

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN PETROȘANI DEPRESSION

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Abstract: In the past 60 years, tourism has become one of the most profitable industries, being in continuous development, which tends, however, to be a risky investment when this activity is dependent on climate, because not all years are successful and not all regions are up to the standards imposed by competition. Petrosani Depression is a territory with a real tourism potential waiting to be exploited, especially now, when the economic constraints are increasingly felt, due to the increasing reduction of activity in the mining field. Thus, we believe that tourism is an economic alternative integrated into the sustainable development of the micro-region. This paper aims to present the fundamental characteristics of tourism in this area, identifying the major problems and propose solutions to overcoming obstacles encountered in the development of sustainable tourism in Petrosani Depression.

Key words: tourism, Petroșani, Parâng, Straja, sustainable tourism, marketing

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an economic sector that provides a sum of products, both consumption and investment and services that we take in other branches of economic activity directly or indirectly related to tourism. Through them, but also directly from tourism activity is reflected in both GDP and socially by creating jobs. In this context, the tourism is identified as an offer markets for the vast majority of industries producing goods and services and to offer work in society, being a global economic and social phenomenon, with major implications for global economy (Herman et al., 2017; Ilie et al., 2017; Muntele and Iațu, 2003; Nimară and Buia, 2012). Overall improvement of the infrastructure, decrease corruption and economic growth, will lead to creating conditions conducive to the sustainable development of Romanian tourism.

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Romania is part of the international tourist circuit with unique touristic resources both natural and anthropogenic, whose smart recovery could substantially strengthen the role of the tourism industry in the national economy, with positive effects on the entire society. Currently, in Romania, tourism has an indirect contribution of 6.3% of GDP and 3.1% of employment and the direct contribution of 5.2% and 1.9%.¹

For several years, Romania has been kept somewhat separate from international tourism system for political reasons. Now with the help of sustainable tourism strategies, Romania can reap the benefits of tourism to avoid mistakes that have been made in other areas. Bear in mind, however, that tourism can not guarantee to resolve all the problems from protected areas.

Petrosani Depression is considered a low compartment into the Carpathians, being limited to the North by mountain ranges: Retezat and Șureanu, South and Southeast of Vâlcanului and Parang Mountains. NNE-SSW has guidance about having a length of about 45 km and a width ranging from East to West between 9 and 12 km. It includes six settlements with their localities: Petrila (Lonea, Jieț, Cimpa), Petroșani (Dâlja, Livezeni), Aninoasa (Iscroni), Vulcan (Dealul Babii, Paroșeni), Lupeni, Uricani (Valea de Brazi, Câmpu lui Neag), with a population in 2011 of 120 734 inhabitants, the largest town being Petroșani (37 160 inhabitants)

The area of study is a micro-region from Transylvanian Carpathians, traversed by the West Jiu River (51.4 km) and East Jiu (28 km), whose confluence at the Petrosani (Livezeni) leads to the formation of Jiu River, which forms one of the most beautiful gorges in the country, now designated as a nature park. The geographical position, hydrological and morphological elements, the landscape, as the entire tourism potential that it possesses a highly recommended as a tourist destination waiting to be fully discovered.

FEATURES OF THE TOURISM FROM PETROȘANI DEPRESSION

If you were to do a comparative situation with other EU countries and not only more or less receiving of the tourism potential that Romania holds it, we could see that some countries smaller in area and with a low number of sights, still record a higher flow of tourists and also significant revenue.

Romania receives annually about 1.5 billion dollars, while Hungary, for example, which hasn't the potential of Romania, receive 5 times more. The major problems of tourism in Romania are reflected at the local level, affecting the socio-economic areas with high tourism potential.

To the geographical and historical province of Transylvania, Hunedoara county, in 2014, recorded a total number of 110 556 tourists, of which 100 886 were Romanian, while the rest of 9670 were foreigners (figure 1), ranking it as number 6 of the 10 counties. Of this total, approximately 70% were oriented into ski areas in Petrosani and Lupeni. So, as a first conclusion, we can say that today the main form of tourism in Petrosani Depression, is the tourism for winter sports.

