

Dynamics of the tourism activities in Bistrita Valley

- Abstract -

Tourism is considered today by the scale of the phenomenon, content, features, and its role as a distinct sector of activity, a component of prime importance to economic and social life. This is a frequent activity of modern man, with implications on multiple plans (natural, economic, socio-cultural and political).

Currently, in a complex and diversified economic and social context, the concept of tourism means all those economic activities that tourists appeal during their stay at the place of destination (transport, hotels, restaurants, bars, entertainment venues etc.). From the economic point of view, the main components of tourism are: touristic potential, work force engaged, tourist infrastructures, equipment and means of production, tourist services, consumption goods for tourism and tourism organizational structures.

Within the thesis *Dynamics of the tourism activities in Bistrita Valley* have been treated aspects in the research field of Human Geography, through its elements closely related to space, territory, demography, transport, tourism, development etc. The reference subdomains of this study are issues of tourism geography, economic geography, geography of human settlements and interdisciplinarity.

The study includes a physical-geographical characterization of this area, an analysis of the territorial accessibility, a characterization of the natural and anthropogenic potential, and a presentation of the main factors that influence the decisions of potential tourists to travel and to access a specific tourist destination. Overall, this study constitutes a synthesis, on theoretical and methodological basis, which analyses, in a chrono-spatial vision, the manifestations of the tourism phenomenon in the studied area.

The study is developed on the basis of documentation on the bibliography in this domain, but especially on the analysis and observations made in the field. The interest of such a study is both the need to cover the lack of studies on the topic of local tourism activities (potential, accessibility and valorisation) but also to establishing a useful tool in territorial and tourism planning, or else in the development of transport infrastructure.

The hypothesis from which starts this scientific approach is that Bistrita Valley has a high and diversified tourism potential, but which is insufficiently exploited. By reevaluating it in an efficient manner, it would be possible to increase the regional competitiveness through the development of tourist facilities and even the improvement of access routes infrastructure.

The Bistrita river basin covers an area of 7 039 km² and is located mostly in the mountains of the Carpathians and the lower sector, downstream of Piatra Neamt is located in Moldova Sub Carpathian. It occupies territories located in the counties of Bacau, Neamt, Suceava, Harghita, Bistrita-Nasaud and Maramures.

This study is intended as a representation of the socio-economic situation of the studied area, an update of the database and of the information on the evolution of human settlements, in the abiotic, biotic and anthropogenic relations developed in this area, as well as a concentration of the existing references in the literature in this field.

Bibliography relating to the tourist activity in this area is not very extensive. Most references to the phenomenon of tourism potential of this area can be found in the overview of studies (at regional or national level), but the majority of geographic research, stop at the '60 - '90's and relate strictly to the physical-geographical characteristics or economic characteristics. These works pose only existing tourism potential of the Bistrita Valley, without reference to the problems arising from the tourism phenomenon.

The growing volume and complexity of the supply of tourist services have led to the development of a true "industries" of tourism, thus justifying themselves by this analysis of tourism as a distinct branch of the national economy. By its nature, the phenomenon is particularly complex, with important implications for economic, social, political and cultural: tourism development stimulate the development of other branches of the national economy (trade, agriculture, transportation, construction etc.); the demand for tourism goods and services determine indirect effects in the sectors that provide investments in the material basis of tourism (building materials industry), as well as their financing, but also in sectors carrying out arrangements infrastructure sectors.

Bistrita Valley consists of 4 municipalities (Vatra Dornei, Gheorgheni, Piatra Neamt and Bacau), 6 cities (Borsa, Brosteni, Borsec, Biczaz, Rozno and Buhusi) and 49 municipalities, cumulating in 2011 a total population of 468 223 inhabitants, 62.05% of the total population of the region lives in urban areas, and the difference of 37.39% in rural areas. The average population density is 66.5 inhabitants/km².

The rafting on Bistrita Valley survived and developed continuously until the middle of the twentieth century. The rafting on Bistrita River and its tributaries reached its peak between the years 1952-1955. Gradually, the wood's water transport was replaced by carriage by land. Rafting for touristic purposes is an alternative for tourism in Bucovina and Bistrita Valley, and could become a local emblem designed to revitalize a representative tradition for Bistrita Valley. In the last period, in agro-tourism offerings of adventure tourism began to appear more and more of a modern form of use of the waters of the river basin Bistrita: rafting. It is currently one of the most popular tourist activities in nature in Vatra Dornei.

Bistrita Valley has a great diversity of landscape, a complexity of tourism resources (landscape, ski area, spa, cultural – folk-Art, ethnography, folklore, traditions, historical sites etc.) and large possibilities for valorisation in tourism. It is noted the Rodna Mountains, Ceahlau, Hasmus etc., the resorts and tourist complexes which offers great possibilities for winter sports, hiking and mountaineering, hunting and fishing, spa treatment, cultural tourism, religious tourism, ecotourism etc.

