

CONCEPTUAL MEANINGS OF THE SPATIAL PLAN FOR THE SINAIA-BRAȘOV REGION, ROMANIA

Radu COCEAN
Pompei COCEAN

Radu COCEAN

Lecturer, Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business
Management, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj Napoca, România
Tel: 0040-364-884461
E-mail: radu.cocean@econ.ubbcluj.ro

Abstract

The process of drafting a spatial plan includes in its matrix a series of a priori coordinates, targeting the role and the functions performed by such a region in the spatial system of upper level, national or international. They take a wide spectrum of peculiar connotations, starting with the spatial ones, imposed by the geographical position, and continuing with the temporal, cultural, economic, social, technological, or environmental ones. Their features seldom become favorable factors, whose influence can lead, in certain circumstances, to deterministic manifestations, becoming strong arguments for various strategic scenarios for a series of proposals and solutions of territorial development that are foreseen in the analysis. As for the Sinaia-Brașov region, an essential role belongs to the spatial, economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

Pompei COCEAN

Professor, Faculty of Geography, Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj
Napoca, România
Tel: 0040-264-431881
E-mail: pompei@geografie.ubbcluj.ro

The Sinaia-Azuga-Buşteni-Predeal-Râşnov-Braşov (Poiana Braşov) Inter-Urban Spatial Plan comprises in its matrix a series of attributes of causal, deterministic order, targeting the spatial, temporal, social, cultural, technological, and environmental dimension of the human intervention in a territorial unit situated at the interface of two great mountainous units, the Eastern and the Southern Carpathians, between two great historical-geographical provinces of Romania, Wallachia and Transylvania, respectively.

1. The *spatial* dimension transcends the national territory, as regards importance and impact, acting as a benchmark of the entire Carpathian chain, seen in its entire geographical stretch between the Vienna Basin and the Timok Valley, that is at the level of a mountainous range situated in central Europe, on the territory of seven countries (Austria, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Romania, and Serbia). Whether in the case of Austria, Hungary and Serbia it shows a low importance due to the small area and the morphological peculiarities (altitude, fragmentation, morphography), without special valences, in the case of Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine, and especially of Romania, this mountainous edifice represents the keystone for the planning and the valorization of a considerable part of the national territory (Cocean and Filip, 2008).

Taking into consideration the complementarity of the soil and underground resources, as well as the principle of comparative advantage, tourism exploitation emerges in relation to other forms of valorization, the Prahova Valley and the Braşov area subscribing to a reference axis from this viewpoint. The radiography of the present state, made at the level of the entire mountainous group of the Carpathians, from the winter tourism viewpoint, indicates the affirmation of several major tourist areas, that is the Slovakian one, of the Tatra Mountains (Jasna, Tatranska Lomnica), the Polish one (Zakopane), the Ukrainian (Bucovel, Slavske, Dragobrat), as well as the ones in the Romanian Carpathians (Mogoşa-Cavnic-Şuior, Borşa, Vatra Dornei and Sinaia-Buşteni-Azuga-Predeal-Râşnov-Braşov-Poiana Braşov). There are, of course, other resorts centered on winter leisure (Bălea, Păltiniş, Straja, Râncea, Semenic, Muntele Mic, Băişoara, Beliş-Fântânele), also situated in the Romanian sector of the Carpathians, the longest and the most developed sector, but without a remarkable importance.

