

MOUNTAIN TOURISM IN ROMANIA BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Abstract: *The article analysis the mountain tourism infrastructure according to the legislation, both for winter and summer season, in correlation with the natural potential of Romania, a country with 33% mountain areas of the total surface. It also refers to the role of the local and central public authorities in developing the tourist potential of mountain areas, in cooperation with NGOs such as the National Association of Mountain Rescuers from Romania (Salvamont). Further on, statistical data are used to highlight the relationship between the number of ski slopes, number of Salvamont units, the mountain massifs operated for, and between these data and the mountain tourist routes existing in the counties with mountain areas. The most important tourism indicators are presented for 2008, in order to compare their value for the total tourism sector in Romania with the values for mountain tourism. At the end of the article, conclusions are drawn, related to the way the mountain tourist potential is valorised in Romania taking into consideration the legislative framework.*

Key words: *mountain tourist routes, ski slopes, mountain rescue units, tourist destination*

Introduction

This paper is not an academic article in the strict sense of the word, meaning an article based on scientific research and literature review. It is an article based on the analyze of practice compared to a legislative system whose main problem is the way in which it is applied. It is also an article which tries to highlight the significant distance between words (the tourist potential of Carpathian Mountains) and deeds (classified ski slopes, classified mountain routes, Salvamont rescue units in counties with mountain areas). It is an article based strictly on the legislation existing in Romania at this moment (May 2009) and on the relationship between this legislation and the practical aspects encountered daily.

The article is structured into four parts, of which three are based on mountain tourism legislation (of winter, of summer, and the tourist destinations in mountain areas). The investigation is also based on the latest statistical data from the National Statistics Institute of Romania.

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Winter Mountain Tourism – Winter Sports

Government Decision (GD) no. 263 / 2001 and the Order of the Ministry of Tourism no. 491 / 2001 state very clearly for Romania the way in which the ski slopes and leisure ski routes are authorised, developed, maintained and used, and also the responsibilities of the ski slopes administrators for tourists' protection. We mention that the administrator of a ski slope is the person who requests the authorisation of the slope, which is done by a commission which comprises members ranging from the representatives of the administrator, to the representatives of the central tourism public authority, and also the specialised NGOs (Salvamont).

Even if the legislation is seven years old, in Romania there are only 88 authorised ski slopes in the Carpathians. It is to be noted that this happens in a country with about 33% mountain areas of the total territory. Based on the facts previously mentioned, some notable aspects have to be stated.

Thus, out of the 41 counties of Romania, 27 include in their territory mountain areas which belong to minimum one mountain massif of the Carpathian Mountains chain (Tulcea County is also included here with Măcinului Mountains). Out of these only 16 have at least one authorised ski slope. It has to be noted that in Iași County, which does not include mountain areas in the geographic and geomorphologic sense of the word and neither Salvamont units, there is an authorised ski slope, while in counties with significant mountain areas, there is not even one (e.g. Argeș, Bistrița Năsăud, Dâmbovița, Vâlcea etc.). Most of the authorised ski slopes are situated in the following counties: Brașov (19 ski slopes), Prahova and Harghita (15 ski slopes in each county) and Maramureș (12 ski slopes). These figures deserve to be commented as follows:

- In Brașov County there are 4 very important mountain massifs: Făgăraș, Piatra Craiului (its relief and the legislation for national park do not allow for a facile winter sports slope), Bucegi and Ciucaș;
- In Prahova County there are 3 mountain massifs: Bucegi, Baiului and Ciucaș;
- Maramureș County includes 2 mountain massifs: Maramureș and Rodna (a national park and biosphere reservation);
- In Harghita County, however, there is a single more important mountain massif – Harghitei Mountains.

With all these quantitative differences in mountain massifs number and implicitly in mountain areas, it can be noted that Harghita County has the same number of authorised ski slopes as Prahova County and a greater

number than Maramureş County. Between these four counties and the other counties, there is a big discrepancy in the number of authorised ski slopes. In Hunedoara County, even if there are 4 very important mountain massifs (Retezat – includes a national park, Parâng, Vâlcan, Sebeş) there are only 6 ski slopes. Besides this county, there are Alba, Caraş Severin and Gorj Counties, with 2 ski slopes each, and Cluj County with 3 ski slopes. The counties Arad, Bihor, Covasna, Neamţ and Sibiu (despite the fact that there is a tradition for winter sports, there are Salvamont units very well trained, and 2 very important mountain massifs - Făgăraş and Cindrel) have only 1 authorised ski slope. Another important aspect refers to the location of the authorised ski slopes in resorts of national or local interest.

