

INFLUENCES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM UPON THE LOCAL ECONOMY OF THE JIU VALLEY

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ABSTRACT: *When authorities decided to close down the ineffective mining units in the Jiu Valley, the region recorded an economic crisis manifested through a permanent decrease in the standard of living of the community. The only viable alternative to replacing coal exploitation was considered to be the development of tourism, the area having spectacular mountain landscapes and natural resources which favored winter sports. It is admitted that tourism has a huge potential to create prosperity and to improve the environment where it is carried out. The extent to which the awareness of the effects (both positive and negative) the development of a sustainable tourism has upon the community and the local economy, as a whole, is absorbed correctly and completely by the natives, it is likely to generate consensus and commitment towards achieving a common goal - a rich and beautiful region with people who take pride in the places they live in, in their traditions and eager to be discovered by those who visit.*

KEY WORDS: *sustainable tourism, local community, tourist area, local development.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *R11.*

1. THE JIU VALLEY – TOURIST POTENTIAL

The Jiu Valley or Petrosani Depression covers an area of approximately 163 square kilometers along the two Jiu Rivers (Eastern and Western) and includes the following administrative units:

- Petroșani municipality and the townships Dâlja Mare, Dâlja Mică, Peștera and Slătioara;
- Petrila city with the townships Lonea, Cimpa, Jieț, Răscoala and Tirici;
- Aninoasa city and the township Iscroni;

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- Vulcan municipality and the townships Dealul Babii, Jiu-Paroșeni;
- Lupeni municipality;
- Uricani city and the townships Câmpu lui Neag, Valea de Brazi.

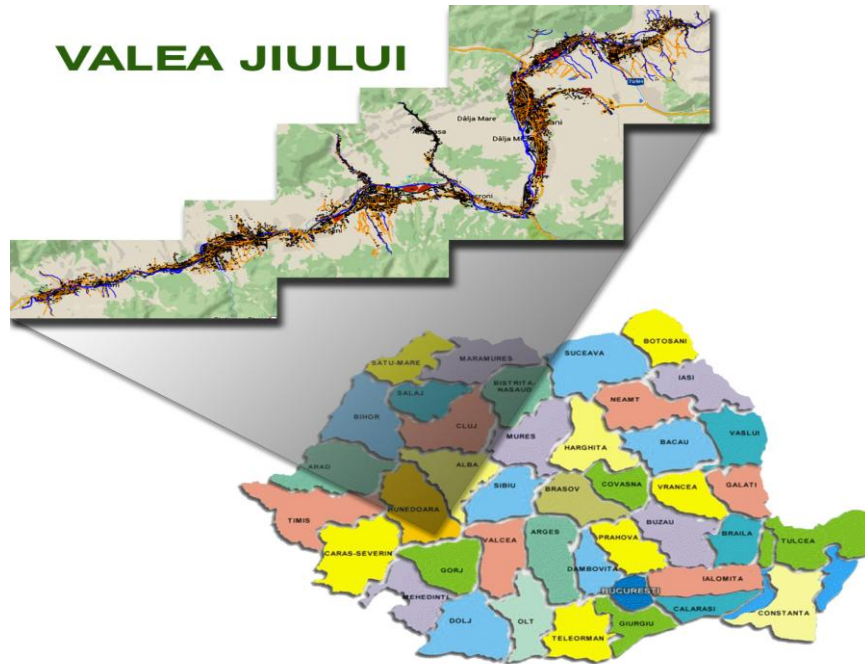


Figure 1. Position of the Jiu Valley nationwide

The main natural resources of the Jiu Valley are believed to be represented by the coal reserves (which is the largest coal deposit in the country) and the unique natural landscape given by its location, surrounded by four mountain ranges: Retezat (natural reserve) in the North-Northwest, Sureanu in the East-North-East, Parang in the East-South-East and Vâlcan in the South.

The geographical location of the Jiu Valley allows it to represent a starting point for other domestic tourist destinations such as the Retezat National Park, the regions of Hateg, Porțile-de-Fier, Cerna – Herculane Valley, the Olt Valley.

