

## DISFAVOURED ZONES AND TOURIST AREAS IN THE APUSENI MOUNTAINS

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**ABSTRACT** – The transformations that have affected the region of the Apuseni Mountains after 1990, have determined a precarious economic and social status in the mining areas, a fact officially recognized through the delimitation of some “disfavoured zones”. The Apuseni Mountains are also a region with a very rich touristic potential, which led to the development of tourism in some of its parts. Yet, spatially, the two types of areas (disfavoured and touristic) do not overlap. Functionally, two different systems manifest themselves, separated by the Arieș Valley and the planned development strategies tend to emphasize the already-appeared differences.

**Key words:** the Apuseni Mountains, disfavoured zone, tourism, spatial disparities.

### INTRODUCTION

The Apuseni Mountains represent a homogenous region from a physical-geographical, economic and social point of view, at least at first sight. The entire area deals with problems related to depopulation, demographical aging, and the recoil of the traditional agricultural and industrial activity. However, analysing carefully, several evident development disparities between the sub-regions of this mountainous area can be identified. In the present paper, we shall present the “disfavoured” zones from the territory of this region and their evolution, the way in which tourism produces development in the Apuseni Mountains, as well as the ulterior development trends, on the basis of county, regional and national plans and strategies.

### DISFAVOURED ZONES

An activity specific to the mountainous regions from the entire world, mining has in the Apuseni Mountains a bi-millenary tradition. Over the centuries, the regions rich in minerals have attracted and maintained a relatively numerous population, leading to the specialization of the zone in extractive activities. After 1990, the gradual reduction of the state subventions, the free liberalization of prices for fuels and electrical power, the inherent reduction of resources, as well as old technologies, have transformed the great extractive and processing units from the area into non-competitive enterprises, leading them to bankruptcy and mass-dismissals. Thus, a series of social problems related to the extreme increase of unemployment have resulted, a fact also perpetuated by the lack of viable alternatives of development. Beginning with 1998, the Romanian state has offered the zones with social and economic problems a special statute by declaring them disfavoured zones, generally for a period of 10 years. In order to facilitate their revival, the enterprisers from these zones were granted some exemptions from taxes (OUG 24/1998). Although they took advantage of similar facilities, the subsequent development has rearranged the disfavoured zones into two categories: some that succeeded in attracting investments, on the basis of a better localization or of an unaltered natural potential, while others still cannot find a way out of this precarious state.

A great part of the **Metaliferi Mountains Area** was declared disfavoured zone (“Brad disfavoured zone”, from Hunedoara County and “Apuseni disfavoured zone”, on the territory of Alba

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County). Known as the “golden quadrilateral”, it has had a continuous development on the basis of underground resources (complex, gold, silver and copper ores). The maximum amplitude of the industrialization was reached after 1960, when the quarry exploitations started (Roşia Montana, Roşia Poieni) and the large ore processing units appeared, generating an extended pollution that affected all the components of the natural environment (Zlatna Depression was one of the most polluted areas from the country and from Europe).

After 1990, the main extraction unit from the area, CN Minvest Deva SA, knew a constant reduction of the activity: the ore production decreased between 1995 and 2000, from over 8 million tones to less than 4 million tones per year and the number of the employees knew a decrease from about 28,000 employees in 1995 to 14,000 in 2000. At the end of 2005 the company had only 2,400 employees and until the end of the under way year only 150 are to remain who will deal with the preservation and the ecological attendance of the mines (Moroianu G, 2006). Although the main resources of the zone (gold, silver and copper ores) would be enough for a future exploitation of 20 or 50 years, respectively (Popescu, Gh. C., 2005), at the moment only the copper ore exploitation from Roşia Poieni is still functioning and some preliminary works for the starting of the gold exploitation at Roşia Montana are being carried out.

