

## THE MOUNTAIN TOURIST RESORT - PLEADING FOR A SINGLE AND CLEAR TERMINOLOGY

SMARANDA SIMONI<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Doctoral School Business Administration, Romania, e-mail: tsmaranda@yahoo.com*

***Abstract:** Since the tourist resort is the core of tourism activity, a proper terminology is helpful for all stakeholders. There is doubt and confusion in the terminology of tourist resorts (in the Romanian literature and legislation); the legislation in effect is not updated, clear and complete, and it does not even match the tourist demand or the practice in the field. Studying the Romanian legislation and literature in this field, where we found some shortcomings, we came to the only clear conclusion that a mountain resort can be considered any tourist resort (a town, village or part of them having tourist attractions and accommodation facilities for tourists) located in the mountains, whatever forms of tourism or tourism resources it presents. Not all mountain resorts are certified under the national legislation in effect.*

***Key words:** mountain resort, terminology, Romanian legislation*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper pleads for a unique and clear terminology on tourist resorts in Romania, in general, and mountain tourist resorts, in particular. The tourist resort represents the core of tourism activity, a complex territorial system of production and distribution of tourism goods and services (Țigu, 2001); therefore, an appropriate terminology is helpful for all stakeholders.

The shortcomings we noticed refer to:

- uncertainty and confusion in tourist resort terminology (in literature and legislation in effect);
- the lack of an updated, complete and clear legislation in this field (the latest law is the Government Decision no. 852 / 2008, and the Project (draft) of Tourism Law has been amended even since 2010, entering recently for approval and public debate);
- the Project Tourism Law 2015 (the latest version) fails to clarify many aspects, but it is certainly the most comprehensive by now;
- disparity between practice (tourists, travel agencies, tourist resorts' offer, statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics - NIS) and legislation in the field.

The causes of these uncertainties and disparities are:

- the frequent changes in the names and powers of the Ministry of Tourism during the post-revolutionary period;
- the repeated establishment and dissolution of some institutions or organizations such as the National Authority for Tourism, the Office of Licensing and Control in Tourism, or the Tourism Promotion Office;
- the poor collaboration with the experts in the field from Romania and abroad (researchers, university professors) in preparing legislative acts on tourist resorts, their classification and certification;
- the lack of a tourism law in effect (there are a number of governmental decisions and orders in effect and a long-debated and yet unapproved law project).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is based on researching the bibliographic sources mentioned therein (specialty books of some renowned Romanian researchers or university professors, normative and legislative acts in the field, publications of the National Institute of Statistics and the National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism N.I.R.D.T.), processed then into pertinent conclusions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Romanian legislation does not provide a clear definition of the mountain resort, though in practice (tourists, travel agencies, statistics of the National Institute of Statistics, studies in the field) this term is widely used. The definitions in legislation are important because they are adopted by businesses, professional organizations and federations in tourism, as well as by the ministries concerned.

We made a review of the Romanian literature in this field, attempting to obtain some unanimously recognized concepts or opinions on the mountain resort, although in many documents we found only partial references on the tourist resort, mountain tourism or mountain area. Therefore we tried to deduce a clear definition of a mountain tourist resort from the existing definitions on tourist resorts and mountain tourism.

There was a rather ambiguous definition, in the project of amending the norms and criteria for certification of tourist resorts and areas in Romania, N.I.R.D.T. 2000: "the mountain resort is a locality or part of it, having picturesque and unpolluted mountain surroundings, natural environment factors, and specific tourist facilities to provide the tourist product of mountain type".

The Lexicon of Tourism Terms (Stănculescu, 2002) defines the tourist resort as "a locality (village or city) situated in a region with great tourism potential and equipped with various equipment for receiving tourists. It is an organized territorial unit, with equipment offering a diverse range of performances, assimilated to a settlement or a service sales center, grouping different businesses. In many tourist countries, including Romania, a locality must meet certain criteria, determined by national legislation, in order to gain this status. A winter sports resort is "a mountain resort, with reception and sport equipment for winter sports: ski or sledding slopes; skating rinks; cableway installations, etc."