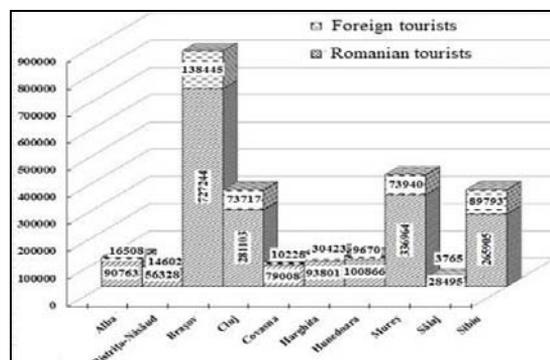


Figure 1. Number of tourists in different counties, in 2014²

¹ www.turism.gov.ro

² www.insse.ro

Romania does not have ski areas with slopes of tens of kilometers, as do for example in France, Austria or Italy, but still, in the highlands, itinerant tourism (transit) is best promoted in all types of tourism.³

Nationally, a total of 150 arranged slopes, 90 of them are approved, most being found in Braşov (19), Prahova (13) and Harghita (12). Regarding the structure of the degrees of difficulty slopes, the situation is as follows: mild slopes (31), medium slopes (44), difficult pistes (15) (Tofan and Păcurar, 2013).

Mountain tourism

Mountain tourism specific Petrosani Depression, includes a wide range of recreational activities, spiritual and economic taking place in various mountain areas. It is an important economic source for many mountain communities, generating jobs and income, ultimately, allow local organization and continuity of living in accordance with their own cultural traditions and origins.

According to some authors (Țigu, 2001), mountain tourism as the concept of the tourism industry, is a form of "interference" tourism, derived from:

- winter tourism, a form of individualized tourism based on the criterion of seasonality, which shows two distinct characteristics, as the reason for making the trip, namely for snow tourism and sun searched in the winter;
- leisure tourism or recreation, sports tourism - individual tourism forms depending on travel motivations;
- tourism packages, which depending on the time available for travel can be a long stay, medium or short.

Petrosani Depression stands within two resorts known both regionally and nationally, even if political or administrative reasons not wish their constant promotion in the media nationally. It must not forget that it is essential for tourism to be politically accepted as a priority, without compromising the durability. Without support and political commitment for sustainable tourism, tourist programs based on the principles of sustainable development will not be implemented.

Parâng Mountains

Parâng Mountains are the highest mountains situated between Olt, in the eastern part and Strei-Jiu, in the West after their maximum altitude (peak Parângul Mare, 2519 m), ranking the second place in the Romanian Carpathians after Făgăraş Mountains. Morpho-structural complexity, large glacial and periglacial relief development (the largest expansion in the mountain sector and which print to the northern central sector an alpine aspects), hypsometric and genetic peculiarities represents indices of landscape individualization to others mountains that make up the group (Benţe and Stan, 2009).

Predominantly composed of crystalline rocks covered peripheral by sedimentary patches Parâng shown an orographic aspects of landforms that betrays the constitution and evolution of geological footprint. Layout of the main peaks on a general direction West-East and altitudes of over 2000 m, gives the role of an orographic dam to the movement of air masses, and asymmetry massifs lead to differences important between northern slopes and those facing south on distribution quantity heat and moisture.

Average annual rainfall is between 900 and 1 200 mm and the highest level was recorded at altitudes of 1600-1 800 m, the most convincing example is the Râncea resort (Gorj) located at 1615 m and where the average of annual precipitation exceeds 1 400 mm.

The snow which last quite long (above 1500 m elevation snow is maintained even over 3 months per year), favorable conditions for training and keeping snow and could sometimes find in the highlands of early October until the first part of May.

At over 1500 m altitude average thickness of snow cover exceeds a meter, the highest accumulations can be done in the last decade of February and beginning of March.⁴

³ www.wto.com

To this, add valuable tourism potential represented generated by river valleys and Jiu's tributaries: *Jieț, Galbena, Jupâneasa, Taia* etc.

Parâng national interest resort is located at 15 km from the town of Petroșani, access to which is provided by the road DJ 709 F. The pistes have a total length of 8 km and assigned in all levels of difficulty: beginner, intermediate and advanced.

