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Background

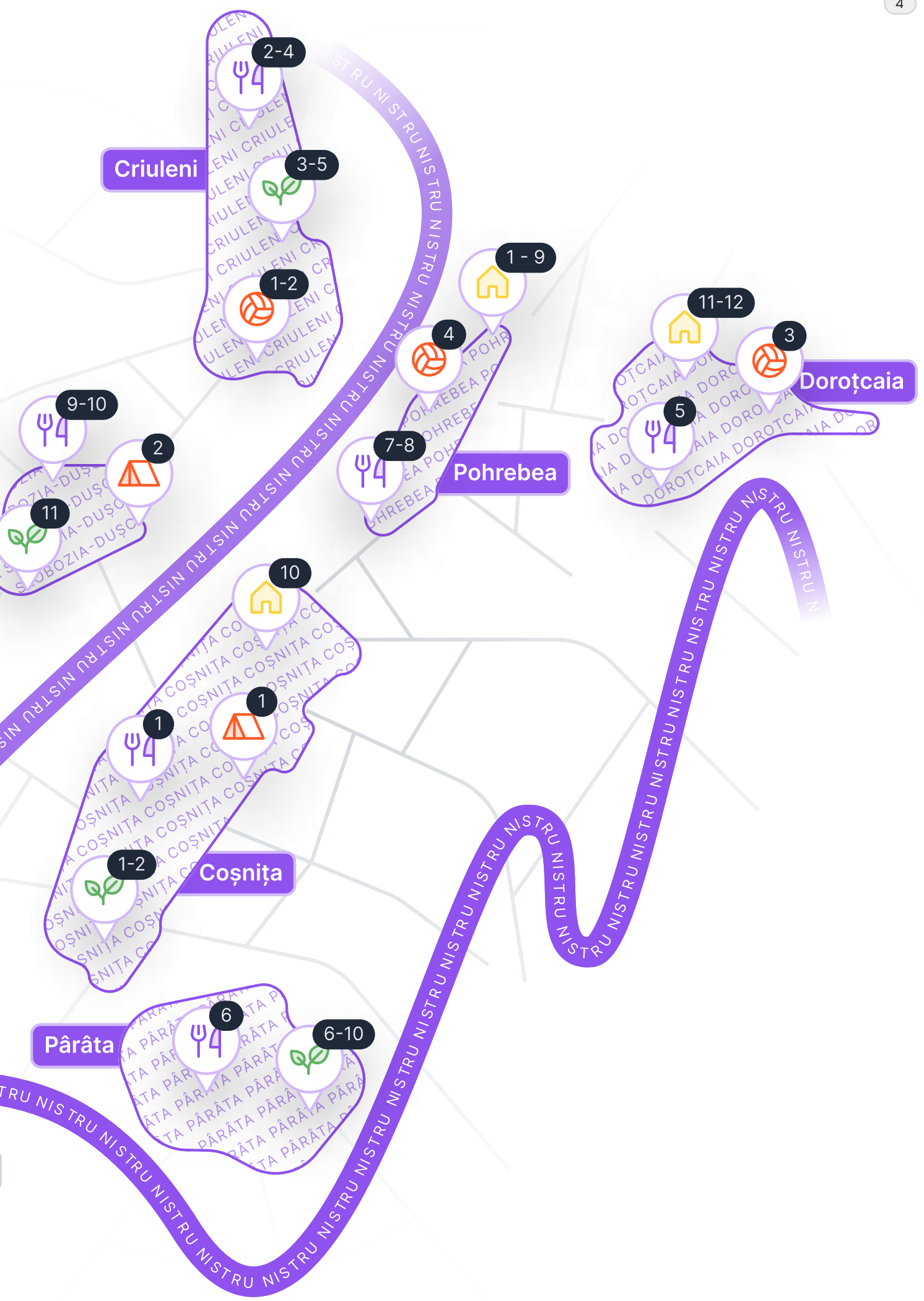
The "Heart of Nistru" is an emerging Moldovan micro-cluster, developed with the support of the Swiss-funded and UNDP-implemented project "Resilient and inclusive markets in Moldova" (PRIM). This support builds upon the previous efforts, made by UNDP Moldova and Switzerland from 2019 to 2022 to boost the local economy of Coșnița region, which led to a significant fivefold increase in tourist flows in just a few years.

