THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IGNIȘ – GUTÂI MOUNTAIN AREA BY TYPE OF TOURISM PREDOMINANTLY

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Abstract: The Igniș – Gutâi mountain area has a complex picturesque landscape, an attractive anthropogenic potential and a favorable position which allows national and international tourist flows. The area’s tourist profile is revealed by combining rural tourism with mountain recreational tourism, health, hunting and transit tourism. The variety of tourist potential supports the development of various types and forms of tourism which contribute to completing the current tourist offer and the area’s sustainable development. This paper aims at developing new tourist areas within the Igniș – Gutâi mountain area, thus promoting it as a complex tourist destination.

Key words: mountain area, types of tourism, tourism zoning, tourism destination

INTRODUCTION

One direction which has become dominant in recent years in the study of human geography in terms of sustainable mountain development is ensuring a high level of standards due to the fact that international competition has taken on a complex dimension.

The systemic organization of the mountain area contributes to the development of mountain resorts and to the tourist demand and supply dynamics. Bran (1998) established that tourist demand influences environment by the tourist forms developed within the tourist destinations which are putting pressure on the environmental sustainability ability. The environmental impact of tourism in this sense becomes an economic, physical and social direction which can be controlled through effective management of all resources. It involves the potential analysis of natural and human resources both quantitatively and qualitatively, the existing tourist infrastructure and the process of turning them into tourist products with specific features for the mountain areas, to meet the needs and expectations of customers, of the local population, but also of competition. Iuga (2012) argues that tourist activity has left its mark on the organization of villages and has lead to the creation of some harmonious structures, well placed in the mountain environment. Thus, a privileged position within the mountain geographical area is occupied by rural settlements which offer tourists traditional products and thus contribute to tourism customization and design a specific brand to promote the revival of the tourist area.

Territorial distribution of resources influences the tourism phenomenon, as also noticed by Muntele & Iațu (2003) who argue that however rich the tourism potential may be, the areas or...
regions which deserve to be supported from the tourist point of view, require the best space distribution of resources. The Ighiș – Gutăi mountain area, located in the north-west of Romania, was placed in the category of small and medium-sized mountains (Mihăilescu, 1963), their maximum altitude only exceeding 1400 m in the Gutăi peak, in the mountains with the same name, which are 1443 m high. Mac & Csaba (1992) argue that the individuality and mountain character are highlighted by the 500 -1 000 m differences in level above the surrounding valleys, vast forests, alpine pastures areas covering the main peaks, and the sunny rocks which often emerge from the rich vegetable coating.

The Ighiș - Gutăi Mountains (figure 1) were regarded as a space with restricted tourist activity, namely in remote areas, a reality reflected by the poor quality of the products and services offered by the local mountain resorts. Rehabilitation of the existing structure and the creation of new cable transport, accommodation, food and entertainment facilities would improve the current offer and would also boost the creation of competitive tourist products and services. In addition, regenerating the entire tourism phenomenon under a new brand and promoting tourism would invigorate mountain tourism and related tourist forms.

This paper aims at developing and exploiting natural and human resources for tourist purposes and developing an integrated tourism brand to promote the Ighiș - Gutăi mountain area as a tourist destination throughout the year, focusing on attracting Romanian and foreign tourists. Its purpose is to promote the tourism in the Ighiș – Gutăi mountain area and to develop new tourist areas based on the most predominant type of tourism.

The paper’s original character is supported by the need for an interdisciplinary approach of the land due to its complex structure and to the actors involved in the tourist activity.
METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

This paper aims at promoting integrated tourism, a concept which generates regional development units in peripheral areas, using the principles, methods and tools tested and described by specialised literature to promote the area’s attractive resources and to develop new types of tourism. The challenge of this study is based on the mountain regionalisation according to the tourism potential distribution in the territory, based on the development of functional cross-border territorial systems set up by Ilieş et al., (2012).

The first step is to identify the current state of tourist development, the tourist potential and then, the main tourist traffic indicators are analyzed. Diagnostic analysis will determine the main types of tourism developed in the area, the main axes of tourism development and new potential tourist centres which can be exploited. Tourism zoning of the mountain area will be achieved by development prognosis and land planning. Being a scientific work, the paper complies with an empirical approach which is well anchored in theory, assuming the alternative performance of office work and field work.