Table 1. Features of pistes from Parâng resort ⁵

| Nr. crt. | Name | Length (m) | Difficulty |
|----------|----------------------------|------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Piste "A" | 350 | advanced |
| 2 | Piste "B" | 3200 | advanced/ beginners |
| 3 | Piste "C" | 250 | intermediate |
| 4 | Piste "Under chairlift" | 367 | intermediate |
| 5 | Piste "Saivane" | 900 | intermediate |
| 6 | Piste "EuroParâng" | 600 | intermediate |
| 7 | Piste "Pig's corridor" | 750 | intermediate |
| 8 | Intermediate new chairlift | - | advanced |
| 9 | Piste "Wall of death" | - | beginners |

Of the nine pistes above (table 1), only six are approved in 2010, as follows: A, B, C, Poiana, Chairlift and Europarâng (SDDMVJ, 2008).

Tourists can choose for accommodation in the Rusu area and in the Parâng alpine area, with a total of 22 accommodation units classified according to the National Tourism Authority, in 1-3 stars, two of which belong administratively in Petrla (Jieț gorges), and the remaining 20 belong to Petroșani (Parâng Mountains - zone B and C, the area Rusu).

Vâlcan Mountains

Are located in the south-eastern of Carpathians and with the Mehedinți Mountains south Carpathian arc between Jiu and the Danube. They consist of a main ridge asymmetric East-West, starting from the south side ridges extend. Southern peaks are composed of dolomite and limestone from Jurassic and Cretaceous (Straja Peak, 1869 m).

Being so sheltered from air masses from North-West, North and Northeast, the presence of Godeanu mountains, Retezat Șureanu and Parâng, the Vâlcan Mountains are under the influence of Southern, Southwestern and Western air circulation.

Straja resort is located at a distance of about 7 km from Lupeni and 20 km from the town of Petroșani (DN 66 A), being declared a local tourism resort in 2002.

Currently there are over 210 accommodation units consisting of: cottages, hostels, villas, of which 38 are approved, most of which have a low degree of comfort, between 1 and 2 stars.

According to statistics, the Straja resort is the most dynamic and attractive ski area in the south of the Carpathians, with a high tourist potential evidence and the increased flow of tourists during the last 20 years. In general, most of them coming from Banat and Transilvania. (Voiculescu et al., 2011; SDML, 2008).

Compared to Parâng resort, it is noticed that the number of tourists is much sought increased during the ski season and the investments made in cableway infrastructure. There are 12 pistes arranged, six runs are approved in 2005 and 2006 as follows (table 2): *Sun Plateau, Lupului, Constantinescu, Mutu, St. George, Pasul Vâlcan*, five of them being supplied with nocturne.

⁴ www.cniptpetrosani.ro

⁵ www.cniptpetrosani.ro

Table 2. Features of pistes from Vâlcan Mountains ⁶

| Nr. crt. | Name | Length (m) | Difficulty |
|----------|----------------|------------|--------------|
| 1 | Sun plateau | 405 | beginners |
| 2 | Lupului | 519 | avansați |
| 3 | Constantinescu | 1741,5 | beginners |
| 4 | Mutu | 1269 | intermediate |
| 5 | St. George | 700 | beginners |
| 6 | Pasul Vâlcan | 395 | advanced |
| 7 | Canal | 1400 | advanced |
| 8 | Straja | 8100 | intermediate |
| 9 | Lupului II | 750 | intermediate |
| 10 | Canal II | 1200 | intermediate |
| 11 | Telegondolă | 3200 | intermediate |
| 12 | Straja Peak | 1000 | intermediate |

Adventure tourism is an important part of tourism, but in many countries it is quite difficult to quantify the phenomenon. In Romania, it comes in quite late, but gradually takes over a growing number of enthusiast tourists for extreme sports. Tourism phenomenon itself is divided into several activities, depending on the environment where it takes place (air, water, land, interior/exterior), season (summer, winter) and the means of propulsion (motorized or not) (Hudson, 2002).