The "Heart of Nistru" micro-cluster was formally established on the **27th of September 2023**, when the local stakeholders signed a Memorandum to establish the cluster, elected the governing bodies, and approved a three-year development roadmap. The micro-cluster comprises 52 public and private entities directly or indirectly involved in the rural tourism sector:












- ✓ 38 rural tourism firms
 - ✓ 6 local public administrations
- ✓ 3 research and education entities
 - ✓ 5 non-government organizations

The micro-cluster leadership consists of a **President** and two **Vice-Presidents**, as well as an **Administrative Board** and a delegated **Management Entity**, responsible for day-to-day activities:

 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">President</div>	<p>Ruslan Uskov Entrepreneur and investor, Chairman of the LAG "Heart of Nistru"</p>	<p> (+373) 79 111 709  ruslanuscov@gmail.com</p>
 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Vice-Presidents</div>	<p>Petru Bondari Entrepreneur, SRL "Activis Training"</p>	<p> (+373) 69 967 509  petru.bondari@gmail.com</p>
 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Administrative Board</div>	<p>Mihail Sclifos Mayor of Criuleni</p>	<p> (+373) 69 666 756  criuleniprimaria1@gmail.com</p>
 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Administrative Board</div>	<p>Ruslan Dragoman Entrepreneur, SRL "Terra Vital"</p>	<p> (+373) 68 413 456  terravital.2021@gmail.com</p>
 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Administrative Board</div>	<p>Anatol Bacioi Entrepreneur, Îl "Bacioi"</p>	<p> (+373) 60 440 474</p>
 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Administrative Board</div>	<p>Petru Bondari Entrepreneur, SRL "Activis Training"</p>	<p> (+373) 69 967 509  petru.bondari@gmail.com</p>
 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Administrative Board</div>	<p>Aliona Sirotilo Entrepreneur, SRL "Eligios"</p>	<p> (+373) 68 400 171  srleligius@mail.ru</p>
 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Administrative Board</div>	<p>Mihail Sclifos Mayor of Criuleni</p>	<p> (+373) 69 666 756  criuleniprimaria1@gmail.com</p>
 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Administrative Board</div>	<p>Ștefan Cojocari Entrepreneur, SRL "Beefarm"</p>	<p> (+373) 69 890 615  stefancojocari111@mail.ru</p>
 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Administrative Board</div>	<p>Larisa Malițev Entrepreneur</p>	<p> (+373) 60 070 013</p>
 <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Management Entity</div>	<p>Viorica Verlan Executive director Local Action Group "Heart of Nistru"</p>	<p> (+373) 68 254 455  gal.inimanistrului@gmail.com</p>









The emerging micro-cluster “Heart of Nistru” is located 35 km away from Chişinău and consists of five municipalities localities in Dubăsari and Criuleni districts (Criuleni, Coşniţa, Dorotcaia, Slobozia-Duşca and Pârâta), which are part of “Heart of Nistru” Local Action Group, with a total population of over 18,000 inhabitants.

MUNICIPALITY	DISTRICT	POPULATION	WOMEN / MEN
 Coşniţa <small>*includes Pohrebea village</small>	Dubăsari	 4,854	2,561 / 2,293
 Dorotcaia	Dubăsari	 2,672	1,372 / 1,300
 Pârâta	Dubăsari	 3,072	1,552 / 1,520
 Criuleni	Criuleni	 5,328	2,928 / 2,400
 Slobozia Duşca	Criuleni	 2,185	1,141 / 1,044
	Total:	 18,111	9,554 / 8,557

Existing business activities

Thirty-eight businesses are providing services related directly or indirectly to rural tourism. The range of services include not only accommodation, but also immersive culinary experiences, opportunities for agri-food shopping, entertainment opportunities, and children camps. For some, these activities constitute their core business, while others offer them as complementary services to enhance the overall rural tourism experience. This collective effort contributes significantly to the vibrant and multifaceted landscape of rural tourism in the micro-region.