THE INFLUENCE OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENT ON MOUNTAINOUS TOURIST FACILITIES

The tourist destination image is one of the current issues in tourist marketing which is greatly influenced by the national context. Tourist promotion requires a set of measures to continuously communicate, through various means, information on the destination, objectives or tourism services (Glăvan, 2000). Pike & Ryan (2004) noticed that the positioning of the tourist destination is a major goal which should reinforce the positive image of the target group on that area. Gallarza et al. (2002) studied the phenomenon of developing the image of tourist destinations and proposed a theoretical development model by defining the area based on complex, multiple, relativistic and dynamic features. People can create their own image of a destination based on their general knowledge, their experiences or through the intermediaries which promote the destination. Pender & Sharpley (2005) emphasizes the important role of human resources and quality services to attract different types of tourists, major targets for the organisation development. Ispas & Saragea (2011) argue that the brand’s development requires additional abilities which determine the staff working in tourism to love it, to live it, to breathe it, in order to be able to properly promote it to tourists. Dolea & Țărus (2009) confirm that, theoretically, branding could help the country improve its tourist destination image, but in reality, there are many factors which affect the tourists’ perception because the customers see the „person representing the brand as the image of the brand itself”. In his works, Rupa Tiwari is studying tourist behaviour, travel demand forecasting, marketing, service quality, planning and designing tourist activities, as well as sustainable tourism and eco-tourism. She points out that tangible and intangible goods and services are the development foundation of tourism from an economic perspective. She also identifies factors which influence travel and tourism (i.e. high costs, seasonality, availability, interdependence, tourist impact, the effect of external shocks), and factors influencing services and physical goods (i.e. intangibility, inseparability, perishability, heterogeneity). In her „Tourism management. Managing for Change”, published in 2009, she examines the skills and resources involved in tourist activity, highlighting the competitive advantages. In 2009, Page St., J. studied tourism planning as a process of continuous change in which managers’ decisions had a great impact on the organization and business, emphasizing the importance of human resources in the creation and sale of tourist products and services, in identifying and solving tourism problems. In 2011, due to the rapid growth of the global economy and the challenges faced by the tourism providers, the author focuses on tourist facilities and provides a set of principles which contribute to the development and management of tourist facilities.

Mountain tourism planning takes into account both landscape and accessibility, and the component parts subject to spatial planning are accommodation, food, treatment, entertainment facilities, the ski area and cable transportation. Tourist areas must be designed as a convertible,
multifunctional system with appropriate equipment, functionally distributed in the area so as not to cause imbalances in the natural and anthropogenic environment (Ciangă & Deszi, 2007).

The tourism potential of the Igneș-Gutâi mountain area is varied, diversified and represents one of the strengths of regional tourism development. The management of the geographic areas highlights the universal connection between the economic, social and spatial planning (Ciangă & Deszi, 2007) and cannot be approached without the spatial and temporal scale (Ianoș, 2000). Ciangă & Deszi (2007) argue that in order to have the best territorial balance between the natural and human management of the geographical area, it is necessary to eliminate some geographical structures which have become obstacles in the forecasted evolution, to preserve the elements which contribute to system stability, to address the divergent trends of atypical structures in the context of increased entropia; it is also essential to create new structures that will not cause any malfunctions. As for mountain development projects, the resorts and ski areas are most often subject to analyses and tourism planning. Tourist infrastructure and natural and/or human tourism resources contribute to the emergence of competitive regional, national and international tourist products and services. The analysis of the mountain tourist resorts is not only a necessity arising from the attempt to understand the territorial organization and planning, but also an academic need motivated by the essence of geographical science.

In order to make a viable and effective tourism planning project for the Igneș-Gutâi area, we must also observe, analyze and compare the National Spatial Planning Project, the Spatial Planning Project of the Northwest Region, The Spatial Planning Project of Maramureș County, the Spatial Planning Project between the localities Sinaia-Azuga – Bușteni – Predeal – Râșnov – Brașov (Poiana Brașov) – as a model of tourist planning and development and also the Spatial Planning Project of the Gutâi Mountain area whose beneficiaries are the Maramureș County Council and the Local Councils of the Baia Mare, Baia Sprie, Cavnic Tăuții Măgherăuș Băiuț, Budești, Desești, Ocna Sugatag and Șișești administrative units.

