

## CONSTRAINTS ON TOURISM DEVELOPMENT CAUSED BY THE ROAD NETWORK IN THE APUSENI MOUNTAINS

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**ABSTRACT** – A well-developed road network constitutes an asset for tourism development in any given region. However, the presence of these roads is not in itself a guarantee of a high level of accessibility and connectivity to the tourism resources. For the Apuseni Mountains, these two features actually rely more on the viability of different road sectors. One can note malfunctions regarding the access to some sites in the analyzed region, malfunctions that have a deep negative effect on how resources are being capitalized in the study area. Another constraint that takes its toll on tourism development is the relatively limited possibility for exploiting the tourism resources in an integrated and efficient manner, by connecting them in thematic tourism routes. In most cases, the causes are not orographic barriers or the absence of connections, but rather the scarce viability of some of the existing road sectors. These observations make the case for the decisive role transport infrastructure is playing in the tourism development of regions and highlight the need of an integrated approach in tourism planning.

**Keywords:** accessibility, connectivity, tourism, route, Apuseni Natural Park, Trascău Mountains

### INTRODUCTION – TRANSPORT AND TOURISM

In most studies that focus on analyzing tourism development in a certain area (Dezsi and Benedek, 2003; Ciangă and Vescan, 2007; Ancuța and Olaru, 2010; Ciangă and Bolog, 2012; Gligor et al., 2014, etc.) the tourism phenomenon is mostly understood through three main aspects: tourism potential, flow, and offer. In such studies, as well as in most regional and local development strategies (e.g. in the case of our study area, the Apuseni Mountains, the tourism planning strategies of Alba and Cluj Counties in particular), one can note that transport, in its relationship to tourism, is mentioned only in those specific cases when it acts as a clear limiting factor.

Meanwhile, in the more theoretical approaches of the phenomenon, most authors (Kaul, 1985; Hall, 2001; Khadaroo and Seetana, 2007; Kordel and Senator-Bentkowska, 2009; Albalade and Bel, 2010, etc.) emphasize the important role of transport for tourism. Some authors even refer to it as having the most influential role in tourism development: “[...] transport can often be the single most important factor in determining the viability of a destination’s tourism sector” (Lohmann and Duval, 2011, p. 3).

Different models addressing the development of destinations and products illustrate the role that transport plays, as an essential factor right from the earliest stages of tourism affirmation in a given area (Miossec, 1976; Prideaux, 2000; Butler, 2006, quoted by Cocean P. et al., 2014, etc.).

Two key aspects can concisely express the role of transport in tourism development: accessibility and connectivity.

**Accessibility** represents the first condition for a sight to actually be visited by tourists, thus becoming visible and interesting for further investments and development. The existence of a viable

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access road influences the tourists' initial decision to visit or not to visit a certain place. However, in areas containing more competing sights, it is the viability of the access roads that decisively influences the choice. The attractive outshine phenomenon (Cocean Gabriela, 2011) is often present in such cases, and it may even occur for already established destinations when confronted to new and more accessible tourist areas: "[...] tourist destinations decline in importance once a more accessible destination is opened elsewhere" (Sorupia, 2005, p. 1770, addressing the former studies of Rajotte, 1972; Lundgren, 1982; Nelson and Wall, 1986).

Improved accessibility determines an increasing number of tourists that require improved accommodation infrastructure and services, thus resulting in the growth of the tourism phenomenon in the tourist areas with viable access roads.

**Connectivity** enables the integrated capitalization of more resources, while being an essential condition in the outlining of wide tourist areas. Thus, it refers to the transport network inside broader tourist destinations, having an important role in *determining their attractiveness* (Albalade and Bel, 2009).

It also increases the efficiency of tourism practices by allowing the development of tourism routes and by this, upgrading the tourist offer of the whole area. "By combining the attraction or a number of attraction providers into regional packages, thus creating greater access to a variety of products while at the same time increasing the product's appeal, routes are important tourism development strategies" (Meyer, 2004, p. 8).