Thus, in Romania there are 37 resorts of national interest and 46 resorts of local interest, according to the legislation. In the first group, out of the 37 resorts, only 17 are located within or in the vicinity of mountain areas. Out of these, only 10 resorts have authorised ski slopes. In the second group, out of the 46 resorts, only 19 are located in mountain areas. It is to be noted the fact that less than half of the resorts located in mountain areas have authorised ski slopes.

Out of the 88 authorised ski slopes, 35 are located in resorts of national interest, 25 in resorts of local interest, and the difference of 28 in other tourist destinations. It is to be outlined the fact that out of the 35 ski slopes located in resorts of national interest, 30 are located in Prahova Valley and Poiana Braşov. When analysing the number of Salvamont units and the areas where they operate, a range of interesting aspects can be outlined (the data for Salvamont units are offered by the National Association of Mountain Rescuers from Romania). In Romania there are 19 counties where Salvamont units operate, out of the 27 located in mountain areas, despite the legislation which stipulates the obligation of organising such a public service in every county with mountain areas. If in some counties there is one Salvamont unit (Alba, Covasna, Dâmboviţa, Gorj, Mureş, Neamţ, Vâlcea) in other counties there are more units (Argeş - 4, Bihor, Cluj, Maramureş, Sibiu, Suceava – 2, Bistriţa Năsăud, Caraş Severin - 3, Harghita, Hunedoara, Prahova - 5), with the most numerous units in Braşov County – 6.

A synthetic table (Table 1) clearly presents the relationship between the number of Salvamont units, the number of authorised ski slopes in the county, and the number of mountain massifs they operate for:

Table 1. - Salvamont Units, Authorised Ski Slopes and Mountain Massifs Operated For

No.	County	No. of authorised ski slopes	No. of Salvamont units	No. of mountain massifs operated for
1.	Alba	2	1	4
2.	Arad	1	missing	missing
3.	Argeş	missing	4	4
4.	Bihor	1	2	3
5.	Bistriţa Năsăud	missing	3	5
6.	Braşov	19	6	7
7.	Caraş Severin	2	3	5
8.	Cluj	3	2	2
9.	Covasna	1	1	2
10.	Dâmboviţa	missing	1	2
11.	Gorj	2	1	4
12.	Harghita	15	5	6
13.	Hunedoara	6	5	7
14.	Iaşi	1	missing	missing
15.	Maramureş	12	2	6
16.	Mureş	1	1	2
17.	Neamţ	1	1	3
18.	Prahova	15	5	3
19.	Sibiu	1	2	3
20.	Suceava	5	2	5
21.	Vâlcea	missing	1	3

Analysing the columns 3 and 4, one observes that the main criteria for establishing the Salvamont units, is not the number of authorised ski slopes (e.g. Arad, Argeş, Bistriţa Năsăud, Dâmboviţa, Iaşi, Maramureş, Vâlcea).

Summer Mountain Tourism

The GD no. 77/2003, regarding the measures for preventing mountain accidents and organising rescue units in the mountains, clearly describes 2 phases for developing, authorising and maintaining of mountain routes:

- a) the local public authorities (county or local) and the National Association of Mountain Rescuers from Romania elaborates the documents for developing mountain tourist routes (article 32); the same article stipulates the content of the documentation;
- b) authorising of the routes is undertaken at the initiative of local public authorities, by a commission, which also includes the Ministry of Tourism as a member, besides those mentioned at (a)

Based on this legislation, in Romania there were authorised 378 mountain tourist routes. The main observations related to these routes are the following:

- a) out of the 27 counties which include mountain areas in their territory, only 8 are listed with authorised mountain tourist routes: Arad, Argeş, Bihor, Braşov, Covasna, Prahova, Sibiu and Suceava;
- b) in conclusion, only in 30 % of the counties including mountain massifs the local public authorities and Salvamont made the necessary procedures for authorising the mountain tourist routes;
- c) among the missing counties there have to be mentioned, according the mountain tourist potential, the following: Bistriţa Năsăud, Gorj, Harghita, Neamţ, Vâlcea;
- d) regarding the mountain massifs, there are authorised mountain tourist routes in about 20 of them; it is to be noted that only in Meridionali Carpathians there are about 21 mountain massifs (it is difficult to have a precise number for all Carpathians in Romania and especially for Meridionali Carpathinas, given the geographic, geomorphologic, and geologic contradictions);
- e) out of these, the most renown massifs with authorised mountain tourist routes are: Bihor – Vlădeasa, Bucegi, Ciucaş, Făgăraş, Piatra Craiului, Piatra Mare, Postăvarul, Rarău Giumalău;
- f) surprisingly, a significant number of mountain massifs renown for the natural and man-made tourist potential are missing from the list: Anina, Ceahlău, Hăşmaş, Retezat, Rodna, Semenic; it is also to be noted that all the mentioned mountain massifs are natural or national parks and two of them include areas declared as biosphere reservations.

Based on the number of mountain tourist routes in each county, there can be established the following order: Braşov (with over 120 marked tourist routes), followed by Sibiu, Arad, Bihor, Argeş, Suceava, Prahova and Covasna (with less than 20 marked tourist routes).

The first observation to be made is that in Arad County there are more authorised tourist routes than in Suceava and Prahova Counties. Both counties

include mountain areas within a significant number of massifs: Bistriței, Călimani, Rarău Giumalău and Suhard (Suceva County), Bucegi, Baiului and Ciucaș (Prahova County). The second observation refers to Covasna County, the smallest county in Romania according to the surface, where there are marked routes despite a not very spectacular mountain area, while in counties such as Hunedoara (Retezat, Vâlcan, Parâng, Sebeș) there is not even a single route authorised.

A grouping of tourist routes on mountain massifs shows the following aspects (see Table 2):

- a) out of the total number of mountain massifs in Romania, only in 11 there are more than 10 authorised mountain routes;
- b) the 11 massifs can be grouped into two distinct regions: Apuseni Mountains (position 1, 5, 11) and Meridionali Carpathians (position 2, 3, 6, 7, 9); the Curvature area with 2 massifs (Ciucaș and Piatra Mare) and Bucovina with Rarău and Giumalău;
- c) most of the marked mountain tourist routes are, as expected, in Făgăraș Mountains and in Bucegi Mountains (natural park)

Table 2. - Mountain Tourist Routes

No.	Mountain massif	No. of authorised routes
1	Bihor Vlădeasa	29
2	Bucegi	40
3	Cindrel	21
4	Ciucaș	22
5	Codru Moma	12
6	Făgăraș	61
7	Piatra Craiului	36
8	Piatra Mare	18
9	Postăvarul	35
10	Rarău Giumalău	18
11	Zărand	28

Correlating the data regarding the authorised ski slopes with those regarding the authorised mountain tourist routes, the following aspects are to be highlighted:

- a) in Bihor, Brașov, Covasna, Prahova, Sibiu and Suceava Counties there are ski slopes, tourist routes and Salvamont units

- b) in Arad and Argeş Counties, there are not either Salvamont units (Arad) or authorised ski slopes (Argeş);
- c) In many situations, there are Salvamont units, there is a relatively significant tourist flow, but there are not authorised mountain routes (Alba, Bistriţa Năsăud, Caraş Severin, Dâmboviţa, Gorj, Harghita, Hunedoara, Maramureş, Neamţ, Vâlcea etc.)