The authors Muntele I. and Iașu C. (2003) do not provide a clear definition, but they consider mountain tourism synonymous with alpine tourism; the authors noted the same various travel motivations and multiple activities, starting with the first mountain tourism activities (climbing, hiking, mountaineering), altitude cures (climatic therapy), hydrotherapy, followed by winter sports, visiting parks and natural reserves, or practicing extreme sports (rafting, canyoning, paragliding).

The researcher Glăvan V. (2006) classifies the forms of tourism by several criteria; the mountain tourism belongs to the criterion of main tourism performance, along with coastal tourism, spa treatment tourism, weekend tourism, sport and recreation tourism, summer and winter tourism, and circumstance tourism. In the chapter on mountain tourism potential, the author mentions "the complex functionality of mountains throughout the year, but especially in winter and summer" and the possibility of practicing more than 15 forms of tourism ("hiking, leisure and recreation, winter sports, spa treatment, scientific tourism and ecotourism, climbing and caving, adventure sports, hunting and fishing, agritourism and rural tourism, water sports, photo-safari, cultural and religious tourism, etc."). This author also emphasizes the multiple functionality and motivations of tourists in the mountain area.

The university course "Tourism Facilities" (Erdeli, Gheorghilaș, 2006) is one of the few works having chapters dedicated to tourist resorts. The authors take the definitions of UNWTO and the International Academy of Tourism as follows:

- the tourist resort is a "locality having a number of attractions, equipped with accommodation and reception units for tourists. It may be, for example, a seaside resort, a climatic, thermal or grape cure resort, if it additionally offers specific features of these resorts". This definition confirms the multiple functionality of a tourist resort.
- the winter sports resort is defined as a "mountain resort equipped with hotels and sports equipment to practice winter sports. The villages that have snow but lack facilities, cannot be called winter sports resorts, but "ski and winter tourism centers".

The authors concludes that in practice (strategies, programs, statistical reports and promotion), the tourist resorts in Romania are classified into three categories (after the main motivation of the offer, the specific tourism functions and the three main segments of tourism) - seaside resorts, spa resorts and mountain resorts - offering a definition (also found in the Dictionary of Human Geography, 1999): "The mountain tourism resort: a locality that features mountain surroundings with natural environmental factors and adequate reception facilities to meet the specific function for tourism, recreation, sport". But this definition leaves room for interpretation because the mountain environment may also be found in resorts situated in the hills and plateaus located close to the mountains (for example, Călimănești-Căciulata, Praid, Ocnele Mari) and omits the spa function of many Romanian mountain resorts (especially those having mineral water resources in the Eastern Carpathians - Covasna, Băile Tușnad, Borsec etc. or hot waters in the Western Carpathian - Băile Herculane, Moneasa).

From the book "World Tourism Resources and Destinations" (Țigu et al., 2011) we could extract some ideas on the different forms of tourism practiced in the mountain area: "in recent decades, the mountain tourism has been assimilated with the concept of winter sports tourism, as these tend to be the main motivation of tourist flow in the mountain area". "Because in recent years the mountain resorts have faced a number of difficulties related to the lack of snow or winter sports market stagnation, they turned their efforts to offer more summer offers (which includes other motivations: hiking and climbing, caving, water sports, hunting and fishing tourism, paragliding, photo-safari. etc.)."

The Project Tourism Law 2015 provides a rudimentary and recurrent definition of the mountain area: "territories in the area of the Carpathian Mountains and in other areas with specific features of climate, soil or ground". However this project is the first in the last 25 years providing an appropriate definition of the tourist resort: "a locality or part of it that has tourist heritage and tourist infrastructure, where the economic activities support mainly the tourism product, being certified by governmental decision on a proposal of the county administrative authority responsible for tourism, if it met cumulatively the mandatory minimum criteria for certification, approved by governmental decision."