Improving the offer and increasing a destination's appeal have a direct effect on how visitors experience the destination. Some authors underline the fact that connectivity influences the length of stay and overall satisfaction of tourists (Lumsdon and Page, 2003). A prolonged stay in a certain area also means an increase in tourism consumption inside that specific area, with a positive effect on accommodation and healthcare facilities, entertainment and adventure package providers, local stores, etc.

In addition, the economic benefits of tourism development are spread within the area, encouraging the development of more locations inside broader areas – "Finally, local networks, or those networks of transport that operate within a wider destination such as a country, are critical in ensuring that the economic benefits of tourism are not simply concentrated in one particular locality" (Lohmann and Duval, 2011, p. 3).

## **METHODOLOGY**

In the present paper, we highlight the importance of accessibility and connectivity for tourism development of the Apuseni Mountains by addressing two issues: the access to the Padiș area, the best-known karst area in the Apuseni Natural Park and the possible connections between sites in the central part of the Trascău Mountains. Data regarding road viability provided by the Alba, Bihor, and Cluj County Councils and by the Romanian National Company of Motorways and National Roads, as well as data on the tourist flow in the Apuseni Natural Park provided by the park administration were used in this study. Interviews with representatives of the local authorities in Gârda de Sus and Râmeț were conducted, complemented by a sustained bibliographical research aiming to identify the main directions for the improvement of road infrastructures in the area. A consistent part was supported by direct observation during the field research.

## **CONSTRAINTS CAUSED BY POOR ACCESSIBILITY – ACCESS TO THE MAIN ENDOKARST ATTRACTIONS IN THE APUSENI NATURAL PARK**

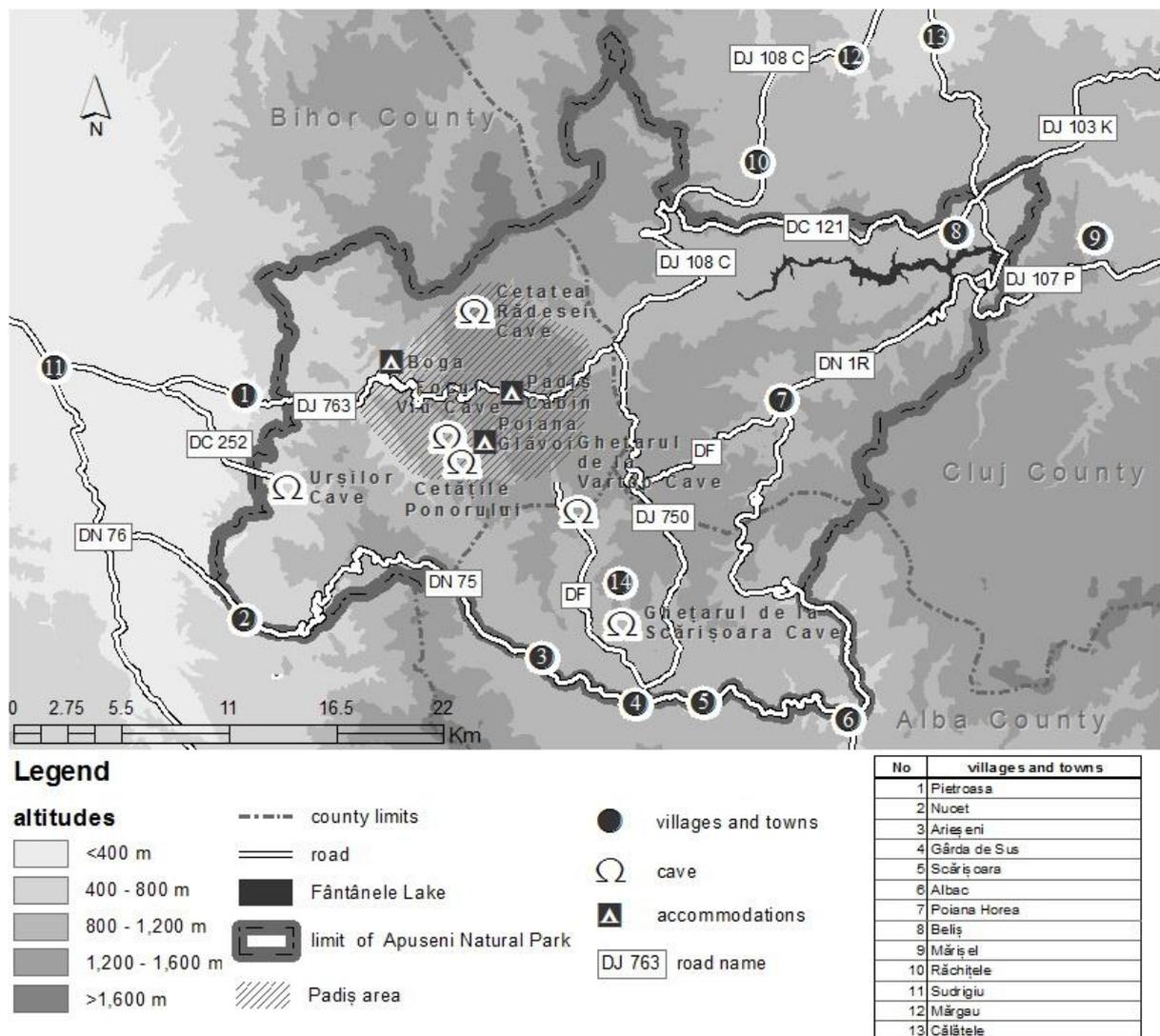
The Apuseni Natural Park stands out at national level due to its typical karst landscape that makes it a very suitable destination for some recreational tourism activities such as trekking, caving, canyoning, climbing, etc. Two of the best-known show caves in Romania are located in this area: Scărișoara Ice Cave and Urșilor Cave in Chișcău, together with other endokarst forms concentrated in the Padiș tourist area and numerous other forms that are not easily accessible, visited only by experienced speleologists.