Table 3. - Salvamont Units, Authorised Ski Slopes and Marked Tourist Routes

No.	County	No of authorised ski slopes	No. of Salvamont units	Authorised marked tourist routes
1	Alba	2	1	No
2	Arad	1	missing	Yes
3	Argeş	missing	4	Yes
4	Bihor	1	2	Yes
5	Bistriţa Năsăud	missing	3	No
6	Braşov	19	6	Yes
7	Caraş Severin	2	3	No
8	Cluj	3	2	No
9	Covasna	1	1	Yes
10	Dâmboviţa	missing	1	No
11	Gorj	2	1	No
12	Hargita	15	5	No
13	Hunedoara	6	5	No
14	Iaşi	1	missing	No
15	Maramureş	12	2	No
16	Mureş	1	1	No
17	Neamţ	1	1	No
18	Prahova	15	5	Yes
19	Sibiu	1	2	Yes
20	Suceava	5	2	Yes
21	Vâlcea	missing	1	No

Another interesting aspect refers to the number of resorts of national or local interest, where mountain tourist routes start from. Out of the more than 80 resorts of national and local interest, only 11 resorts are a starting point for

tourist routes. The most reknown are the resorts on Prahova Valley and Braşov area (Sinaia, Buşteni including Poiana Țapului, Azuga, Predeal including Pârâul Rece, and Poiana Braşov). The most numerous authorised mountain tourist routes are in Poiana Braşov. Besides these resorts, there are also Bran (the western side of Bucegi Mountains), Păltiniş (Cindrel Mountains), Cheia (Ciucas Mounitains), Timişul de Sus (Postăvarul Mountains), Vatra Dornei (Suhard Mountains) and Stâna de Vale (Apuseni Mountains).

The Plan for National Territory Development - section 8 “Tourism”

According to the Government Ordinance of Emergency (GOE) no. 142/2008, the Plan for National Territory Development - Section 8 “Tourism” was approved. Based on four criteria (natural potential, man-made potential, tourism specific infrastructure, general infrastructure), each destination in Romania down to commune level was scored. Thus, 3 main categories of tourist destinations were created: with a great tourist potential, with a big tourist potential and other tourist destinations.

In the first category there are about 200 tourist destinations, out of which about 100 are located in the rural area and the same number in urban area. In the mountain area (including localities in its vicinity – maximum 15 km.), there are about 55 tourist destinations, representing around 25% of the total number. Compared to other forms of tourism, mountain tourism is very well represented, being surpassed by what it could be called urban tourism (business, cultural) which includes 65 tourist destinations (about 30%).

Statistics

The number of accommodation facilities existing in Romania in 2008, according to the National Statistics Institute, was 5.329 units. Out of these, 1.064 representing about 20%, were located in mountain areas. The number of rooms in accommodation facilities, in Romania, in 2008, was about 123.000, of which only about 14.000, representing 11%, were located in mountain areas. It is evident that mountain tourism, compared to other forms of tourism, determines the construction of B&B or small size hotels.

Total number of overnights in 2008 was of 20.725 thousand. Out of these 2.245 thousand, representing 10%, were registered in mountain area units. The total number of tourists related to these figures was 7.125 thousand at national level and 998 thousand in mountain area. The structure Romanian / foreign tourists was 5.659 thousand / 1.466 thousand at national level, and 893 thousand / 105 thousand for the mountain area.

The average length of stay in 2008 was 2,9 days for the total number of tourists, 3,1 days for Romanian tourists and 2,3 days for foreign tourists. For the mountain area, the average length of stay was 2,2 days for Romanian tourists and 2,4 days for foreign tourists.

Table 4. Tourism Statistical Data - 2008

INDICATOR	Total	Mountain area	% mountain area/total
Accommodation facilities	5.329	1.064	20%
Rooms	123.300	14.000	11%
No of tourists	7.125.000	998.000	14%
Overnights	20.725.000	2.245.000	10%
Structure Romanian /foreign tourists	5.659.000/ 1.466.000 (3,86)	893.000/ 105.000 (8,5)	
Average length of stay - days	3,1 for Ro. tourists and 2,3 for foreign tourists	2,2 for Ro. tourists and 2,4 for foreign tourists	

Conclusions

There is a big discrepancy between the natural and man-made potential of Carpathian Mountains and the way in which this potential is transformed into added value. Both for the winter and summer season, the active tourism offer is very low from a concrete point of view.

Even if over than 30% of Romania's territory is represented by the Carpathian Mountains, even if most of the national and natural parks are located in mountain areas, the valorisation of these competitive advantages is very low on the national level and also on the level of the tourist regions,

Despite the legislation elaborated some years ago, the level of its application is very reduced, even if all the necessary conditions for its implementation in a coherent manner exist.

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