CATEGORY	TYPE	NOTA BENE
 Accommodation	7 B&B rural houses 3 tourist guest houses 4 mini-hotels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 50 beds (25 rooms) ✓ 20 beds ✓ 43 beds (23 rooms)
 Children camps	Coșnița children camp Slobozia-Dușca children camp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 500 beds ✓ 250 beds
 Gastronomy	3 restaurants 6 cafes 1 catering facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 400 seats ✓ 390 seats ✓ Capacity to deliver up to 100 orders per day
 Agri-food shopping	3 agri-food marketplaces 6 agri-food shops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Over 200 selling places
 Entertainment	10 companies providing various rural entertainment services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ “Goats City” entertainment compound ✓ Organization of the national festival “Hodina” ✓ Beaches and swimming pools ✓ Team building organization facility ✓ Agri-food engagement experiences ✓ Disco-clubs
 Agri-food production	Over 10 agri-food suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Vegetables, fruits and berries fresh and processed ✓ Meat ✓ Juices

Moreover, local entrepreneurs in the micro-region actively promote new innovative tourism projects. These forward-looking projects cover a broad range of activities, from creating new experiences for tourists to producing artisanal beer, meat and fish products, natural juices, sauces, dried vegetables and fruits, teas and aromatic herbs. In addition, there are plans to launch more than 10 new guesthouses that will diversify the area’s offer for tourists. The high entrepreneurial spirit and boost in investments prove the commitment to make the area more attractive for tourists and create exciting opportunities both for visitors and locals.



Key economic indicators

INDICATORS	VALUE	NOTA BENE
Number of visitors per year (2022)	✔ ≈80,000 tourists	A remarkable growth by over 500% in recent years, if compared to less than 10,000 visitors in 2019.
Total accommodations per year	✔ 2,400 tourist nights	✔ +300% compared to 2019
Major tourist attractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Beaches and swimming pools ✔ “Kozy City” ✔ “Gastroferma” restaurant ✔ Children camps ✔ “Hodina” national festival ✔ Facility for team building activities ✔ Strawberry picking tours 	Beaches and swimming pools attracted about 30% of tourists, “Kozy City” - 27%, restaurants/cafes - 15%, “Hodina” festival, teambuilding facility and children camps - about 5-7% each.
Total annual turnover of rural tourism businesses (2022)	✔ 26.7 million MDL (≈1.35 million EUR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Accommodation = 3% ✔ Gastronomy = 15% ✔ Children camps = 30% ✔ Entertainment = 52%
Average expenditure per visitor	✔ 200 MDL (≈10 €)	Most tourists are mainly interested in entertainment services. Many of them bring their own homemade food.
Average price per person/night	✔ 300 MDL (≈15 €)	Most of the accommodation units are rural houses and mini hotels.
Average restaurant bill per person	✔ 200 MDL (≈10 €)	“Gastroferma” restaurant accounts for 75% of all gastronomy sales in the micro-cluster.
Total number of jobs in the touristic business (2022)	≈ 200 jobs (including seasonal workers)	The micro-cluster is predominantly composed of micro family businesses.

Major challenges

The “Heart of Nistru” micro-cluster is presently confronted with substantial challenges that require attention to enhance its competitiveness and elevate the overall and individual turnover of associated business activities. Among the most pressing challenges are the following:

Low occupancy rate for guesthouses. The average yearly occupancy rate of accommodation facilities in the micro-cluster is about 6%. Even during the peak season (weekends in the summer), the occupancy rate is under 50%.

Limited sales of agri-food products to tourists. Tourists do not visit often the three agri-food markets and several of the agri-food shops. They are located quite far from the main tourist routes and remain undiscovered by visitors.

The restaurants and cafes from the micro-cluster primarily rely on agri-food products delivered by external suppliers. Just 15% of the agri-food products are bought from local farmers, and the rest is procured from farmers outside the micro-cluster. Local farmers who are selling the same agri-food products are hence excluded from the existing supply chains.

Very short “business season” for the micro-cluster, relying rather on the cash flow generated during 15-20 days per year only, primarily on weekends during the summer, the working days during the summer and the entire cold period being disregarded by local businesses. Furthermore, major catering and accommodation facilities are closed during the winter period, as well as on weekdays during the summer season.



Limited entertainment opportunities for tourists. The key entertainment facilities offer rather static services, which do not encourage repeated visits by tourists. As a result, many entertainment businesses are facing a decline in the number of tourists, resulting in lower cash flows and unsustainable business prospects.



Inadequate public infrastructure, in particular unpaved roads that become muddy during the rainy season and dusty during dry periods. Besides, there is a shortage of organized parking spaces and essential public utilities such as toilets, beach showers, garbage bins, and public lighting.

Limited cooperation among businesses in the micro-cluster. The micro-cluster does not have an integrated approach to touristic services, encompassing entertainment, catering, accommodation, and local artisanal products. In addition, few joint efforts are made to promote the micro-cluster as a tourist destination.