The climate of Bistrita River Basin is favourable for tourism through the year due to the thermal comfort and the snow layer that, by the average thickness and duration allows the development of winter sports. The Bistrita River Basin has a diverse climate because it occupy a large area and a varied topography. Overall, the climate is temperate continental, with shades varies by the topographic elevation, its forms and peculiarities of atmospheric dynamics.

The levels of relief determinate a natural steps of the climatic conditions so that the temperature decreases toward the mountain ridges. The Bistrita Valley climate is influenced by the narrowing of the valley: the air flow creates a local microclimate. Because Bistrita Valley has a wide opening to the extra-Carpathian region and it is under the direct influence of the continental climate, this is reflected especially in the climatic characteristics of the winter season.

The climatic conditions from the extra Carpathic sector are favourable to agriculture, and those from the mountain to the forest economy and animal husbandry; in some sectors the climate favourability allows the development of important spa resorts.

Bistrita River hydrographic network is among the most important factors generators of tourism, with a high tourist potential, offering optimal conditions for recreation and leisure.

The Bistrita Valley enjoys a rich hydrographic network collected by the Bistrita River from the adjacent mountain ranges.

After the construction of the dam of the Lake "Izvorul Muntelui" from Biczaz and commissioning of the entire hydropower system, the economic role and the appearance of Bistrita River have changed.

On the Lacu Rosu's shore is the Lacu Rosu resort witch offering opportunities to carrying out various activities that can be practiced in addition to rest and treatment. Depending on the season and weather conditions can be chosen recreational activities such as canoeing, fishing, climbing and skiing.

Bistrita Valley has a good spa potential, which may constitute a major tourist destination, given the resources available. Bistrita Valley climate is suitable for therapeutic treatments, including areas with a tonic, sedative and saline environment. Famous tourist areas and resorts have large spa complex. Worth mentioning spas as: Vatra Dornei, Borsec, Lacu Rosu, Saru Dornei, Durau, Poiana Negrii, Borsa and Negulesti.

Bistrita Valley is characterized by the richness of its natural and antropical environment, which outlines a great touristic interest area. Besides the impressive and diverse topography, Bistrita Valley has an important natural heritage - flora and fauna of this area: various species of plants and animals, some of them protected by law, are included in nature reserves that hold true riches of nature.

On Bistrita Valley, climbing can be practiced in Biczaz Gorge, Ceahlau massif, Rarau Mountains, Calimani mountains etc. The Biczaz Gorge area is considered the third largest climbing region of Romania, after Bucegi and Piatra Craiului. Rodna Mountains offers favourable conditions for winter technical climbing, skiing and climbing. Escalate has a special charm due to the relief of the spectacular Biczaz Gorge, the Rarau massif and the Zugreni narrow path. On Bistrita Valley can be found climbing gyms in most cities but most complex climbing centre is the adventure park in Gura Humorului.

The general infrastructure is represented by a network of well-developed communication paths and under modernisation (rails and means of transport), which allows access to all the major tourist areas of the region.

Anthropic touristic potential of the Bistrita Valley, as variety and value, is directly linked to the long evolution of human civilization in this area. Thus, there is a series of group goals, each with different weights under different areas of interest identified in the region: historical vestiges, religious sights, monuments, dams and reservoirs, cultural (museums, memorial houses), goals and ethnographic manifestations, regions with traditional Romanian culture and civilization. The relatively small distance between the cultural sights favouring their integration in various thematic circuits.

The cultural heritage of national interest of Bistrita Valley include: churches and monasteries, monuments and architectural ensembles, castles, mansions and palaces, urban architectural ensembles (civil buildings), historical and archaeological centres etc.

Ethnographic resources occupies a distinct place in the anthropic attractions due to their specificity: jointing materials with the spiritual heritage. The reduced weight of ethnographic heritage in Bistrita Valley area is due to industrialization and urbanization, increased especially after 1950, which led to renunciation of their own traditions and folklore. Traditional crafts and occupations in the past, on Bistrita Valley, may be considered: exploitation and woodworking, blacksmithing, animal husbandry, plant culture (agriculture and the traditional tools and techniques), hunting and fishing, beekeeping, pottery, spinning and weaving, sheepskinng. Their attractiveness increases when the occupations and crafts are the pretext of other manifestations of ethnographic assertion, especially customs, games and folklore songs.

Bistrita Valley held in 2012 a number of 277 structures with tourist accommodation functions, which are ranked between 1 and 4 stars/ daisies.

Travel services Bistrita Valley are well developed and include catering structures, recreation and treatment structures, but which requires a process of modernization and adaptation to international standards.