ANALYSIS OF TOURIST TRAFFIC IN THE TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS OF THE IGNEȘ-GUTĂI MOUNTAIN AREA

Maramureș County stands out at nation level by the diversity of both natural and anthropic tourism potential and also by people’s hospitality, their traditions and customs and the traditional way of life. The Spatial Planning Project of Maramureș County – (2009, p.7), the region’s resource diversity and multiculturalism contributes to outlining a mental space which is well-defined in inhabitants’ minds and carried throughout their soul, a socio-economic connection to the current territorial development trends. The economy of the Igneș-Gutâi mountain area relies mainly on exploitation and primary processing of natural resources in the mines in Baia Sprie, Cavnic, Nistru, as well as on forestry - wood processing reaching to the level of art. Maramureș is thus famous for the wood culture as it transforms it into households with annexes, churches, gates etc, and is also used agriculture and rearing. Tourism, as an innovative and competitive sector, contributes to the socio-economic development of the area by exploiting natural and human resources, infrastructure and turning them into personalized tourist products.

The Igneș-Gutâi Mountains tourist development is seeking to revive these customs, to offer products and services which meet tourist demand and carry out tourism planning models that integrate harmoniously into the mountain landscape of Maramureș County. The geographical location, its accessibility, the diversified and complementary natural landscape, the ski area, the human presence and popular culture are some of the factors that drive the transformation of the mountain area into a fully-defined dynamic territorial system, a perfect framework for the implementation of development plans. The Igneș-Gutâi mountain area provides favorable conditions for the development of competitive multi-profile mountain resorts to remove the seasonality barriers. The custom tourist offer could transform northern mountain resorts into highly attractive destinations for foreign tourists.
The analysis on the number of tourists in the Igniș - Gutăi mountain area enables profiling the tourists who choose this area as a tourist destination. In summer there is an increased number of domestic tourists, mainly those who live in plain areas, while in winter the highest percentage is covered by foreign tourists seeking to integrate in the authentic and simple lifestyle of people living in the countryside and to relive local customs and traditions.

The national Institute of Statistics provides data regarding the number of tourists according to types of tourist accommodation. The findings of the analysis reveal that the largest number of tourists chose Baia Mare city as a tourist destination because it has the highest number of tourist accommodation facilities. The other tourist destinations accumulate a relatively low number of arrivals as compared to Baia Mare (figure 2). There is an evolution in arrivals between 2004 - 2007 due to the expansion of accommodation facilities. Starting with 2008, we can notice a decreased number of tourists due to the global crisis which also affected this area.

![Figure 2](image.png)

**Figure 2.** The number of tourist arrivals in the Igniș – Gutăi mountain area (Source: INS, 2011)

In figure 3 reveals that the number of overnight stays is directly proportional with the number of arrivals and the number of accommodation facilities, with the highest rates in Baia Mare, followed by Ocna Șugatag. While in Baia Mare there is a slow evolution between 2004 - 2007, followed by a slight decline in 2008, Ocna Șugatag is characterized by a downward activity during 2001-2003, followed by a period of balance due to the constant number of tourists heading

![Figure 3](image.png)

**Figure 3.** Evolution of the number of tourists / days between 2001 - 2009 in the Igniș – Gutăi mountain area (Source: INS, 2011)
towards health and wellness spas. The average length of the stay is of two to three days, overlapping with weekend tourism, a very common phenomenon in this area (figure 4). In addition, the transit tourism is also recorded in the localities with an average length of stay of one to two days. In Ocna Șugatag, the average length of stay exceeds seven days due to therapeutic cures and treatments performed in spas.

![Figure 4](image-url) The average length of stay spent in Igniș – Gutâi mountain area (Source: INS, 2011)

**TOURIST ZONING OF THE IGNIȘ - GUTÂI MOUNTAIN AREA ACCORDING TO THE MAIN TYPE OF TOURISM**

The Igniș - Gutâi mountain area has a picturesque landscape, an attractive anthropogenic potential and a favorable position which supports national and international tourist flows. The area’s tourist profile is incorporated in the Spatial Planning Project of the Northwest Region, a combination of rural, recreational, mountain, spa, hunting and transit tourism. This plan provides priority intervention actions:

- complex development of rural tourism, with the opportunity of European competitiveness;
- reshaping the recreational mountain tourism (hiking, climbing, winter sports);
- health tourism;
- transit tourism;
- hunting tourism;
- fishing and water sports;
- scientific and visitation tourism;
- congresses and meetings.