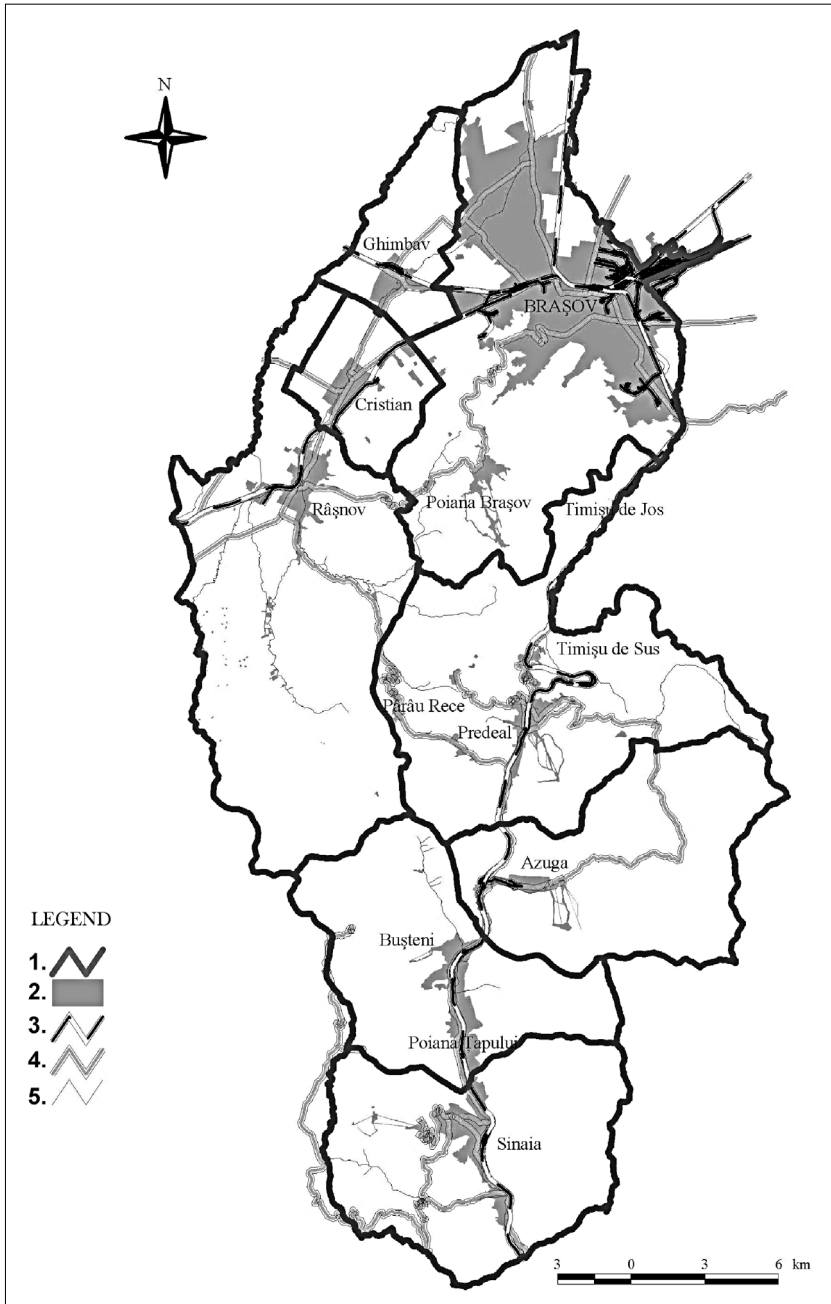


Figure 1: The Sinaia-Braşov territorial system.

[Legend]: 1: territorial administrative units; 2: built-up area; 3: railway network; 4: road network; and 5: hydrographic network.

In the context in which the resorts in Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine tend to a definite international consecration, the planning of a major tourist complex, of a

tourist pole of international relevance in the Romanian Carpathians (National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism, 2003) appear as imperative, in order to satisfy the domestic demand, as well as a consistent external demand existing in the south-eastern and eastern part of Europe (not to forget that between the Carpathians and the Ural or the Caucasus, the next mountain ranges with similar potential, there are thousands of kilometers and a demographical basin of more than 150 million people). Or this ample complex, focused predominantly on winter tourism, but without excluding, as regards the diversification of supply, the other recreational summer or cultural valences, cannot be imagined but starting from the valorization of all strengths of the region analyzed in the aforementioned project.

2. The *temporal* dimension is related to the period in which the introspection takes place and for which the planning is to be achieved. That is the period of the second decade of the 21st century and of the 3rd millennium, when the supply and the tourist infrastructure of this kind have reached in Europe, as well as in other continents (North America, Australia, and East Asia) the highest rate of technical performance and tourism exploitation. It stands to reason that our entire intercession to promote Romania among the European countries having a developed tourism, to valorize the resources of the Carpathian winter tourism to a higher degree of competitiveness, respectively, must be accomplished in the parameters and according to the present requirements. We cannot afford the step-by-step planning, broken down by decades, but major efforts for top facilities, equal to those in the Alps, Pyrenees, Appalachians, or Cordilleras. Otherwise any competition in the sector is doomed to failure from the very beginning.

Taking into consideration two temporal benchmarks in prospect, 2013 and 2022, with major events in the field of sports competitions, including the Olympic Winter Games, the facilities in the Sinaia-Braşov region must have as reference system the international achievements in the field. Consequently, the Olympic infrastructure of Vancouver (Canada), afferent to the 2010 Winter Olympics, becomes a permanent standard, to benchmark our initiatives and refer to (which actually motivates the references in the documentation to this location).

The organization of an Olympics dedicated to winter sports represents a supreme consecration for a mountain resort, its worldwide promotion being thus ensured. This sharpens the spatial competition between the special infrastructures in the countries afferent to some mountain regions, such as the Carpathians, where such an even has not yet been held up to this date. Before anything else, it exerts a logistic pressure upon the involved players and upon the planning standard of that particular location. In this case, the resort of Zakopane, in Poland, with more than 3 million tourists annually, with numerous world class sporting events hosted since 1929 (world alpine ski, cross-country skiing, ski jumping championships, Winter Universiades) has already competed for organizing the 2006 Winter Olympics (Turin was chosen the

host), while the Ukrainian resort of Bucovel has already launched its candidacy to host the 2018 Winter Olympics. Whether these initiatives have materialized or not, they express a trend that will increase in future and that Romania can not overlook if it wishes to be among the competitive players in the winter tourism sector in Europe. Moreover, because of the policy for a wide promotion of sporting competitions mediated by snow, considered by the world authorities in the field, which aims at involving as many countries and regions of the world, the choice of such a location in a particular part of the continent delays for a long period the chance of other resorts in the respective region to host an event of the same scale. This, in turn, represents a reason for accelerating the development of infrastructures and services peculiar to such a desideratum in the Sinaia-Braşov region.