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According to the cave inventory in the Apuseni Natural Park Management Plan, there are eleven A category caves (caves with a very high protection degree, access being granted only for scientific purposes), nine B category caves (where speleotourism is allowed with specialized caving equipment), eight caves containing both A and B sectors, eight C category caves (where permanent arrangements are allowed, being accessible for a wider range of visitors), one B category cave with a C tourism sector and many other not classified caves.

The Apuseni Natural Park is located at the junction of three counties: Cluj, Bihor and Alba, at about 100 km distance from Cluj-Napoca (a city of more than 300,000 inhabitants) and Oradea (approximately 200,000 inhabitants), and about 150 km from Alba Iulia (about 60,000 inhabitants).

The Park is reachable leaving the E79/DN76 and E60/DN1 European roads and the DN75 national road (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Access roads in the Apuseni Natural Park

Source: authors' own elaboration based on SRTM data (NASA/JPL/NIMA), the topographic map 1:500 000 (Ministry of Armed Forces of the People's Republic of Romania, 1962, L34B – Cluj) for mapping settlements and tourist sites, data provided by the Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests for the borders of the Apuseni Natural Park and Google Maps for tracking the roads.

It is crossed by the national road DN1R Huedin – Albac, which passes through Beliș – Poiana Horea – Pasul Ursoaia – Mățișești – Horea – Albac, where it intersects the DN75 road from the Arieș Valley. Another route cutting across the Park is formed by the DJ763 and the DJ108C county roads, with a junction at the Bihor – Cluj county border. This route passes by Pietroasa – Padiș – Doda Pili – Răchițele – Călata and intersects the national road network in Sudrigiu, Bihor (junction of DJ 763 with DN76/E79) and Păniceni, Cluj (junction of DJ108C and DN1). It also intersects the previous route, DN1R, in Călata.

The two main roads of the Park (DN1R and DJ763 followed by DJ108C) are connected by a forest road passing by Poiana Horea – Poiana Călineasa – junction with DJ763, and by the DC121 road, Răchițele – Dealu Botii – Bălcești – Beliș.

These main transversal roads have connections to other roads of tourist interest in several directions, most of them leaving DN1 - Cluj-Napoca – Oradea. The DJ107P county road, starting from Gilău, intersects DN1R in Beliș, close to Lake Fântânele. DJ103K, starting in Căpușul Mare and passing by Râșca, is another option for reaching Beliș. In the southern part, DJ750, starting from DN75 in Gârda de Sus, heads towards Ghețari, where Scărișoara Ice Cave is located. From the nearby village of Ocoale, a forest road continues to Poiana Călineasa where it intersects another forest road heading towards DJ763, close to the border of Cluj County.