These priority intervention actions are accompanied by the area-specific forms of tourism. Rural tourism is one of the most successful solutions regarding the harmonization of tourism with the requirements of environmental protection and sustainable development and is defined broadly by the desire to spend the holidays in nature, to return to the traditional life and customs. There are profile tourist networks with a complex and diversified offer in the Igniș – Gutâi mountain area (Vadu Izei, Săpânța), as well as places with incipient tourist phenomenon even if they possess rich natural tourist resources (Desești). Rural tourism allows for competitive development of Maramureș villages even at European standards; therefore, foreign tourists are an important target segment of tourism in Maramureș.

Agritourism involves accommodation in a traditional house, consumption of agricultural products and taking part in some of the specific agricultural activities. Development of rural guesthouses is possible in Săpânța, Vadu Izei, Desești, Giulești, Budești, Ocna Șugatag etc. Tourists are attracted by agritourism in Maramureș because, in this way, they have contact with the local families which are very hospitable, communicative and enjoyable.
Recreational tourism is less dynamic, with a slightly longer stay linked to a location with certain specific particularities. The Regional Spatial Development Plan proposes the mountain recreational tourism re-organization for the Ighiş – Gutăi Mountains, having as starting points the localities in converging areas (Cavnic, Săpânţa, Deseşti). It also recommends the development of Izvoare resort based on the existing attractive resources, with the aim of developing recreational and health mountain tourism. The recreational tourism in the Ighiş – Gutăi mountain area is developed mainly in the mountain resorts, as well as in rural areas which provide designated areas for nature walks. The tourist heritage of the Ighiş - Gutăi Mountains has increased its attractiveness through the specific equipment and facilities designed to attract a high number of tourists. The current development situation reveals the interest of official authorities and economic agents in the planning and development of the tourist area, with most of the investments made after 2000. The mountain tourist offer trends so far are related to data on tourist demand, which explains the development of tourism infrastructure in the mountainous area in order to facilitate winter sports practice. Adventure tourism is a growing segment of the total population of tourists and involves visiting a region almost unaffected by human impact and requires intense physical effort and taking high risks. The Ighiş - Gutăi Mountains have an attractive heritage for practicing adventure tourism, especially the eastern blocks of the Ighiş volcanic plateau which have level differences between 100 and 300 m.

Ecotourism is an increasingly common tourism form encountered in the Ighiş - Gutăi Mountains due to the increased public awareness on the importance of preservation, protection and sustainable development of tourism potential. This form of tourism is seen both in rural and urban areas, and is mainly destined to individual visitors such as small organized groups wishing to visit the nature with the purpose of observing the protected areas.

Spa tourism has developed especially in the Ocna Șugatag spa resort due to natural conditions and salt water, sodium and chloride mineral water and specific climate and in Dăneşti spa resort.

Business tourism is the most stable sector in the Romanian tourism, with a steady development in recent years. It corresponds to various fields, including diplomatic meetings, cultural and educational meetings, sporting events etc. The Ighiş - Gutăi mountain area provides a series of structures which include conference rooms where tourists can achieve the meeting’s targets.

Scientific tourism is a form of tourism which occurs only occasionally and refers to taking part in congresses, visiting some industrial locations, agricultural areas, hydropower sights. From the scientific point of view, a special interest is taken in visiting certain caves, natural reservations and nature monuments. Baia Mare and Sighetu Marmatiei have the possibility of accommodating congresses, conferences and symposia, through existing university departments, while Cavnic or other former mining towns in the Ighiş - Gutăi area can provide organized tours to visit the mines.

Religious tourism is the kind of tourism that aims at visiting religious buildings with spiritual implications and involves a certain level of training and a high degree of culture to allow the assessment of cultural - religious objectives from the architectural point of view, taking into account the value, the spiritual signification and the content of works of art.

The Ighiş - Gutăi mountain area has an important religious cultural heritage due to the wooden churches and monasteries included in UNESCO patrimony. These include: Peri Monastery (Săpânţa), „Sfântul Nicolae” church (Budeşti), „Cuvioasa Paraschiva” church (Deseşti), „Sfinţii Arhangheli” church (Plopiş) and „Sfîntii Arhangheli Mihail si Gavril” church (Şurdeşti).

Transit tourism is specific of the Ighiş - Gutăi mountain area due to its territorial positioning and its belonging to the Romanian – Ukrainian trans-border region. The Spatial Planning Project of the Northwest Region proposes the creation of a database system located along main roads or at the crossroad of important county roads. Transit tourism is also given by the average length of tourist stays ranging from one to two days.