The list of activities that can be undertaken in Petroșani Depression is quite varied and includes: *rock climbing, rafting, rappelling, zip line, hiking, paragliding* etc. and recommended locations for some of these activities (climbing, rock climbing, rappelling) are *Jieț Gorge, Taia Gorge, Rosia Gorge* (across all of the administrative area of Petrila) *Balomir Gorges, Campu lui Neag, Campusel, Valea de Brazi, Cușma-Gurganului area* at the base of the *Piule ridge, Jiu Gorge*. The favorable time for these activities takes about 7-8 months a year, are not dependent on climatic conditions, as is the case for winter sports, which in depression, yet are restricted only to skiing and snowboarding and in recent years a number recorded more than tourists, due to the general warming climate. It is worth mentioning that climbing cliffs in areas above are mentioned in the Annals of the Romanian Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing.

Jiu River is considered by practitioners as the most technical professional river in Romania for fast water sports such as rafting, kayaking and stand up paddle. Development of practicing adventure sports on Jiu was surprising from year to year. If 10 years ago there were only two companies in Romania offering tourist packages which included kayaking or rafting, currently are 24. The number of tourists has also increased from 300 (2005) to over 2000 tourists per year in 2015. ⁷

Generally, tourists seeking for these tour packages are employees of multinational companies, students, pupils or groups of friends. Team-building sites are addressed in particular employees of multinational companies and aimed at strengthening confidence and cohesion of the team members, as all adventure sports are focused on the team.

Ecotourism. The term ecotourism is becoming more frequently used. This phenomenon involves visiting natural areas in order to learn, study or participate in activities that have no negative effects on the environment, protecting and enabling the local community to develop socially and economically, ie tourism based on nature experience. Ecotourism is actually the most valuable manifestation of sustainable tourism (Dincă et al., 2012; Hall & Higham, 2005; Mazilu, 2004).

Over 10% of international travel agencies sell ecotourism programs, and 40% of tourists visiting Romania mentions nature as the main reason for the trip (Cândeia et al., 2003).

⁶ www.travelguideromania.com

⁷ www.insse.ro

International market of nature-based tourism is growing currently by 10-12% annually and sustainable tourism could grow, reaching 25% of the global tourism market over the next six years. World Tourism Organization believes that eco-tourism and cultural tourism along the adventure will be the most spectacular growth in this century.

Given the outlook on global tourism development and preferences of tourists, the natural potential of the basin recommend, given the fact that it is a limit of two natural parks and a national park: *Grădiștea Muncelului-Cioclovina Natural Park*, *Jiu Gorge Natural Park* and *Retezat National Park*. In this area, the tourists can observe and appreciate the nature.

Of the 276 localities located inside or near the 28 large protected areas in Romania, only 60 localities are not issues of tourism infrastructure and Petroșani Depression settlements are part of this list.

Speotourism is the tour of the caves specialized undeveloped. Visited caves have a sporting feature (walking in water, waterfalls, crawl, boosters, potholes, orientation issues) and are rich formations (columns, stalactites, stalagmites, draperies, organ pipes).

Through this form of tourism aims at exploring the unknown, unpredictable and team work in stressful conditions, lack of information management and identification solutions, decision making and crisis management dominance and intelligent use of emotions.

In Petroșani Depression can be found about 80 caves and avens. The sights that we recommend are: *Dâlma cu Brazi*, *Alunii Negri Cave (Uricani)*, *Toplița Cave*, *Peștera cu corali (Câmpu lui Neag)*, *Bolii Cave (Petroșani)*. The Tusu area, located in the administrative area of the Lupeni town, houses several caves interesting from the point of view of spelunking, but the predominance of exo-karst represented by fields of ditches and along the watercourse can be seen downward pressure cookers dug in limestone and in the crystalline.