Major opportunities

Despite the challenges encountered, the micro-cluster has demonstrated remarkable growth over the past period, highlighting numerous opportunities that foster business development and growth. In addition, there are many untapped opportunities waiting to be explored.

The key opportunities to be leveraged encompass:

Currently, tourists spend less than they are willing to. A recent survey shows that, on average, tourists are willing to spend approximately 500 MDL per day during their visit to the micro-cluster. However, the current average spending per tourist is significantly lower - about 200 MDL.

This suggests a higher demand than the supply.

Analysis indicates an existing demand for rural tourism in the cold period (not explored yet), with a special focus on winter holidays (December 13th to January 16th), St. Valentine's Day, 8th of March, and the two-week Easter period. Calculations show that by embracing the winter season, the micro-cluster could potentially expand to at least double "high season" capacity and significantly increase the annual cash flows.



Research shows that the use of digital booking platforms (e.g., Booking.com, Airbnb, etc.) and digitalization of the communication process could significantly boost sales in the accommodation sector. Thus, a more proactive promotion and a user-friendly reservation system have the potential to significantly increase the occupancy rate of the existing guesthouses.

Integrating local agri-food producers, especially those focused on artisanal-products, into the supply chains of the existing HORECA sector could yield a significant multiplier effect for the local farmers. This integration has the potential to not only expand the micro-cluster and increase its overall turnover, but also enhance the quality of life in the community. Moreover, by earning more, local farmers will be able to invest more in their properties, ultimately leading to a more picturesque landscaping of the localities.

Institutionalizing the cluster, with a professional management entity, provides an excellent platform for advancing a shared agenda among all stakeholders. This includes promoting the micro-cluster as a tourist destination and conceptualizing and promoting “integrated tourism products”, which combine accommodation, various entertainment services, and catering.

The micro-cluster is situated in the only segment of the Nistru River where the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova control both banks. This presents a substantial opportunity for the development of water-based entertainment services, which have the potential to attract a significant number of additional tourists. Furthermore, well-ordered beaches (which are now poorly organized and equipped) could stimulate the creation of more income-generating opportunities, ranging from sunbed rentals to fast-food services.

More frequent festivals and cultural public events could lead to a significant enhancement of the micro-cluster, attracting a greater quantity of tourists and higher revenues. Consequently, this would generate demand for services and boost cash flow. While organizing national festivals has proven to be highly effective in attracting tourists and promoting the micro-cluster, it's worth noting that the micro-cluster currently hosts only one such event per year, contributing to over 6% of the total annual number of tourists.

Implementing energy efficiency measures has the potential to significantly reduce current operating costs, which currently constitute a substantial portion of expenses. Proper insulation of buildings, widespread utilization of solar energy, and the adoption of bio-heating technologies can enhance business efficiency while simultaneously promoting a more environmentally friendly approach.



Micro-cluster members

Private Sector Entities:

#	COMPANY	LOCALIZATION	SPECIALIZATION	CONTACTS
1	SRL “Dimafin”	Pârâta	✓ Production and selling of agri-food products (berry green house)	☎ (+373) 60 516 377
2	SRL “Beetruck”	Pârâta	✓ Beekeeping (selling of honey and organizing visiting tours)	☎ (+373) 69 890 615
3	SRL “Laurent”	Slobozia-Dușca	✓ Strawberries (production and selling, and organizing touristic engagement into the harvesting process)	☎ (+373) 61 020 003
4	SRL “Surpas”	Slobozia-Dușca	✓ Production and selling of agri-food products (pig farm)	☎ (+373) 69 310 363
5	SRL “Madorix Lux”	Slobozia-Dușca	✓ Taxi services ✓ Local shops	☎ (+373) 60 070 013
6	SRL “Olcriscom”	Slobozia-Dușca	✓ Children camp ✓ Mini-hotel ✓ Swimming pool	☎ (+373) 69 599 099
7	SRL “Ogorlux”	Slobozia-Dușca	✓ Cafe ✓ Disco club	☎ (+373) 68 271 963
8	SRL “Dornist Flower”	Doroțcaia	✓ Flower cultivation (selling to tourists and to local hospitality sector)	☎ (+373) 68 725 116
9	SRL “Mayoral”	Doroțcaia	✓ Restaurant	☎ (+373) 79 409 428
10	SRL “Nistean Grup”	Pârâta	✓ Production and selling of agri-food products	☎ (+373) 68 522 589
11	ÎI “Bar Bacioi”	Doroțcaia	✓ Swimming pool ✓ Cafe	☎ (+373) 60 440 474
12	ÎI “Țugulea Veaceslav”	Coșnița	✓ Production and selling of agri-food products (vegetables)	☎ (+373) 69 681 319