Although apparently having an operational road network, there are, however, important locations in the park that are less accessible due to the viability of the roads. While DN1R is paved on most of its sectors and DC121 was modernized in 2014, the two county roads contain sectors of different viability (Table 1). Most forest roads are earth roads that can only be used under favourable weather conditions.

**Table 1.** County roads sectors in the Apuseni Natural Park

Road	Sector	Length (km)	Pavement	Viability (Dec 31st 2013)
DJ763	Sudrigiu – Pietroasa	13.100	Asphalt Concrete	Good
	Pietroasa	6.550	Thin asphalt layers	Medium
	Pietroasa – Boga	15.450	Asphalt Concrete	Good
	Padiș – Cluj County border	9.080	Gravel	Low
DJ108C	DN1 – Mănăstireni	10.650	Thin asphalt layers	Medium
	Mănăstireni – Călata	6.000	Thin asphalt layers	Low
	Călata – Scind Frăsinet	10.200	Modernized asphalt layers	Good
	Scind Frăsinet – Răchițele	4.130	Thin asphalt layers	Good
	Răchițele – Doda Pili	15.868	Gravel	Low

Source: Bihor and Cluj County Councils

The Padiș tourist area is an essential part of the Apuseni Natural Park due to its high concentration of endokarst sites of national interest (Cetățile Ponorului, Cetatea Rădesei and Focul Viu caves, Bortig vertical cave, the vertical caves in the Lumea Pierdută Plateau, etc.).

Easy access in the area (by car) is only possible from Pietroasa, due to the rehabilitation of the access road, while access from other directions is still scarce. Thus, visitors coming from those directions (Cluj-Napoca or Alba Iulia) have to either take a detour through Pietroasa or use the deteriorated gravel county road Răchițele – Doda Pili – Padiș or the forest earth roads starting from Ocoale or Poiana Horea heading towards Poiana Călineasa and Padiș. Either taking such a detour or using any of the deteriorated roads has a direct effect on the quality of the tourist experience and overall satisfaction of travellers.

Moreover, a questionnaire applied in the Padiș area by Bădulescu and Băc (2009) revealed that the interviewed tourists' main concern before their journey was the road status, having a higher

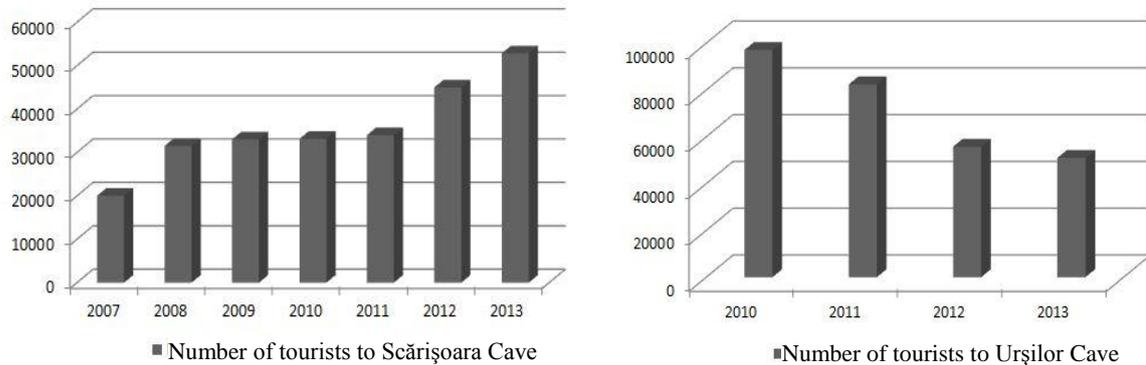
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percentage of responses than other factors such as the weather (which is essential for an outdoor tourist activity) or accommodation options.