The zone of the Apuseni Mountains knew an international publicity when the project proposed by Roşia Montana Gold Corporation was launched. This project implied the gold ore quarry exploitation and, then, the steeping in lye by cyaniding in order to obtain the gold, but at the moment, the project is blocked at the environmental study phase, the proposed technology arousing the protests of numerous Romanian and foreign institutions and organizations. In other domains, the only investment of certain amplitude was made so far in Babita (Hunedoara county), where SC Key Safety Systems Ro SRL has produced working places for 1,250 workers (a steering-wheel factory and a safety-belt production unit) in lohn system (e-Transport.ro). The same production system lies at the basis of some textile factories, but of smaller dimensions and incapable of absorbing the entire available working force (Baia de Arieş and Zlatna). The viable alternatives to mining have not appeared yet and tourism is at its very beginning. A little hope comes from the funds approved by the government (in April 2006) for funding some investment objectives. Among these, the pilot program for the ecological attendance and the removal of the pollution effects in Zlatna zone ([www.finantare.ro](http://www.finantare.ro)) is also taken into consideration.

**Ştei–Nucet–Drăgăneşti Zone** was specialized in exploiting complex ores and uranium (starting with the 1950s), an activity that determined the implantation of other industrial branches and the appearance of Ştei and Nucet towns. The exhaustion of ores led to the restriction of the activity of the National Company of Uranium in this zone, which, together with the bankruptcy of the machine-building industry, has generated a high rate of unemployment. This made the zone to be declared a disfavoured zone in 1999.

Nowadays, the effects of industrial restructuring are eliminated. In the Land of Beiuş, the European Drinks Group is localized, which represents “both the greatest productive company from the food industry domain from Eastern Europe and one of the greatest private investments from Romania, assuring more than 14,500 workplaces” ([www.tribunaeconomica.ro](http://www.tribunaeconomica.ro)). This has attracted the exceeding number of the labour force from the depression and the need of highly-educated employees has stopped the migration of the faculty graduates from the zone. The use of agricultural resources of the depression, the development of transports and the increase of the incomes at the local budgets are other effects of the presence of the above-mentioned industrial group (Popa-Bota, H.; Zotic, V.; 1998).

The area formed in the centre of the **Pădurea Craiului Mountains and the town of Aleşd** was declared a disfavoured zone in 1999. Its component localities are: Borod, Şuncuiuş, Dobreşti, Vadu Crişului and Aleşd. The area was also specialized in the extractive field, on the basis of bauxite and refractory clay resources existing in the area. It knew recoil after 1999, when the alumina factory from Oradea was closed (the only client for the extracted bauxite), the chance of these exploitations also dying out.

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Aleșd has continued its traditional activity as binder producer after passing into the private sector. Nowadays, it belongs to the Holcim group, like the factory from Turda. Moreover, an important part of the town's and the neighbouring communes' labour force is attracted by the production units in Lohn system (textile, footwear production), this area being the third area from Bihor county in concentrating such enterprises ([www.bihor.ro](http://www.bihor.ro)).

Further development opportunities of the area result from its position on the railroad and road axis Cluj-Napoca – Oradea and from its high touristic potential (the Pădurea Craiului Mountains and the Crișul Repede Defile).

### TOURIST AREAS

The tourist areas must take advantage, besides a special natural or anthropic potential, by a touristic infrastructure and by an appropriate publicity. But, many zones that dream of a tourism allowing them develop harmoniously lack exactly this latter tool. Taking into consideration the great development of the internet and the fact that the potential tourists come from the urban environment, with access to internet, we chose to survey the tourism websites in order to observe the offer, known in the virtual space, of the Apuseni Mountains. As far as the touristic potential is concerned, the list obtained as a result of this approach may seem incomplete, but the main aim of the paper was to detect the spatial concentration and the promotion of the touristic phenomena. That is why, in the delimitation of the touristic areas, we used only the communes that have more than five boarding houses registered on the surveyed websites.

For the areas with rural tourism, we accessed the following websites:

- The website of the National Agency for Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism: [www.antrec.ro](http://www.antrec.ro);
- The portal of tourism, the official partner of the National Association of the Tourism Agencies: [www.romaniantourism.ro](http://www.romaniantourism.ro);
- [www.ruraltourism.ro](http://www.ruraltourism.ro), a website for promoting the agro-tourism boarding houses from Romania;
- [www.apusenitourism.ro](http://www.apusenitourism.ro), a catalogue achieved by the Transylvania Ecological Club and Ecotop Foundation;
- [www.cazaretransilvania.ro](http://www.cazaretransilvania.ro), a site with a version in Hungarian.