The context in which tourism in the Bistrita Valley of evolves and manifests is dynamic, characterized by a great diversity of attractions, all located in a permanent race to attract tourists and generate profit. After 1990, Bistrita Valley tourism has experienced a stalemate in its development, due to the rigors of the market economy and the restructuring of the real estate and land, but also the physical degradation of tourist units, some of them surpassing the 30 years of existence. This setback was caused by lack of leisure and sports facilities and cultural, of the arrangements for the practice of winter sports and mountain vacationers, as well as technical-urban facilities.

The year 2007 has seen an increase in the number of accommodation structures in rural areas and a large increase in the number of accommodation places in the towns Vatra Dornei (an increase of 14.9% of accommodation than in 2001), Ceahlau (an increase of 26.7% of accommodation), Gheorgheni (38,3% increase of accommodation), and a drastic drop in the number of places of accommodation in Borsec (71,9% decrease of accommodation) - locality in the year 1990 was the most developed tourist resort of Bistrita Valley.

In the year 2012, Vatra Dornei resort held the leading position in terms of the number of places of accommodation (with 0.8% surpassing the number of existing accommodation in 1990), followed by Gheorgheni (the number of places of accommodation increased 39.8% compared to 2007, but still were 28.4% less in comparison with the year 1990), due to the Lacu Rosu Resort who knows a significant development. We can observe a significant development of tourist accommodation structures in rural areas, resulting in a greater number of places to stay, most of the accommodation type and touristic pensions. They are located near the tourist points of interest (tourist resorts around some of the natural sights of nature reserves etc.), but also in the vicinity of the settlements or road junctions.

The tourist interest for the studied area resulted, over time, by increasing the number of tourist and agritouristic pensions. After 1989, it can be seen that the most numerous units have been tourist villas, followed by hotels and tourist lodges. While the number of hotels has remained approximately constant, it can be noticed a drastic decrease, especially after 1995, the number of tourist villas and tourist chalets, until the year 2004, when their number began to be maintained at a constant level.

Bistrita Valley accessibility is ensured by a chain of national and county roads which are in an acceptable conditions, a few European roads and two secondary railways. Bistrita Valley air transport are supported by a specific infrastructure consisting of a single airport in Bacau, operating both on the

internal and external. From the data presented shows annual growth in the number of passengers, so that in the year 2012 it is noted that nearly 400 000 people have used the services of Bacau Airport, an increase of 70.2% compared with 2008.

Taking into account the fact that there are no official data on tourist flows and their intensity, and most of the data available are from the county level, it has opted for the application of a questionnaire of tourism. It was completed in several places and landmarks of the Bistrita Valley, amounting to a total of 147 questionnaires. According to the responses recorded in the applied questionnaires, Bistrita Valley is visited mainly by tourists aged up to 50 years, who wish to spend their free time, either the weekend, a holiday or a stay of 2-3 days within a framework of accommodation structures, in general in a touristic or agritouristic pension. The means of transport used is mainly the personal car, which is the most convenient, adapted and faster means to travel in this area. The majority of tourists visiting Bistrita Valley can be classified in the category of those who practice an individual mass tourism, characterized by a partial use of the specific facilities for an organized mass tourism.

Regarding the most visited sights on Bistrita Valley are referred to the National Park Bicaz Gorges and Lacu Rosu Resort as the most visited. The charts were preferences and Bicaz Dam and Lake Izvorul Muntelui, Monastery Bistrita, Monastery Pangarati and National Park Ceahlau. Analysis of responses show a preference of tourists for natural sightseeing, architecture and churches, other types of sights are considered secondary.

Along with the tourist valorisation of natural and cultural heritage of Bistrita Valley, creating an appropriate recreational infrastructure is vital in the context of the development of tourism on Bistrita Valley, its quality influencing the duration of stay of tourists. In this context it notes the efforts of local authorities to initiate and develop some projects dedicated to this purpose.

Bistrita Valley enjoys a wide variety of accommodation structures, and in recent years it senses a significant increase: hotels, motels, villas, inns, cabins, tourist stops, campgrounds, holiday camps, cottages, hostels etc., located both in some resorts and in their surroundings. The tourist accommodation structures of hotel and motel type are specific for the urban areas, which can be found in cities and towns, and the touristic or agritouristic pension, the villas and the tourist huts are specific structures for the rural areas.

In recent years there has been increasing the comfort around major urban centres (Bacau, Vatra Dornei and Piatra Neamt).

Due to favourable conditions available, beauty places, diversity of landscape, impressive and diversified relief, the purity of the air and water, as well as priceless existing anthropogenic heritage (cultural and architectural), Bistrita Valley holds a relatively high tourism potential, which can be compared to other popular tourist areas in the country and abroad. Along the picturesque Bistrita Valley, well-known hospitality, folklore, traditional customs and specific Moldavian gastronomy give local colour to attract tourists.