However, in spite of this concern, there are some local projects targeting road improvement. The current best access road (Sudrigiu – Padiş cabin) has been recently rehabilitated under a project of the Bihor County Council. The Cluj County Council also has such a project on the line for DJ108C: “Modernization of access infrastructure to the Răchițele – Prislop – Ic Ponor tourist area”. Structural funds for rural development also represented an important opportunity for many local communities to propose the modernization of some forest roads serving tourism purposes as well. The road sector on the Gârda Seacă Valley, the one connecting the Gârda de Sus – Ocoale road to Padiş (following the Vârful Clujului – Poiana Călineasa route) and the Bălcești – Răchițele (passing Dealu Botii) roads were included in such proposals.

The positive correlation between road improvement and an increase in visitor flows can be noticed. When analyzing data sets related to the number of tourists visiting the main show caves in the Apuseni Natural Park, one can note the increasing number of visitors to Scărișoara Cave between the years 2008 and 2013, in direct relation to the works for the asphalt road. The largest increase is noticed since 2012, when the works for the access road were completed. On the other hand, the number of tourists decreased in the case of Urșilor Cave in Chișcău. In spite of being paved, the DC252 road leading to this cave (leaving DJ763) has numerous sectors of low viability.

The positive effect of the asphalt road to the Scărișoara – Ocoale Plateau has also extended for Poarta lui Ionele Cave (located right beside the road) that has recorded an increase in the number of visitors from 8,400 visitors in 2011 to 22,714 in 2013 (according to the data provided by Gârda de Sus Mayoralty).



**Figure 2.** Evolution of the number of visitors to Scărișoara and Urșilor caves

Source: graphical interpretation of data provided by the Apuseni Natural Park

Meanwhile, analyzing the case of Vârtop Cave, one can note certain administrative aspects that have acted as impediments to the integrated tourism development of the area. This cave is located in Arieșeni commune, at a 10 km deviation from the road leading to Scărișoara Cave. The access road to Vârtop Cave, from that point on, is covered with asphalt up to the border of Gârda de Sus Commune, followed by a 5 km deteriorated earth road (it also includes sectors affected by wood exploitation in the area). Thus, the number of visitors in the case of Vârtop Cave did not follow the same ascending trend as in the case of the nearby Scărișoara and Poarta lui Ionele caves.

### CONSTRAINTS CAUSED BY POOR CONNECTIVITY – PLANNING A TOURISM ROUTE IN THE TRASCĂU MOUNTAINS

The Trascău Mountains represent another representative area in the Apuseni Mountains in terms of karst landforms, due to its ridge-klippe landscape and great number of exokarst forms, being the mountain unit with the largest number of karst gorges in the Apuseni Mountains. The central part

of the Trascău Mountains provides a great example of an area suitable for organizing an integrated tourism route due to the great density of tourism resources (38 geosites) and their spatial proximity, being concentrated in the following areas:

- the Arieș Gorge;
- the area around the Trascău Depression including Colții Trascăului Ridge, Colțești Fortress, the Vălișoara Gorge and the gorges in the Inzel Basin;
- the Bedeleu Massif which includes Vânățara Swallet and Huda lui Păpară Cave;
- the Râmeș Basin –including the Râmeș, Mănăstirii, Geogel, Piatra Bălții, Prav gorges and the karst ridge of Pleașa Râmeșului;
- the Galda Basin – with the Galda, Întregalde, Găldița, Cetea and Tecșesti gorges.

Today, if a tourist were interested in travelling to all of these sites during his stay in the area, he would have to leave the national road following secondary roads leading to the sites and then return on the same track to the departure point, which has a negative effect on the overall experience, by inducing monotony. Thus, he would have to take the following one-day trips:

To visit the main gorges located in the Intregalde Basin, he would leave DN1, follow DJ107K through Galda de Jos – Benic – Galda de Sus – Poiana Galdei – Intregalde and return on the same track (51 km in total). The road passes right through the Galda and the Intregalde gorges, while from Intregalde tourists can easily arrive in the Găldița Gorge by following the road to Necrilești for about one km.