#	COMPANY	LOCALIZATION	SPECIALIZATION	CONTACTS
13	SRL “Negatur Service”	Slobozia Dușca	✔ Food and accommodation services	☎ (+373) 62 144 911
14	SRL “RIL Eco Grup”	Pohrebea	✔ Guesthouse	☎ (+373) 68 582 104
15	SRL “Bezzy SLS”	Pârâta	✔ Production and selling of agri-food products	☎ (+373) 62 192 446
16	SRL “Activis Training”	Pohrebea	✔ Team building facility	☎ (+373) 69 967 509
17	SRL “Leagul Ghenadie”	Pârâta	✔ Production and selling of agri-food products (fruits and herbs)	☎ (+373) 69 190 426
18	II “Rusnac Ecaterina”	Coșnița (Pohrebea)	✔ Guesthouse (in the process of development)	☎ (+373) 69 500 566
19	SRL “Slavana Comerț”	Coșnița	✔ Mini-hotel (in the process of development) ✔ Entertainment facilities	☎ (+373) 78 275 725
20	SRL “Greca Lux”	Coșnița	✔ Production and selling of agri-food products ✔ Camping (in the process of development)	☎ (+373) 68 444 390
21	SRL “Pescărușul de Aur”	Criuleni	✔ Catering and shop ✔ Brewery and trout farm (in the process of development)	☎ (+373) 79 783 753
22	ÎI “Andronic Chiril”	Criuleni	✔ Production and selling of agri-food products (nuts)	☎ (+373) 69 666 756
23	SRL “Crio Met”	Criuleni	✔ Swimming pool ✔ Event hall ✔ Sauna ✔ Bar ✔ Accommodation	☎ (+373) 67 360 161
24	SRL “Consult LG”	Criuleni	✔ Production and sale of agri-food products	☎ (+373) 69 158 931

#	COMPANY	LOCALIZATION	SPECIALIZATION	CONTACTS
25	SRL “Kozy House”	Coșnița (Pohrebea)	✔ “Kozy City” touristic compound (entertainment and restaurant)	☎ (+373) 68 288 557
26	Îl “A. Șapovalov”	Criuleni	✔ Cafe ✔ Shop	☎ (+373) 60 755 355
27	SRL “Contvioserv”	Pârâta	✔ Production and selling of agri-food products	☎ (+373) 68 254 455
28	SRL “Eligius”	Coșnița	✔ Guesthouse ✔ Shop	☎ (+373) 68 131 713
29	SRL “Terra Vital”	Criuleni	✔ Production and selling of natural juices	☎ (+373) 78 793 456
30	SRL “Colț de Rai”	Pohrebea	✔ Guesthouse	☎ (+373) 79 900 288
31	Îl “Iurii Coica”	Doroțcaia	✔ Guesthouse	☎ (+373) 78 152 605
32	SRL “Ergo Enterprises”	Pohrebea	✔ In the process of developing a beer production facility	☎ (+373) 60 735 107
33	SRL “Planeta Express”	Pohrebea	✔ Guesthouse (in the process of construction)	☎ (+373) 60 735 108
34	SRL “Marfcomtrans”	Vadul lui Vodă	✔ Production and selling of agri-food products	☎ (+373) 69 601 212
35	SRL “Amorus Tour”	Pohrebea	✔ Guesthouse ✔ Restaurant “Gastroferma” ✔ Tourism agency	☎ (+373) 79 433 351
36	Îl “Hinculova Natalia”	Criuleni	✔ Pizzeria	☎ (+373) 67 312 237
37	SRL “Aria Tehno Proiect”	Pohrebea	✔ Guesthouse	☎ (+373) 69 054 020
38	SRL “Trial Pro”	Criuleni	✔ Entertainment (bike tours and hiking)	☎ (+373) 69 733 220
39	Natalia Frunze	Slobozia-Dușca	✔ Artisanal / crafting	☎ (+373) 69 078 022
40	Doina Todica	Coșnița	✔ Rural house (in process of construction)	☎ (+373) 60 372 129

Public Sector Entities:

#	ENTITIES	CONTACTS
1	Dubăsari District Council (Economic Development Department)	☎ (+373) 78 745 676 ✉ vasile.efrim@gmail.com
2	Mayorality of Coșnița	☎ (+373) 248 44236
3	Mayorality of Pârâta	☎ (+373) 248 46246
4	Mayorality of Dorotcaia	☎ (+373) 248 45236
5	Mayorality of Slobozia-Dușca	☎ (+373) 248 46236
6	Mayorality of Criuleni	☎ +(373) 248 22585

Education-Research Entities:

#	ENTITIES	LOCATION	CONTACTS
1	Dubăsari Business Incubator	Coșnița	☎ (+373) 67 237 280 ✉ ia.dubasari@mail.ru
2	Center of Excellence in Viticulture and Winemaking in Chișinău	Stăuceni / Chișinău	☎ (+373) 79 911 097 ✉ cevvc2018@gmail.com
3	Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova	Chișinău	☎ (+373) 22 224 128 ✉ turcov.elena@ase.md

Associative Sector Entities:

#	ENTITIES	LOCATION	CONTACTS
1	NGO “Ostrov”	Coșnița (Pohrebea)	☎ (+373) 79 111 709 ✉ ruslanuscov@gmail.com
2	NGO “Împădurim Moldova”	Chișinău	☎ (+373) 79 415 306 ✉ import.moldova@gmail.com
3	NGO “Fiecare contribuie pentru o schimbare”	Criuleni	☎ (+373) 68 474 000 ✉ office@fcps.md
4	NGO “Klumea”	Coșnița (Pohrebea)	☎ (+373) 79 900 288 ✉ nataalbot@gmail.com
5	LAG “Inima Nistrului”	Coșnița (Pohrebea)	☎ (+373) 68 254 455 ✉ gal.inimanistrului@gmail.com

Development strategy

The vision:

The vision for the micro-cluster's development envisages transforming it into the leading rural tourism destination in Moldova by 2035, offering a diverse and high-quality range of services, with the goal of attracting at least 200,000 tourists annually.

To achieve this vision, the micro-cluster aims to engage at least 100 dedicated businesses, including at least 30 guesthouses (providing over 200 accommodation places), at least 5 restaurants, 10 fast-food units, at least 20 distinct entertainment services for tourists, and over 30 high-quality agri-food suppliers.

Development objectives:

Strategic objective 1: Develop and expand the micro-cluster's value chain to streamline the activities of its members and increase the attractiveness of the micro-region.

Specific objectives:

- ✓ Strengthen the existing tourism operators by extending their business season, developing additional services, and enhancing the quality of the existing services.
- ✓ Develop supply and marketing chains for artisanal products to increase the attractiveness of the micro-region and boost tourist consumption during their stay.

Strategic objective 2: Strengthen the micro-cluster's capacity for balanced territorial development and extend the length of tourists' stays in the micro-region from one to two-three days.

Specific objectives:

- ✓ Expand the existing tourism businesses and services such as accommodation, catering, and entertainment activities into all localities of the micro-cluster, so that each locality offers major attractions for tourists.
- ✓ Develop the public and private infrastructure and support services for tourism activities, and make sure that they are compliant with environmental standards. Additionally, provide training and entrepreneurial skills development in the tourism sector.

Strategic objective 3: Enhance the micro-cluster's competitiveness through innovation and digitalization.

Specific objectives:

- ✓ Develop new types of local services and products as new tourist attractions.
- ✓ Develop new digital tools for communication, information, and promotion.
- ✓ Develop and implement innovative solutions to optimize production processes, improve energy efficiency, and modernize the provision of services or production of goods.

Investment opportunities

The most important investment needs of the micro-cluster for expanding and strengthening the touristic value chain:

#	INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY	LOCATION	ESTIMATIVE INVESTMENT USD
1	Trout farm	Criuleni	\$ 50,000
2	Fish restaurant	Pohrebea	\$ 50,000
3	Fish farm	Criuleni	\$ 35,000
4	Artisanal brewery	Pohrebea	\$ 100,000
5	Artisanal brewery	Criuleni	\$ 120,000
6	Fruit and vegetable drying facilities for households	In all communities	\$ 12,000 (per unit)
7	Vegetable and fruit collection and packaging center	Pârâta	\$ 40,000
8	Plantations with medicinal and aromatic plants	In all communities	\$ 20,000 (per unit)
9	Amusement park	Pohrebea	\$ 50,000
10	Winery	Pohrebea	\$ 50,000
11	Modular container-type mini poultry slaughterhouse	Slobozia-Dușca	\$ 50,000