Other disparities result from the classification (and thus definition) of tourist resorts by different criteria:

- the location (geographic) criterion is used in practice: tourists, travel agencies, resort offers, NIS statistics, specialists' studies;
- the criterion of tourism function is used in legislation;
- the criterion of attractiveness and level of organization and equipment is also used in legislation to certify tourist resorts.

The National Institute of Statistics uses the location criterion combined with the tourism function in its statistics (Statistical Yearbook of Romania, chapters 20 Tourism; Tourism Series; Romanian Tourism. Statistical Abstract), but does not define these terms:

- spas

- seaside resorts
- mountain resorts
- Danube Delta
- Bucharest and county capitals
- other localities and tourist routes

The legislation uses the criterion of attractiveness and level of organization and equipment (Decision no. 852/2008 and Decision no. 867/2006 for approving the norms and criteria to certify tourist resorts): "a tourist resort of national or local interest is certified if that locality or part of it has natural and human resources registered in the Register of tourism heritage and if it meets cumulatively the criteria set in Annex 1, for one of the categories. The certification of a tourist resorts is performed by the Ministry for Small and Medium Enterprises, Commerce, Tourism and Liberal Professions, at the request of local authorities and approved by Government decision. The certification as tourist resort does not change its rank provided by the law."

The legislation uses the criterion of tourist function – the Project Tourism Law 2010-2015 (and other previous provisions such as Government Decision no. 112/2002, Government Decision no. 867/2006, Government Decision no. 852/2008) and distinguishes 3 types of resorts:

- spa resort - locality and / or area that has mineral resources, traditionally recognized and scientifically proven to be effective in therapy, with specific treatment facilities and structure that allows medical spa assistance in appropriate circumstances, as well as authorized accommodation facilities, according to the legal provisions in effect;
- climatic resort - means the locality or / and area located in areas with benefic climatic factors, having conditions to maintain and improve health and / or work capacity, as well as accommodation facilities, according to the legal provisions in effect;
- spa and climatic resort - means the locality and / or area that meets the conditions stipulated in pt. 36 and pt. 37, as well as tourist accommodation facilities, authorized according to the legal provisions in effect.

**Table 1**

**Certified mountain resorts in Romania**

Pos	Certified mountain resorts of national interest	Pos	Certified mountain resorts of local interest	Pos	Certified mountain resorts of local interest
1	Azuga (PH)	19	Albac (AB)	33	Păltiniș (SB)
2	Bușteni (PH)	20	Arieșeni (AB)	34	Pârâul Rece (BV)
3	Băile Herculane (CS)	21	Balványos (CV)	35	Secu (CS)
4	Băile Tușnad (HG)	22	Borsec (HG)	36	Semenic (CS)
5	Câmpulung Moldovenesc (SV)	23	Borșa (MM)	37	Stâna de Vale (BH)
6	Covasna (CV)	24	Bran (PH)	38	Straja (HD)
7	Geoagiu-Băi (HD)	25	Cheia (PH)	39	Soveja (VN)
8	Gura Humorului (SV)	26	Crivaia (CS)	40	Timișu de Sus (BV)
9	Moneasa (AR)	27	Durău (NT)	41	Trei Ape (CS)
10	Poiana Brașov (BV)	28	Hargita-Băi (HG)	42	Vața de Jos (HD)
11	Predeal (BV)	29	Izvorul Mureșului (HG)	43	Zona Fântânelor (CJ)
12	Sinaia (PH)	30	Lacu Roșu (HG)	44	Zona Muntele Băi □ orii (CJ)
13	Slănic-Moldova (BC)	31	Moieciu (BV)	45	Vișeu (MM)
14	Târgu Ocna (BC)	32	Ocna Șugatag (MM)	46	Baia Sprie (MM)
15	Vatra Dornei (SV)				
16	Voineasa (VL)				
17	Petroșani-Parâng (HD)				
18	Râșnov (BV)				