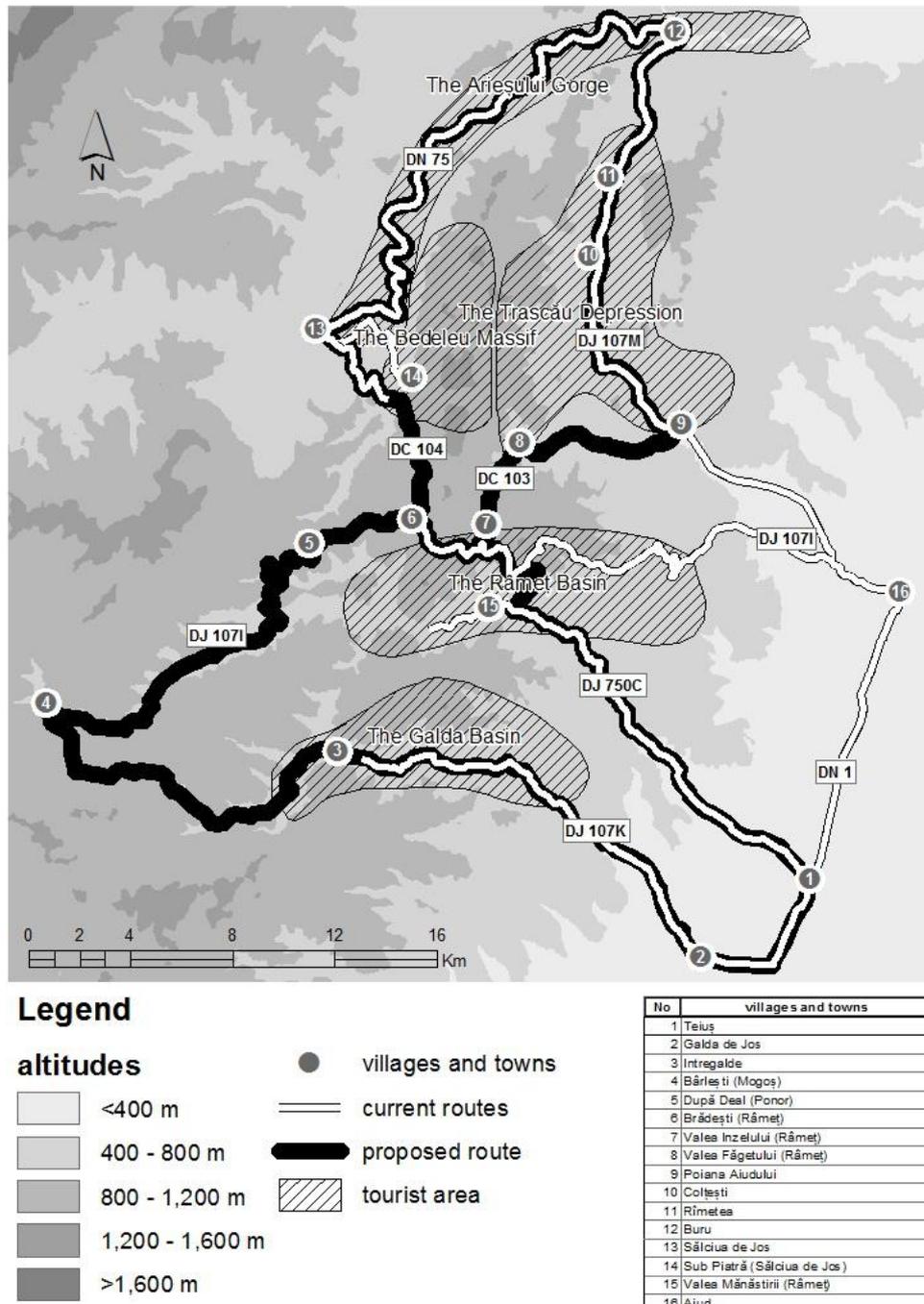
- a) To visit the Râmeș basin, he would leave from Teiuș following the road to Valea Mănăstirii (where the Râmeș Monastery is located) and the Râmeș Cabin, until the end of the road, close to the entrance in the Râmeș Gorge. From this point, he can go on by foot to cross the Râmeș Gorge and arrive in Cheia with the possibility of visiting the Piatra Bălții, Geogel and Prav gorges nearby. The total length of the track is 40 km from Teiuș to the end of the road and back.
- b) To visit the old villages on Pleașa Râmeșului Ridge he would pass by Aiud – Râmeș – Brădești on the DJ107I scenic road, from which a spectacular perspective opens towards the Mănăstirii and the Râmeș gorges. The total Aiud – Brădești – Aiud route is 63 km.
- c) The tourist can easily reach the Trascău Depression on the 107M road, an axis of established tourist importance that has undergone a modernization process between 2009 and 2011. One direction to reach this area is from Aiud, passing by Poiana Aiudului – Vălișoarei Gorge – Colțești – Rimetea (25 km) or from the Arieș Valley, leaving DN75 in Buru and arriving after 8 km in Rimetea.
- d) The Bedeleu Massif is also easily reachable leaving DN75 and following DC140 towards Sub Piatră, where the tourist can visit the monastery, Huda lui Păpară Cave and can easily reach Vânățara Swallet, Șipote Waterfall and Poarta Zmeilor Cave on hiking trails. There is another option to get close to Vânățara Swallet, yet not so popular, by following the scenic road leaving from Sălciua de Jos and offering a great view towards the Bedeleu slope and the Gilău – Muntele Mare Massif. The distances for these trips range between 11 and 13 km, starting from Sălciua de Jos.