Weekend tourism represents all the journeys taken by tourists in weekend in order to rest, to relax, to have fun or any other internal motivation. To avoid overcrowding, it is recommended that the development, upgrading, equipping and maintenance of mountain resorts take account the
tourism demand. In addition to transit tourism, the weekend tourism is defined by the average length of stay of two to three days in a tourist destination like Cavnic, Baia Sprie, Sighetu Marmatiei, Baia Mare etc.

The main forms of tourism developed in the Igniș – Gutăi mountain area and other forms of tourism are also proposed is represented in figure 5, taking into account territorial profile. After analyzing the current territorial situation, the following tourist areas within the Igniș – Gutăi mountain area were identified:

- Baia Mare - business tourism, scientific tourism, cultural tourism;
- Baia Sprie - mountain tourism, recreational tourism;
- Budești - religious tourism, rural tourism, agritourism;
- Cavnic - mountain tourism;
- Dânești - recreational tourism, curative tourism;
- Desești - mountain tourism, recreation tourism, fishing tourism, adventure tourism, eco-tourism, business tourism;
- Ocna Șugatag - spa tourism, recreational and health tourism;
- Săpânța - rural tourism, agritourism, fishing tourism, religious tourism, adventure tourism, eco-tourism;
- Sighetu Marmatiei - cultural tourism, adventure tourism, business tourism, scientific tourism;
- Vadu Izei - rural tourism, agritourism, adventure tourism.

The profile of the Igniș - Gutăi mountain area is made up of several subsystems; tourist zoning is carried out according to the framing of the territorial development within effervescent, convergent or isolated areas. The effervescent areas characterized by compact territorial entities contain the territorial administrative units of Campulung la Tisa, Sarasau, Sighetu Marmatiei,
Vadu Izei, Giuleşti, Ocna Sugatag, Călineşti, Cicârlău, Seini, Tăuţii Măgheruş. The converging areas, located in the foothills, offer unique landscapes and the possibility of developing tourist destinations. The converging areas in the Ighiş - Gutăi Mountains overlap the territorial administrative units at Remeşti, Săpânta Deseştii, Budeşti, Siseştii. The isolated areas, represented by the actual mountain area, are characterized by diverse natural resources and favorable conditions for mountain tourism. The isolated areas are overlapping localities at 1000 m, such as the Cavic city, most of the territorial area of Săpânta, and the villages Blişari, Firiza, Valea Neagra and Valea Porcului which belong to the of the administrative-territorial unit of Baia Mare, the ski resorts Mogoşoa, Suior, Izvoare and Cavic.

Following completion of the chorematic territory analysis, Pui (2012) noted that the flows are directed towards major urban areas with administrative, socio-economic, cultural, medical and educational functions, thus offering a centrifugal character to the Ighiş - Gutăi territorial system. The axes represented by DN18 (linking urban centers Sighetu Marmăţiei and Baia Mare) and DN 19 (Sighetu Marmăţiei –Negreştii Oas) are major elements in system organization.

CONCLUSIONS

Some of the factors which influence the mountain tourism development in the Ighiş - Gutăi Mountains and hence the tourist traffic in the resorts is the need for recreation, rest, leisure, practicing winter sports, organizing conferences or symposiums etc. Analyzing the number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays revealed that the mountain tourism phenomenon can be competitive with the tourist resorts in the North- West Development region; the decrease registered at national level since 2008 and up to nowadays, is also present in this area. Because the ski resorts have several tourism ventures which provide competing or complementary tourist products in terms of their components, there is the need for a development plan so that each unit can loyalty promote its products and services.

The current market trends in mountain tourism show stagnation of winter sports and, at the same time, an increased interest in playing summer sports in the mountains and spending the holidays in countryside villages. The effort undertaken to improve tourist facilities and services should be much higher in order to satisfy the tourist needs.

The Ighiş - Gutăi mountain area has attractive natural and anthropogenic tourist potential, significant cultural and ethnographic resources, but a poor tourism infrastructure. The field analysis of the housing facilities showed that the accommodation establishments do not follow accurately the authenticity specific of Maramureş area; on the contrary, the intention is to develop the tourist phenomenon with the purpose of immediate gain.

The development of the tourism phenomenon requires a comprehensive strategy related to the growth evolution and the competitive advantage of each housing structure mountain resort. A balanced development in harmony with the natural and socio-human environment can only be achieved by focusing on the concept of unitary tourism development. Based on the knowledge provided by experienced countries with real progress made in the field of mountain tourism, we have sought solutions and models to allow for the development of natural and anthropic tourism and environmental sustainability.

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