

SHORT CONSIDERATIONS ON THE NUMBER AND STRUCTURE OF BALNEO-CLIMATERIC RESORTS IN ROMANIA

1. Introduction

The statistical relevance of such an approach is obviously thanks to the opportunities it offers to understand the facilities and resources all resorts use and the place they occupy at a local, regional, national and even at an international level. Furthermore, this approach facilitates comparative analyses at an international level.

Nowadays, and in the future, the establishment of local, regional, cross-border, and international policies has to consider rigorously all the aspects of the problems and its social, demographic and moral implications. Objectively, this investigation is necessary in order to come to know the role of tourism in general, and of balneo-climateric tourism in particular, has to play in relation to other fields of activity. These analyses cannot possibly be carried out without knowing the resources the activity is using, the exploitation level reached and the strategies to be employed in the future.

The methodological importance of such an approach is also relevant. In fact it was this aspect that determined the selection and treatment of this particular issue. We can state that the reasons for choosing this topic have mainly been related to:

- a. the fact that, by purely administrative decisions, many communities have been lately named holiday resorts;
- b. the fact that some real resorts function illegally at present because after 1990 either the necessary managerial measures were not taken or projects were not approved by the local authorities;
- c. the uncertainty concerning the number and structure of resorts in Romania.

2. Theoretical and practical observations

Romania is one of the blessed countries of Europe, as it benefits from numerous valuable natural factors for balneo-climateric treatment that are even located throughout its territory.

Thus, certain localities, sites and areas of the country possess unique natural treatment factors, scenery and monuments, a fact that is obvious to experts and laymen alike.

Initially, these places – by the effects of the factors they possess – began attracting people outside the area who come there to spend time for rest or health treatment, for longer or shorter periods.

In time, technical and material facilities were established, mainly for balneary treatment and for the consumption of mineral water for baths. There followed board and lodging facilities. Tourism resorts fully developed with the establishment of certain managerial structures.

According to certain indicators, the places that have natural balneo-climateric factors and that have special tourist attractions, can fall under the following categories:

- a. places with balneary treatment factors – balneary resorts – such as: thermal waters, mineral waters, muds, CO₂ and sulphur;
- b. places having natural factors favourable for active leisure, namely scenic landscapes – holiday or climateric places;
- c. balneo-climateric resorts, which have the touristic resources, the material and technical facilities and managerial structures.

The historical evolution of the three types of places reveals the fact that, under certain political, economical, historical, and natural circumstances, certain places have passed from one category to another, preserving the base structure of their specific factors. Thus, in some cases, places having balnear or natural factors have been highlighted following the setting up of specific organisational structures became holiday resorts (balnear or climateric). After a period of so-called development they underwent a decline, returning to their initial position. This was the case of such former balneary resorts as Calu-Iapa (Negulesti, Neamt county) or Cacica (Suceava county). Similarly, all the present holiday resorts have reached this stage after functioning initially as balneary resorts.

At present, due to the severe effects of the transition to the market economy and to the fact that many resorts function for limited time in a year, the process will eventually reverse. Thus:

- a. Climateric and balneary-climateric resorts will simply become localities having climateric or balneary factors.
- b. Resorts that function all year round will be transformed into seasonal resorts.

3. Current demands in defining and accrediting balneary-climateric resorts in Romania

The development of balneary-climateric resorts in Romania has involved several stages:

- a. The attestation of the birth, definition or acceptance of certain places as 'resorts' was given by the written evidence of chemical research and analyses of mineral waters or the publication of studies and articles concerning balneary treatment and its effects.
- b. The development of holiday resorts, required by series of factors such as the progress in the chemical research of mineral waters and their medical effects (the 7th decade of the 19th century), the interest shown by the Romanian state, the establishment of trade associations.
- c. The establishment and implementation of norms meant to regulate the functioning of resorts, namely:
 - the period prior to the World War II, the interwar period in particular;
 - the period after the nationalisation;
 - the period after 1993, the transition period.

The introduction of these minimal norms was meant to support the development of holiday resorts by modernising old resorts and organising new ones. This was the case for most of the seaside resorts (Costinești, Venus, Jupiter, Neptun, Olimp, Cap Aurora) and also some other resorts such as Voineasa, Soveja, Semenic, Trei Ape, Izvorul Mureșului, Muntele Mic, etc.

- d. The formulation of strict norms to attest holiday resorts, under the Government decision no. 77/1996.

The transition and Romania's natural aspiration to develop and implement clean, efficient and ecological tourism and to integrate the European Union has necessitated "the creation of the required framework for highlighting, protecting and conserving the potential and meeting the people's demands for rest and recreation at an optimal level." [7; 245].

According to this decision, the holiday resort represents “a place having a specific tourist function, equipped with natural tourist resources and with the structures required in order to exploit and run tourism and which meets certain minimal requirements...” [7; 245]

These minimal requirements refer to 4 groups of problems that perfectly illustrate one of the three A's :

- a. natural setting and environment quality;
- b. conditions for access to the resort;
- c. the level of the utilities;
- d. the organisation of accommodation.

The Government decision no 77/1996 classifies resorts only according to their local and national interest. By comparison, during ‘socialism’, the 30-50 resorts of local, national and international interest were grouped with reference to their facilities, quality, natural resources and the fame they had acquired over time.

By meeting certain specific factors, a resort can fall under one of the two categories.