Thus, in order to visit all these sites, the tourist would actually have to travel over 313 km, among which 200-220 km in the actual mountain area and 113 km just for transfer between the entry points of these “no through” roads (Galda de Jos, Teiuș, Aiud, Sălciua).

The fact is that the roads presented above are not actually no through roads, except for the Sălciua de Jos – Sub Piatră and Râmeș Cabin – Râmeș Gorge roads. Analyzing the region’s road network one can note that all these resources and main access roads can be connected and a route could easily be designed. Starting from DN1, the route would follow the Galda Valley through the Galda and Intregalde gorges, towards Mogoș, passing by some lookout points that could be set up as picnic areas. In Bârlești (Mogoș), the route would follow DJ107I for Brădești (Râmeș), at first along the Geoagiu Valley until the După Deal village (Ponor) and then ascending towards the lookout points upon the gorges in the Râmeș Basin (the access to these gorges is ensured mainly by hiking trails). Leaving DJ107I and continuing through Valea Inzelului village, the DC103 road to Valea Făgetului and the “Drăgoi” forest road one could arrive in Poiana Aiudului.

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The road passes close to the gorges in the Inzel Basin and once arrived in Poiana Aiudului one can visit the other sites in the Trascău Depression, following the DJ107M Aiud – Buru road. From Buru, DN75 on the Arieș Valley leads towards the Bedeleu tourist area. The “eight”-shaped route is outlined by the DC104 Sălciua de Jos – Brădești road back to the Râmeț area. The route is completed by following DJ750C to Valea Mânăstirii (the starting point of the hiking trails through the Râmeț Gorge) and back to DN1 in Teiuș.



**Figure 3.** Tourism routes in the middle sector of the Trascău Mountains

Source: authors' own elaboration based on SRTM data (NASA/JPL/NIMA), the topographic map 1:500 000 (Ministry of Armed Forces of the People's Republic of Romania, 1962, L34B – Cluj) for mapping settlements and Google Maps for tracking the roads.

The proposed route has the following advantages:

1. The route is an optimal solution for the tourist flow in the central sector of the Trascău Mountains due to its five possible entries: Sălciua, Buru, Teiuș, Galda de Jos and Mogoș making it highly accessible from more directions. Its “eight” shape implies the possibility of choosing the direction and the length of the actual travel. It also engages some areas that at this time are seldom visited by tourists: Ivăniș, Valea Inzelului or Valea Uzei villages, the gorges in the Inzel Basin, the Ponor Monastery, etc.

2. It improves the tourists’ experience in the area by:

- a) Reducing driving distances to a total of 173 km (while the current visiting paths reach a total of over 313 km, including the sectors that connect the main entrance points). Reducing the distances diminishes the time spent in the vehicle, with positive implications on the overall experience.
- b) Eliminating another great inconvenience: the transit of the same areas by using the same route both for arrival and for departure. By taking a different road for the return journey, the tourist has the opportunity of visiting more sites and enjoying the changes in the scenery.