3. The ***economic and social*** significance has in view the efficient exploitation of the national tourist resources and the satisfaction, in most accessible conditions possible, of the domestic demand for such products. Given the extent of weekend tourism, the complex equipment of the Sinaia-Braşov region is justified by it through the provision of high standard services to match the demand of the urban quadrilateral of Bucureşti-Buzău-Piteşti-Braşov (which circumscribes the city of Ploieşti in its very centre), that is of a population of over 4 million people. Not to add, of course, the demand from across the country and, in the context of an intensification of tourist transit, from other countries in the region.

The economic efficiency of territorial exploitation has in view, of course, all the branches, starting with agriculture (the oldest occupation but for which the region shows limited availability), followed by industry (found in a long period of reconversion and restructuring), tourism (the branch with the widest perspectives of affirmation), trade and services. The emphasis on the affirmation of tourism is due to the natural and human attractive resources, particularly rich and diverse in the region, but whose valorization is, due to the deficient infrastructure and the poor management, at the lower limit of intensity and efficiency.

4. The ***cultural*** connotation owes its origin to the contribution that tourism plays in the valorization of the built and spiritual heritage of a country or region, in its ideal vector of promotion and spatial dissipation of the values belonging to a specific region. Or the Sinaia-Braşov area represents a territory where the creativity and the genius of the Romanian people has materialized into an outstanding dowry represented by numerous and varied historic (fortresses, castles), religious (churches and monasteries), cultural or ethnographic sites. The multicultural interferences peculiar to the Land of Bârsa (Pop, 2009), secular hearth of cohabitation of the autochthonous Romanians with the Transylvanian Saxons and the Szeklers, are found in the built heritage of Braşov and Râşnov, as well as in the ethnography of the respective area. The equipment of the region in line with the international standards will allow, based on the same

principle of complementarity and diversification of supply, the exploitation, and the efficient promotion of all of them.

5. The **technological** dimension has in view the practical methods of the process of planning and endowment with infrastructure, adequate to the types and forms of recreational, cultural and transit tourism that are to be developed in the region. It surmounts the preconceived idea of impossible, of apparently major costs, of intimidation in front of futuristic, avant-garde solutions. The achievement of fast connection tunnels between the tourist bases (the present dysfunctions as regards the connectivity between Poiana Braşov, Râşnov, on the one hand, and the resorts in the perimeter of the Prahova Valley, on the other hand, must be noticed), the interconnection of the ski domains through networks of ski tracks and cable-based means of transport, the endowment with the full range of ancillary tourism services are not only imperative necessities, but also sine qua non conditions for internationally competitive facilities. Modern technology will also bring a significant contribution to the edification of the access road infrastructures (the Bucureşti-Braşov-Borş highway), of a high speed rail line on the same route, the Rail Corridor 300, the international airport of Ghimbav, as well as of the facilities claimed by a competitive winter tourism (alpine skiing, bobsled, and sledding tracks; trampolines, skating rink etc.).

6. The **environmental** dimension receives a more extensive connotation, as the human impact on the environment (including the one of tourist nature!) increases. It is known that out of all human productive activities, tourism is the most environmentally friendly one, implying, even since the start of its deployment, a balanced environment, lacking negative structural and functional features which, rather than comforting, have opposite effects. However, his primary condition is often violated and neglected by the tourism promoters themselves who, through an uncontrolled and excessive pressure on the natural components of landscape, affect its integrity and harmony installed as result of a long evolution. The phenomenon is even more evident and more damaging as it develops in an uncontrolled manner, based on ad hoc initiatives in which free will becomes sovereign.

The apparently irreconcilable antinomy between natural heritage protection and preservation and the necessity of economic exploitation of the territory can be adjusted through balanced and rigorous strategies and policies, to exclude the excessive human pressure, to harmonize the interrelations between the components of the territorial system, to fortify a fruitful cohabitation between man and nature. From this perspective, the Sinaia-Braşov region must become a model for ecological planning and management of the territory, with wide perspectives of implementation in other Carpathian regions as well.

Thus, controlled planning and equipment becomes the only effective way to manage the territorial dynamics, to imprint its direction and a positive finality. The

use of the ecological network model, consisting of nodes, corridors, polyfunctional modules, areas of ecological reconstruction, elaborated by Bouwma *et al.* (2001), and the Rodoman's polarized landscape model, respectively, in which growth poles and development corridors alternate with parks and nature reserves, find in the Sinaia-Braşov region a fertile ground supported by the existence of the Bucegi Natural Park, on whose abutments the most inspired solutions for sustainable development can be imagined.

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