Thus, for a resort to be considered one of national interest, it has to meet 26 conditions, among which there are:

- a. the accommodation potential must be at least 300 beds, out of which 10% must be in hotels rated 3 stars or more;
- b. pleasant natural surroundings, having ecological, hydrological, and sanitary protection;
- c. access to asphalted roads, public transport between the resort and the corresponding trainstation, opportunity to book express train tickets, etc;
- d. water and sewage facilities, electricity, commercial sites, medical assistance, pharmacies;
- e. treatment facilities in built spaces, fitness and bodybuilding facilities, etc.

According the law, the certification of a locality as a resort is made by Government decision, at the initiative of the Ministry Tourism of or of the local public authorities that well write down and present a rigorous documentation.

* The theory of the 3 A's is very useful in the practice of touristic development of the territory and refers to:

- a. for a certain place X to develop a certain touristic activity, it has to meet 3 basic requirements, namely: attractiveness, accessibility and arrangement.

4. Possible indicators used in classifying localities having holiday, balneary or climateric function

In order to classify the localities having touristic, balneary or climateric function, one should have in view a series of relevant indicators such as:

- a. the nature and structure of attractive factors (localities having balneary or climateric healing factors);
- b. the extent of knowledge and information about touristic potential (localities whose balneary potential is known and has been researched or has not been researched and assessed);
- c. the extent of use of the factors (factors can be used intensively, in a normal manner or may not be used at all);
- d. the level of equipment and tourist facilities, which allows us to refer to balneary and climateric resorts;
- e. the touristic interest they attract (balneary and climateric resorts of national or local interest);
- f. the altitude of th respective resort (alpine localities, situated at over 800 m, subalpine, plateau and plain resorts, respectively);
- g. the period of functioning (permanent or seasonal).

5. The number and structure of resorts in Romania

The number and structure of resorts in Romania is still an issue that sparks numerous debates.

Here is what the biographical sources say:

An analysis of the information offered by the main bibliographical sources makes us believe that the research in the field has to be taken further.

Thus, Al. Cruceru, the author of a study published by the former Ministry of Tourism, "Holiday and balneary treatment resorts", shows that during the 1980's there were over 60 resorts, of national and international interest, of which 55 belonged to the territorial units of the Ministry of Tourism, 2 to trade unions, Soveja and Ocna Şugatag and 3 to the BTT - Pârâul Rece, Izvorul Mureşului and Costineşti.

Elena Berlescu in her "Dictionar enciclopedic medical de balneo-climatologie" (Encyclopaedic Medical Dictionary of Balnear-Climatology) lists 226 balneary-climateric resorts and localities and localities having balneary factors. "Micul dictionar enciclopedic" (The Concise Encyclopaedic Dictionary) lists 91 balneo-climateric resorts or localities.

In "Cura balneo-climaterica in Romania", Teleki Nicolae, Munteanu Laviniu, Stoicescu Constantin, Teodoreanu Elena and Grigore Ludovic list 168 balneary-climateric and climateric resorts, and localities having therapeutic factors. Artemiu Pricajan, in "Substantele minerale terapeutice in Romania" shows that Romania has 153 localities that boast "reserves of therapeutic mineral substances". Şandru Ion and Cucu Vasile reach a similar conclusion in "Romania. Prezentare geografica", as they refer to the existence of over 160 resorts.

6. The conclusions of our research

The information in the bibliographical sources that we referred to, combined with our own scientific approaches¹ has lead to the conclusion that Romania currently has more than 237 balneary-climateric resorts and localities or localities having balneary factors. Of these, 205 have balneary-climateric factors and 32 climateric factors. Our conclusion confirms Artemiu Pricajan's statement that Romania could be seen as being 'the country of mineral waters' [3:7], a tourist destination, a 'country of tourism' [3: 77].

There follow, hierarchically, Maramureş county (17 localities and resorts), Prahova (13), Covasna and Vâlcea (11), Suceava, Satu Mare and Constanţa (10), Caraş Severin, Argeş, Neamţ (10), etc.

There are some localities that have exceptional resources, such as:

- Covasna, located in Covasna county, named "the resort of the 1000 springs".
- Balvanios (Covasna county), where even on a surface of just a couple of square metres there are springs with different chemical composition, used to heal opthalmologic, rheumatic conditions, etc.
- Slănic Moldova (Bacău county), where there are 25 collected mineral springs, used for internal cure, etc.

Table 1

The number and structure of balneary-climateric resorts by county
- number -

County	Total	Balneary	Climateric
Alba	1	1	
Arad	2	2	
Argeş	9	9	
Bacău	6	6	
Bihor	7	7	
Bistriţa Năsăud	7	7	
Brăila	3	3	
Braşov	13	6	7
Buzău	6	5	1
Călăraşi	1	1	
Caraş Severin	9	9	
Cluj	6	6	
Constanţa	10	5	5
Covasna	11	11	
Dâmboviţa	3	3	
Gorj	4	4	
Harghita	25	23	2
Hunedoara	5	5	
Ialomiţa	1	1	
Iaşi	5	5	
Maramureş	17	14	3
Mehedinţi	1	1	
Mureş	5	5	
Neamţ	9	3	6
Olt	2		2
Prahova	13	6	7
Sălaj	6	6	
Satu Mare	10	10	
Sibiu	4	3	1
Suceava	10	10	
Timiş	7	7	

Table 1 (continued)

Tulcea	3	1	2
Vâlcea	11	10	1
Vaslui	1	1	
Vrancea	4	4	
Total	237	205	32

* Source: Data resulting from our research.

** Harghita county ranks first in Romania as it boasts 25 localities with balneary factors and balneary resorts, Harghita being surnamed "the county of the 2000 mineral springs". Here is located the famous 'golden triangle' of holiday resorts, made up of Tuşnad, Borsec and Lacu Roşu.

References

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