3. By providing an improved experience, the average length of stay of tourists in the area would increase and, therefore, would create the premises for increasing tourist spending for services and products in the area (accommodation, food services, rentals, purchase of local products or experiences - guiding, adventure packages, etc.).

4. The expanding of the tourism market and the development of new facilities and services along the route can also include areas that are less developed now. At this moment, disparities between the northern and the southern sectors of the route in terms of tourism development are striking. Accommodation and restoration services, as well as other types of services, like guiding, adventure tourism assistance (speleotourism, canyoning), etc. are well developed in the Trascău Depression and the Bedeleu area (especially in Rimetea and Sălciua). In the Râmeț area, there are only two accommodation units that do not offer other types of services. In Intregalde, however, there is no kind of tourism services providers, due to the rather poor demand in comparison with the previous area. Therefore, this area in particular could benefit from the inclusion in such a route.

5. Once functional and properly marketed, the route would lead to an overall development of the entire area by providing additional employment and income, through local facilities and services.

However, in spite of these advantages, this route cannot be completed at this moment, mainly because of the poor viability of the connection roads (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Viability of road sectors in the Trascău Route

Road	Sector	Length (km)	Pavement	Viability (31 Dec.2013)
DJ107H	Junction with DN1 – Galda de Jos	3.000	Asphalt	Good
DJ107K	Galda de Jos – Bârlești (Mogoș)	11.500	Asphalt	Good
		6.200	Asphalt	Medium
		19.800	Gravel	Low
DJ107I	Bârlești (Mogoș) – Brădești – Râmeț	27.200	Gravel	Low
DC103	Junction 103I – Valea Inzelului – Valea Făgetului	7.000	Dirt road	Impracticable
DF	“Drăgoi” forest road – Valea Făgetului – Poiana Aiudului	7.000	Gravel	Good
DJ107M	Poiana Aiudului – Buru (junction with DN75)	19.700	Asphalt	Good
DN75	Buru – Sălciua de Jos	28.400	Asphalt	Good
DC104	Sălciua de Jos – Brădești	11.800	Dirt road	Low
DJ750C	Brădești – Râmeț – Valea Mănăstirii – Geoagiu de Sus – Teiuș – junction with DN1	9.100	Gravel	Good
		5.200	Dirt road	Impracticable
		17.500	Asphalt	Good

Source: Interpretation of the data provided by Alba County Council and field observations

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While the connection road between Intregalde and Râmeț can be approached with personal vehicles (under favourable weather conditions and with certain dexterity of the driver), DC104 connecting the Bedeleu Area to DJ107I can become a challenge even for off-road drivers, depending on the weather. The roads connecting Râmeț to Valea Mănăstirii and Valea Inzelului to Valea Făgetului are however impracticable with any sort of personal vehicles.

The legal classification of these roads is another obstacle in actually planning these kinds of routes. The route that we have proposed includes sectors of national, county, communal and forest roads. Different structures and institutions therefore manage them, which often do not coordinate their actions based on common goals.

### CONCLUSIONS

Accessibility and connectivity are the two main coordinates of the transport-tourism relationship. While accessibility is a vital factor for the affirmation of tourism resources and development of destinations, connectivity is the one that articulates tourist networks inside wider destination areas.

Improving accessibility in the case of the endokarst sites of the Apuseni Natural Park had a positive effect and contributed to the increase of the number of visitors. However, for the Padiș Plateau, issues regarding easy access from multiple entry points are still pending.

Improving connectivity between different sites and locations in the destination area is just as important for tourism development and has strategic importance for the destination planning by allowing the establishment of tourism routes. Such a route could easily be designed as a way to integrate various sites in the middle sector of the Trascău Mountains, but the viability of some secondary roads inhibits this project.

Local authorities in these tourist areas are well aware of the importance that the viability of roads plays in the tourism development. However, stronger collaboration between regional and local authorities, as well as with other stakeholders (service providers, investors, NGOs, etc.) is required in the future.

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