Besides the location, a set of natural elements is also added to what represents the natural beauties of the place thus generating a high tourism potential with landscapes, with scientific and practical values:

- extremely picturesque relief forms, as well as isolated cliffs, canyons, gorges, caves and spectacular waterfalls;
- a climate characteristic to medium altitude mountains;
- rich hydrographic network, with fast low flow streams, with picturesque valleys, with numerous breaks of slope and small waterfalls, and also gorges (Jiet Gorge), plus lakes such as Gâlcescu or Mija;

- vegetation and fauna specific to the mountain area, where one can notice not only the edelweiss and the snow-rose - as elements of vegetation, but also the black goat, the capercaillie, along with the bear and the red deer, the boar, the wolf and the lynx, the trout and the grayling - as elements of fauna and avifauna.

Natural resources are augmented with anthropogenic resources, among which it is worth mentioning the following: the Mining Museum (the only one in Romania, founded in 1962, as a tribute to the miners' work, evoking the history of mining and the development of coal mining technology), Bumbesti-Livezeni railways (begun in 1923, but completed in the early years of the Communist period (1948) thanks to a remarkable effort of young volunteer workers, making it one of the most spectacular railways in Romania across the Jiu Gorge, a stretch of 31 kilometers in length through 39 tunnels and over 127 bridges and viaducts), Sâniilor Church in the Jiu meadow (the oldest building that has withstood the passage of time in Petroșani. It was built in 1790, on the site of another church, deserted by the Ottoman hordes passing through Vulcan Gorge. It still retains the original bell (engraved with the year of installation 1790), several sacred images of the same period and a few religious books printed in the 17th and 18th centuries).

“Momârlanii” - the archaic population of the area/the ancestors of the area, still keep the customs and folk traditions, the origin of which has been lost in time: Pițărăii, Paștele Blajinilor, etc.

2. JIU VALLEY – FROM MONO-INDUSTRIAL REGION TO TOURIST REGION

If the economic development of the region and its transformation into a mono-industrial area was due to coal exploitation, nowadays, because of the restructuring of the once dominant mining activities, it is time to “exploit” the natural beauties of the area (landscapes, vegetation, fauna, popular customs and traditions) in order to become the “engine” of regional development, generating economic prosperity and social security.

Practicing intensive mining without taking into account the criteria of sustainability and protection of the environment has made, however, both natural advantages erode over time, thus the intervention of the authorities for the purpose of reducing the effects of pollution and conservation of the ecological environment, especially since until that date, among the development opportunities identified as viable alternatives to traditional mining, tourism is considered to be the most accessible owing to the advantageous position of the region, with a really great scenery.

Through tourism, all the resources offered by the Jiu Valley - anthropogenic and natural, material and human, traditional and modern – may find a way to be turned to profit, if not the only way to be exploited. Thus, tourism is expected to cause mutations in the development of the territory, to constitute a solution not only for maintaining economic equilibrium in the region, a remedy for mining locations subject to restructuring, but also for mitigating the existing inter-regional disparities on district and regional levels.

Materializing this opportunity does not imply, unfortunately, only a favorable geographical location and attractive features for numerous forms of sports practice, but also a long timeframe by which they are to be achieved and substantial investments.

For the development of tourism in the Jiu Valley there are several favorable premises:

- the existence of an infrastructure, such as the transportation by road, which was rehabilitated (the European route E66 linking the Jiu Valley to Deva and from there, the A1 highway that is to link Bucharest to Nădlac) or in the course of rehabilitation (the case of the Jiu Gorge which connects the Jiu Valley to Târgu-Jiu); indeed the road that connects the Jiu Valley to Râmnicu Vâlcea and at the same time to Transalpina requires major investments which were delayed for the sector of the road belonging to Hunedoara County;
- setting up an adequate healthcare infrastructure (the rehabilitation, with the help of European funds, of Emergency Unit within Petrosani Municipal Hospital);
- inauguration of the Tourist Information Centre located at the entrance from Deva into the Jiu Valley.