As a result of the analysis carried on between the 17th and the 19th of October 2006, it comes out that:

1. in Arad and Hunedoara counties there was no boarding house registered on any of the consulted websites;
2. in Alba County, Rîmetea commune had 27 registered boarding houses, Albac and Arieșeni communes had 23 each and Gârda de Sus commune 13;
3. in Cluj County, Sâncraiu commune had 16 registered boarding houses and Margău 13;
4. Bihor County was represented by Târcaia commune, with 8 registered boarding houses, and Pietroasa commune with 6.

From the above-mentioned results, we can conclude that the traditional areas for practicing the rural tourism are the Land of the Moși (with concentrations in Albac, Arieșeni and Gârda de Sus communes) and the ones with Hungarian population (Rîmetea, Sâncraiu and Târcaia). Moreover, the communes on whose territory the Apuseni Natural Park stretches or those situated on the main access roads develop their accommodation base on the basis of the presence of the exquisite natural touristic potential (Pietroasa and Margău communes).

As far as the cure tourism is concerned, we chose to present only two of such type of resorts (Geoagiu Băi and Moneasa), resorts that have been modernized and correspond to the standards of a quality tourism. The acknowledged winter resorts, Băișoara and Arieșeni, have also been mentioned,

as well as the communes with concentrations of holiday villas (identified from the bibliography or by field observations).

**Apuseni Natural Park.** Padiş is by far the most well-known tourist destination from the Apuseni, having the greatest density of natural touristic objectives from the country. This is also the nucleus of the Apuseni Natural Park. The park aims at protecting some exquisite natural elements and at promoting an environmentally friendly tourism. There are numerous marked touristic routes and forest roads. The main forms of tourism practiced on the territory of this park are the following: trekking, speleological tourism, alpinism, kayak downstream rowing etc. Thus, several agencies offer active holidays in the area: Apuseni Experience, Apuseni Adventure, ANTREC Cluj etc. As far as the accommodation base for tourists is concerned, there are few accommodation facilities in the interior of the park: two chalets and several forest ranges ([www.padis.ro](http://www.padis.ro)). Most of the accommodation facilities are situated peripherally, in the agrotouristic boarding houses from Răchițele, Pietroasa, Arieş Valley or in the inhabitants' households (Casa de Piatră).

**The Arieş Valley.** The territory of the Arieşeni, Gârda de Sus and Albac communes, superposed on a major communication and gravitation axis of the Apuseni Mountains, was, not long ago, only the place for acceding to Padiş or the Găina Mountain. With the help of the external capital (Operation Villages Roumaines, SAPARD funds, FIDA the Farmer Programme initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture) after 1990, the appearance of touristic boarding houses has known a real explosion, in this area, ANTREC Alba also being localized. Nowadays, the zone divides its tourists between the trekking lovers and the ski lovers, enjoying their presence throughout the whole year.

The promotion of the Arieşeni resort was an important factor in the development of the zone. Gârda de Sus also benefits by the effects of this development, numerous boarding houses accommodating during winter the tourists coming from Vârtop. Albac, with as great ambitions as Arieşeni, has a ski track endowed with an artificial snow-making device, too.

**Zones with Hungarian population.** We grouped under this name different communes situated on all of the sides of the Apuseni Mountains (in Fig. 1, they are marked by letter "b"). They face a touristic development based on the high natural potential, but also on the interest shown by the Hungarian tourists for these cultural and ethnographical zones.

Rîmetea commune benefits by the best on-line promotion (the greatest number of boarding houses registered on the surveyed websites and a tourist agency - SC Alpin Tour SRL- function here). Besides the presence of the Trascău Mountain, with their typical limestone landforms, the commune is also proud of the architecture, typical for the Hungarian villages. However, the access roads are in an extremely bad condition.

A well-developed network of boarding houses also appears in Sâncrai, Cluj county, a commune which is part of the Călata ethnographical zone, with original folk costumes and traditions (Benedek J. 2003). Târcaia commune, situated at the foothills of the Codru-Moma Mountains, has also several on-line registered boarding houses, tourism being one of the few opportunities for developing this commune.

**Areas with a great concentration of holiday villas.** The great development of the secondary residences on the eastern side of the Gilău-Muntele Mare Mountains is due to the proximity of these areas to the Cluj-Napoca municipium. In this respect, the shores of the reservoirs built on the Someşul Mic river (Beliş and Gilău commune), as well as Valea Ierii, enjoy a great interest. These function especially in weekend tourism regime.