Source: own processing of the list of localities certified as tourist resorts, National Tourism Authority (tourism.gov.ro)

Annex 4 of Resolution no. 852 of 13 August 2008 to approve the norms and criteria to certify tourist resorts mentions 83 tourist resorts, out of which 37 of national interest and 46 of local interest. In 2010, the National Tourism Authority (NTA) listed 89 tourist resorts, adding to the preceding 4 resorts of national interest (Petroșani-Parâng, Târgu Neamț, Piatra Neamț, Râșnov) and 2 resorts of local interest (Vișeu, Baia Sprie). From the 89 resorts certified by NTA, we extracted in Table 1 the 46 mountain resorts (18 of national and 28 of local interest), meaning those resorts located in the mountains, as the mountain area is clearly studied, defined and stated by the Romanian geography. Note that the table contains only the certified resorts, but the actual list of all mountain resorts and tourist centers is larger.

We consider necessary to establish the Romanian mountain resorts (although it seems obvious), because in some papers of tourism or marketing, even PhD theses, we found some colossal mistakes of classifying the mountain resorts according to the wrong criterion of altitude (there are genuine mountain areas in Romania with lower altitudes, such as the intra- mountainous depressions or the Banat Mountains). For example, in the PhD thesis "Substantiation of Marketing Strategies in Romanian Mountain Tourism" in subchapter 2.2.4, the author Chicoș-Băltescu Codruța states that Sovata, Băile Homorod, Praid are mountain resorts (!), or they are spas in the hilly and plateau area, even having salt deposits specific to the peri-Transylvanian depressions.

### CONCLUSIONS

A mountain resort is a holiday destination located in the mountains. There are many forms of tourism practiced within and they vary depending on local resources, from winter sports (a winter sports resort) to summer activities practiced throughout the year (hiking, climbing, mountain biking, ecotourism, rural tourism, cultural and historic tourism, fishing and hunting, riding, tennis, golf, etc.). A mountain resort receives tourists all year round, both for winter sports and for summer activities; therefore one may say that a winter sports resort that functions also for summer activities is a mountain resort.

Therefore the proper criterion of establishing a mountain resort is that of its location in the mountain area (as the mountain area is scientifically defined and stated by the Romanian geography); other criteria used by some authors such as altitude (for example, some genuine mountain resorts located at low altitudes, like Băile Herculane), the main tourism resource (for example, the mineral waters at Vatra Dornei or equipped ski area at Păltiniș or Râncea), or the form of tourism (since we cannot quantify precisely the preferences of tourists in a mountain destination; for example, at Sinaia, the initial motivation of a tourist may be the winter sports, but he may do at the same time hiking, riding, visit cultural and historical objectives or spend time in casinos) are not appropriate solutions.

Along with the unprecedented diversification of tourists' preferences and motivations for leisure, new forms of tourism have occurred, merged or evolved from the traditional ones (according to the variations and evolution of demand), so we can hardly distinguish or classify the forms of tourism practiced in a particular tourist destination or fit a particular destination or resort in a single category. Studying the Romanian legislation and literature in the field, where we found some shortcomings, we came to the only clear conclusion that a mountain resort could be any tourist resort (locality or part of it that has tourist attractions and it is equipped with accommodation facilities) located in the mountain area, whatever forms of tourism or tourism resources it relies on. Not all mountain resorts are certified according to the national legislation in effect.

As long as the tourists demand a holiday in the mountains, at the sea or spa, the travel agencies and resorts offer such tourist products, and the National Institute of

Statistics provides data thus classified, we consider necessary to adapt the legislation to practice (because the current legislation "responds" to a tourist's demand for a mountain holiday with a climate resort of local or national interest). We also consider primordial the classification criterion of location used in practice, while the remaining criteria (tourism resources, tourism function, size, tourism forms, attractiveness, etc.) may vary and combine in different ways.

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