Unfortunately these advantages are accompanied by a series of shortcomings to which officials must pay great attention and must consider them a priority in order to remediate them as soon as possible:

- *competitive disadvantages* - some resorts benefit from investment projects with a greater chance of implementation and materialization. All investments in mountain resorts from the Jiu Valley (whether they refer to Parang-Petrosani resort or to Straja-Lupeni resort) were financed by the Ministry of Development and Tourism which, subsequently, has not fulfilled its commitments so that today we are witnessing a partially executed work and unpaid builders, as well as an intolerable delay in meeting deadlines;
- *unsatisfactory collaboration of the factors involved in the tourist phenomenon*, which records interruptions in the dialogue between the local government and the private sector involved in tourist activities, with recriminations of neglect and misinformation;
- *the lack of tourist services/lodgings, with accommodations offering a low degree of comfort and amenities* in order not to tempt tourists to extend their stay or to spend more money in this area;
- *insufficient parking lots in mountain resorts* (Parang-Petroșani or Straja-Lupeni);
- *access to Parang-Petroșani resort for tourists is possible only by chairlift* which can operate only under certain weather conditions and only by day;
- *a deficient public utilities system, with reference to water and sewerage networks and waste water treatment*. At the present time, owners of lodgings within the resort provide their own drinking water by abstracting drinking water from springs or wells. The lack of a

centralized water distribution system makes it impossible to meet the quality requirements for drinking water, as imposed by the Romanian legislation. Abstraction of water from various sources, which cannot be controlled, means that people who use drinking water are exposed to risks. The lack of a centralized distribution system makes users have no security and continuity in the water supply. In the mountainous region fluctuations of the hydrological regime are very heavy; therefore the individual systems are exposed to failures. With regard to sanitation, this is done through the septic tank system. The absence of a sewerage network brings severe environmental damages because the lack of a proper system has as consequence the infrequent discharge of toilets.

3. EFFECTS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SUSTAINABLE TOURISM UPON ECONOMY AND LOCAL COMMUNITY

Many tourists want to visit destinations, in order to to be impressed by the beauties the natural environment offers, well organized areas not coping with social, environmental or safety problems, to assimilate knowledge about the history and culture of the areas they visit, to experience new tourist products, to satisfy their interests and hobbies.

Starting from these desiderata, supplemented by the will of the local authorities to properly exploit the tourist potential of the area concerned and supported by the central authorities, there is a significant increase in the degree of assurance of sustainable tourism development on the local level. Developing and preserving a strong tourism sector depends on the effectiveness of the relations that must exist between the local public administration - the one that knows best the development opportunities on local level and that is in charge of supporting this process -, and the upper levels of the Administration, governmental institutions in the field of tourism - which are responsible for the coordination of this process through the development and implementation of regional and national tourism policies and with directing tourism toward sustainability.

Since tourism is a multi-sectorial activity, permanent cooperation is essential between governmental institutions with assignments in the tourism sector and other governmental institutions, as well as between the public and private sectors.

Sustainable development of tourism should not be the sole concern of the public sector, of administrations, respectively, be they local or central, instead they must be the result of a partnership with local communities, with those trained in businesses in the field of tourism (e.g. owners of tourist lodgings or restoration service providers, transport or leisure service providers, travel agencies, etc.), with various associations and NGOs which aim the development and improvement of the living standard of the communities they represent. Under this partnership, the public sector shall be responsible for pointing out the need and the opportunity to establish an investment in tourism, for carrying out feasibility studies, for building the basic infrastructure, for developing tourist attractions, for establishing measures to turn the region to profit and to protect the environment etc., a process in which the

commitments assumed (both financial and as regards the deadlines for implementation) and related to the effective implementation of strategies and policies in the field of tourism on local, regional or national level, plays an essential role. In parallel, the private sector develops accommodation services, restauration activities, travel and leisure services and other complementary tourism activities. Marketing, promotion is also extremely important and lies, mostly, with the private sector.