Muntele Băişorii, conceived initially as a winter resort (endowed with ski-lift in 1977), has become, in exchange, the feoff of the particular holiday villas. An entire series of villas and hotels has appeared after 1989, transforming the old resort totally ([www.alpinet.org](http://www.alpinet.org)).

**The watering and climatic resorts.** Known as one of the most profitable forms of tourism, the watering tourism has a great potential of development on the territory of the Apuseni Mountains due to the thermal water resources. Although the bibliography mentions four such resorts, Moneasa, Vața de Sus, Geoagiu Băi and Stâna de Vale, only two of them took advantage of important investments (PHARE funds) and enjoyed a sustained tourist promotion.

Moneasa, situated at the foothills of the Codru-Moma Mountains, is found in full process of modernization (a project for developing the touristic potential is being carried on) ([www.mie.ro](http://www.mie.ro)).

Having longer traditions than the previous one, as it is known since Roman times, Geoagiu Băi resort is situated in the southern extremity of the Apuseni Mountains. It must be remarked that the development of the resort does not give impulse to the development of the surrounding areas. If, in the case of Moneasa resort, Dezna also benefits by rural tourism, in the case of Geoagiu Băi, the development is strictly local, the beautiful Cib Gorge situated nearby and the locality situated at its margin are almost forgotten (Băcaia had only 16 permanent inhabitants in the summer of 2006).

### DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND TENDENCIES

Being divided between six counties and three development regions, the Apuseni Mountains lack a unitary development strategy. However, analyzing the national planning documents of the development regions and counties with the territory superposed on the Apuseni Mountains, we can notice the investment and evolution priorities of the tourism on the analyzed mountainous territory. Moreover, taking into consideration the tendencies of the national economy, several directions in the evolution of the industrial areas can be inferred.

As for the **disfavoured zones**, in accordance with the negotiations with the European Union regarding the competition domain, these will keep their statute until the expiration of the initially established period, with the gradual lessening of the facilities offered to the economic agents. However, the integration of Romania into the European Union can have negative effects on the lohn-type economy, pretty spread in the disfavoured zones. The ascendant evolution of wages will probably determine an eastward migration of these investors (Republic of Moldavia, Ukraine).

The project sustained by the Ministry of Environment and Water Management is of great importance for the Zlatna Depression, which grants funds for the ecological attendance and the rehabilitation of the environment in the industrial zone ([www.finantare.ro](http://www.finantare.ro)). Stipulated to be carried on beginning with the next year, the project will have a positive impact both over the labour force and over the natural environment.

In spite of the idea that tourism is a re-launching engine for the disfavoured zones (an idea transmitted especially in the mass media, as an alternative to the mining project from Roșia Montană), the already under way development of the incipient or older touristic zones will lead to the increase of competition for any other new structures. Moreover, in the majority of these zones, the natural potential was reduced, having been affected by a quite serious pollution. Then, their relatively peripheral placement from the nucleus, rich in touristic objectives and situated in the northern part of the Apuseni Mountains, reduces the chances of a quick start in this domain.

Analyzing the **tourism development plans**, the main evolution directions can be identified: the developing of the winter sports tourism and watering tourism.