Even if quite varied tourism potential of the depression itself as a resource waiting to be exploited, there are a number of impediments. So the main identified problems of tourism in Petroșani Depression, which solution can be achieved are:

- *lack of adequate transport infrastructure*, which primarily involves the definitive rehabilitation of the DJ 709 F access road to the Parâng resort, which is continually affected by subsidence caused by processes of underground coal mining. The completion of Route 66 on the west side of the basin that connects Petroșani and Băile Herculane. Asphalt access road from the Rusu resort toward Parâng. Rehabilitation of railway stations to European standards: CFR Petroșani and Lupeni, buildings and platforms. Integrated development of airports near the tourist area with roads that connect the main objectives. Lack of public transportation routes Parâng-Petroșani, Lupeni-Straja respectively. Constantly use of the cablecars in ski areas;

- *reduced promotion of tourist resorts* due to lack of qualified personnel in promoting tourism packages (tourism marketing) and less viable initiatives of local authorities;

- *deficiencies in the management of parking areas* so that in both resorts, are undersized and inadequate placed.

KEY FACTORS OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN PETROȘANI DEPRESSION

From the economic point of view, we believe that Petroșani Depression should be a priority in the political agenda, given that, Romania is a signatory to the Protocol on Sustainable Tourism on Framework Convention related to the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians, where, in chapter 3, art. 12 para. 2 shall contain the following aspect: "*In order to mitigate the impact of tourism on mountain fragile ecosystems in the Carpathians and provide a fairer distribution of traffic of tourists in the Carpathian region, each Party shall take measures in its national territory with the aim of disperse, redirect and channel some of the traffic of tourists outside the main tourist destinations current and sensitive sites such as protected areas, to less sensitive ecologically, less developed and explored by tourism, but with sufficient potential to absorb and accommodate some traffic of tourists*" (CCPDDC, 2003; MPDTN, 2010).

In recent years it has been invested in cableway infrastructure of Parang and Straja resorts. They operate only in a certain time of the year and only when it fulfills a certain number of tourists. Thus, we believe that the key factors in the development of sustainable tourism in this area are:

- **Unity through Diversity.** A slogan so much circulated within the European Union, with multiple connotations, but hardly implemented within the Romanian economic policy. The aim of sustainable tourism should be diversifying the local economy and not disolution or replacing coal mining activity in Petroșani Depression. Substituting this activity would lead to the following negative aspects:

- dependence on a single activity (tourism), which in turn is conditioned by climatic factor, given that at present local authorities are geared only toward developing mountain and here we refer to the ski area;

- by developing a pattern resort it is lost the uniqueness based on nature and landscapes, reason why the policy-makers should focus towards the promotion and development of circuits that contain natural sights or special cultural, failed to now it could carry out thematic tourism or adventure tourism.

In a broader context, development of sustainable tourism in Petroșani Depression can be seen as an instrument to solve or mitigate the social and economic problems resulting from rising unemployment, a lack of employment or emigration.

Retraining of mining employees and integration within the tourism sector in our view is a difficult and lengthy process. This resides in the fact that we are dealing with two different economic sectors (mining-secondary sector and tourism-tertiary sector), the preparation of human relations is different. Most often acquired through education, culture, experiences and not accessed in a short time, as is the case of training courses in tourism. For this reason, allocated funds for retraining should be rethought somewhat. Some staff qualified or unqualified in the field of mining, which will cease operation in a relatively short time (since 2018/2023) can carry about the same activity in the tourism sector (Eg. electricians, carpenters, plumbers, economists, laborers for maintenance access roads, tracks, theme parks character mining etc.).

The concepts of sustainable tourism suggest as development an alternative: if the locals would be financially encouraged to hold tourist facilities developed after the renovation of traditional houses or new buildings, it would create a number of additional advantages. First, the residents would be strongly motivated to remain in the area and maintain traditional activities. Locals and thus would increase the horizon, acquiring skills and knowledge they will need training courses in tourism management, which can be sustained mainly by teachers of the University of Petroșani. As an example, we mention the communities from the Petroșani area (Dâlja, Slătinoara, Sălătruc), Petrița (Lonea, Roșia, Rășcoala), Vulcan (Dealul Babii, Valea Ungurului), Lupeni (Tusu, Valea Vacii, Colonia Ștefan, Valea Roșia etc.), Uricani (Buta, Bilugul, Sterminos etc.) which, we say, in terms of financial stimulation, would have more interest to renovate existing buildings rather than build new ones that probably would not fit in the context of existing areas.