Local communities will understand the role that they have in the social-economic development of the area in which they live and work as far as they are properly and fully informed about the benefits generated by the development of tourism in the area, provided they are involved in the decision-making process and they are able to benefit from tourism. It is important that local people be aware of the ways in which they can benefit directly or indirectly from tourism activities as an integral part of the motivation to participate actively in supporting the development of domestic tourism.

Through actions regarding tourism development, some objectives are to be attained:

- *from economic point of view:*

- *ensuring economic development by increasing production and services* (the effect of stimulating production and services due to the requests from the tourists, spreads from tourism to other economic sectors, as a result of its character of branch of interference and synthesis. In the case of production, the effect is especially beneficial as it is done on local level) *and revenue* (profits of entrepreneurs, salaries of employees to the State and local budgets);
- *diversification and integration of activities on local level.* The need to adapt to the requirements of tourists contributes on the one hand to the development of specific activities such as recreation (paragliding or rafting on the Jiu River) or making traditional handicrafts products, etc., and, on the other hand, it gives new dimensions to existing activities, such as those in the food industry, construction, etc.);
- *generating business opportunities* (both directly, in establishments that provide tourism services (hotels, restaurants, transportation services, sports equipment rental units, and others), and indirectly, in companies carrying out complementary activities (shops, banks, and others);
- *increasing the employment rate of the active population, particularly among women and young people*, thus reducing the desire for immigration present on high levels among youngsters. The restructuring of mining activities, “without replacing them” has led to a considerable reduction of the population of the area because of its migration to other regions of the country or outside the country, a disturbing phenomenon especially since it affects the labour force of the region;
- *improvement of infrastructure, facilities and services and more.*

- *socially:* relieving poverty and unequal income distribution, awareness and involvement of local population regarding the importance of tourism development in order to raise the standard of living of the whole community and to preserve local traditions and customs which may be endangered by modern development;

- *ecologically*: conservation of biodiversity on local level.

The impact of tourism on the development of local communities includes not only positive aspects - as those listed above - but also negative aspects, such as (Stănciulescu, 2004, pp.49-50):

- social degradation of local community;
- alteration of the ecosystems;
- increased production of waste;
- congestion, etc.

The existence of those two issues is acceptable as far as the positive impact is considerable and contributes, directly or indirectly, to the economic development of that certain region.

The establishment of a sustainable development policy is very important in making an assessment of the effects, both positive and negative, generated by tourism development in order to be able to elaborate a full program of action aimed at amplifying the benefits resulting from the development of tourism, but also at diminishing them until the elimination of detected threats and weaknesses.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In the case of the Jiu Valley, tourism is understood - not only by those who live in the region or by those who know it, but also by the central authorities - as the only viable alternative to the collapse of mining activities. There is undoubtedly a potential for tourism development, therefore a number of local development strategies have been elaborated; however, they exceed the financial availabilities of local administrations. Unfortunately, if there is no political support and no commitments to encourage tourism, the local initiatives embodied in tourist plans and programs, regardless of their designation, their extent and their generated benefits, cannot be implemented.

With certainty the effects generated in particular on local level, by a region's economic revitalization through tourism development are well known to the Ministry and other institutions with competence in the field of tourism, however, and they are minimized because otherwise the delay of investments cannot be explained.

Locally, the benefits generated by the development of tourism is not sufficiently known by all its beneficiaries (the local public administration, the private sector, the civil society, etc.), or they have not yet found the way to strengthen the partnership between them. Unfortunately, until these shortcomings are remedied, the Jiu Valley will continue to be one of the poor areas in the county and country, an area where the "innocent" population has to put up with apathy, ignorance and vanity.

The involvement of partners in the strategy for tourism development on local level provides important information on the types (forms) of tourism that have potential for development, as well as on the extent to which tourism can develop in that area. Obviously, especially at the beginning, during the period in which it aims to launch tourism and to turn it into an important activity within the economy of the region, the local administration must play the leading role in this partnership in order to achieve an optimally efficient cooperation mechanism.

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