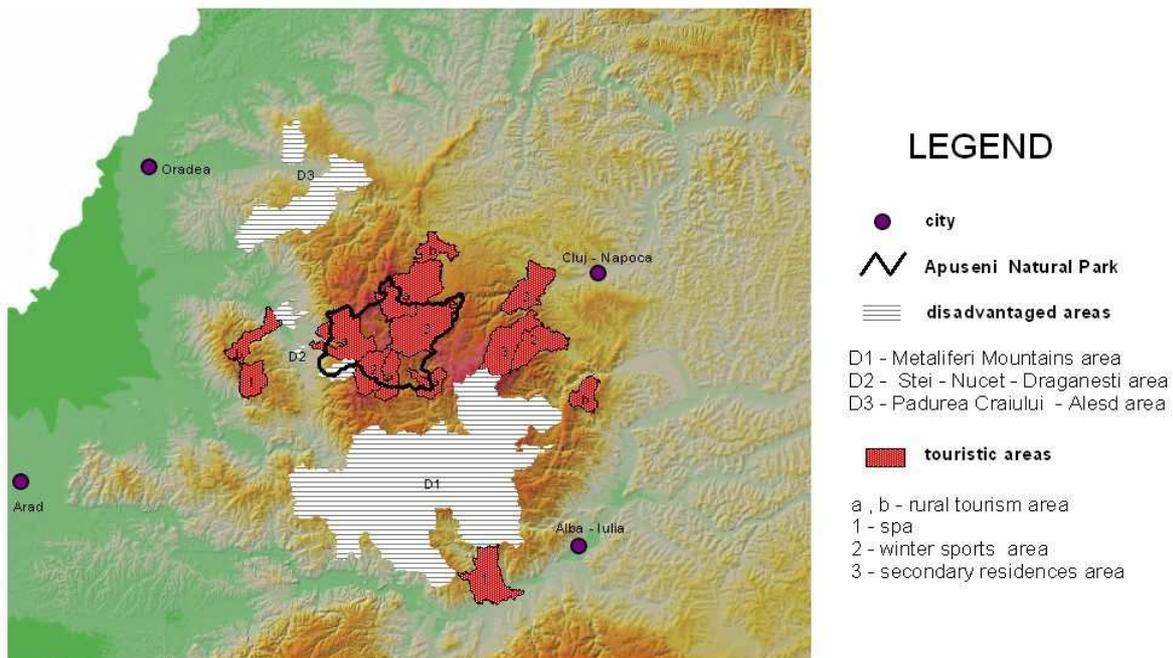
In the Sectorial Regional Document for Programming the Tourism Development in the North-West Region 2007-2013, two “priority projects” have been established in order to sustain this domain in the Apuseni Mountains. Having both a period of development between 2007 and 2009, they have a foundation study and marketing plans, geological and topographical studies, and are conceived to attract grants of PHARE type: The Modernization of the Access Infrastructure in the Răchițele-Prislop-Ic Ponor Touristic Zone and Winter Sports Tourism in Apuseni. The latter has in view the arrangement of ski tracks with cable installations, parkings, access roads and electrical power supply. Băișoara and Vârtop resorts will benefit by these funds (5,218,858 euro and 4,858,815 euro, respectively).

In the North-West Region Strategy, the project for connecting the two skiing domains together with their spatial extension is given a special place. The Alba County Council has also a going on project for a winter sports resort at Vârtop (Arieșeni).

Moneasa and Geoagiu Băi benefit by grants of PHARE type that will continue the next year, too ([www.mie.ro](http://www.mie.ro)).

The rural tourism is considered the saving solution by some local authorities, in this respect introducing projects for its sustaining into the development strategies. However, a comparison with the other agrotouristic zones from the country is of great help. Maramureș, Bucovina, the Land of the Szeklers are already classical destinations which attract more tourists than the Arieș Valley does, the only agrotouristic zone recognized as such by the Romanian or foreign touristic guides. In fact, even the ANTREC specialists mark “a good development potential” in this domain only in the case of the counties of Alba and Cluj, due to the lower promotion costs ([www.antrec.ro](http://www.antrec.ro)).

### Disadvantaged areas and touristic areas in Apuseni Mountains



**Figure 1.** *Disfavoured areas and touristic areas in the Apuseni Mountains.*

### CONCLUSION

Nowadays, the Apuseni Mountains are referred to both as a disfavoured zone and a touristic zone. However, spatially speaking, the touristic zones appear mainly in the Northern Apuseni, while the disfavoured zones lie in the southern part of the Arieș River (Figure 1).

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The areas with a better spatial positioning in the supra-regional context, with infusions of capital from the European funds, as well as those that were not affected by the previous industrial development, had a chance in developing the tourism. The areas that were based on the industrial mono-specialization from the previous century oriented themselves towards the same activity domain. In this case, the memory of the system was very strong, leading to a return to the same trajectory.

In the case of touristic areas, the slight internal and international promotion can be remarked. Their offer hardly makes way on the Romanian websites, in a relatively low proportion in comparison with other touristic zones from the country, and the major investments follow the path of concentrating the touristic phenomenon (winter resorts, watering and climatic resorts).

Different projects launched by the government or by the county and the regional authorities have in view sectorial actions that are not integrated into a unitary strategy at the mountainous region level. This often produces confusion at the level of the local authorities and the target groups, leading to the dissipation of the expected positive effects.

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