- **Conservation.** Generally, the "*consecrated*" tourists seek tourist agencies that emphasize the local architecture, cuisine, attractions, aesthetics and ecology. Thus, tourism revenues are increasing the value of assets in local communities. It is known that communities do not measure success in the tourism sector by number of visitors, but the average length of stay, expenditures made by tourists and quality of the experience.

Given that tourism is a competitive industry with a "trend" that can change very quickly, local communities may face serious problems if only heavily rely on the tourism market. To remain a stable economy, the tourism must encourage original, functional and authentic cultural scene.

Thus, local producers of traditional foods tend not to be addicts of fluctuating tourist flow because they can be marketed and indigenous community in specially designed booths. Revenue from the sale of food and non-traditional products can similarly become part of conservation tools.

Even though it may seem paradoxical, locally, certain perimeters, whose activity has been suspended, can be used for tourism. It is known that in the new environment created by the sterile dumps, from landfill were created specific aquatic ecosystems (the best example is the 2 East dump from Petrila). In addition, lakes formed in coal pits can be used to develop aquatic parks (Eg. Câmpu lui Neag coal pit), (Nimară and Buia, 2013).

- **Promotion through marketing strategies.** Starting from the phrase "*advertising is the soul of commerce*", we can say that the tourist packages of Petroșani Depression, should be promoted through extensive campaigns, not only locally and nationally/regionally.

Promotion is an activity that requires a high professional expertise without which the entire strategy may fail. The essential element is the *person* making the promotion campaign. It must have a high degree of specialization, have imagination, vision and understand specific market niches that take account of the special qualities of the promoted area.

Behind every tourist attraction is a story, which is not always true. The story is more detailed and better anchored in place, the number of tourists interested in coming to visit the tourist attraction that will be higher. So we can say that the soul of natural or cultural tourist attraction is the "**story**"! The story that will sell the tourist attraction on tourism market.

CONCLUSIONS

To achieve sustainable tourism in Petrosani Depression, it takes an open approach, partnerships with stakeholders. The success of the partnership depends on the goodwill and flexibility of stakeholders, requiring a long-term approach, working hard to achieve in a rapidly changing modern world.

Partners can be public, private sector and non-profit stakeholders. Partnership implies: the involvement of the media, public education, training for employees involved in tourism, policy planning, marketing, development of regulations and waiving when needed, finding a system to stimulate new ideas by sector public and other sectors.

Development and planning of tourism at the local or regional should be designed so that the society members to be the main beneficiaries of the revenue from this activity (Stănculescu, 2004).

Sustainable tourism is a way to conceive, plan and manage sustainable tourism activities in Petroșani Depression. At the same time it requires a change in management style, behavior, mentalities and habits. There is no "*recipe*" for success in the development of sustainable, although we propose several lines of intervention:

- communication on sustainable development;
- creating policies and general proposals at local, regional and urban ensuring proper integration of tourism in the life of these structures and provide specific proposals for architectural and urban works;
- promoting an action plan in partnership with the "*key*" actors in the development of the tourism phenomenon, including involvement of industry leaders;
- creating distinct cultural emblems representing local traditions right to use the whole range of resources;
- promoting adventure tourism in Jiu Gorge, Jieț Gorge, Taia and Roșia Gorge;
- promoting the tourism themes in the areas with mining landforms;
- demystifying the meaning of sustainable development;
- implemented policies in this area should be based on social and economic rational, grounded in a rigorous needs of the community and the requirements of environmental protection;
- integrating sustainable development as a factor for recovery of the tourism industry and wagering on the close links between quality and sustainable tourism;
- recognition and promotion of sustainable development success stories;
- education for sustainable development to make the best choices in developing tourism act;
- integrating sustainable development into the training of future managers of the tourism phenomenon.

So, the sustainable tourism from Petroșani Depression should aim at achieving a balance between development and conservation, to find the best tourism activities taking into account the elements of ecology and social and economic consequences. In this way would diminish the negative migration and depopulation trends, helping to fight poverty and ensure a fairer distribution of the benefits and revenues from tourism services to all settlements depression.

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