

## THE TOURIST ROLE OF RELIEF AS LANDSCAPE BACKGROUND <sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** – In its relation with tourism, relief fulfils three roles: of attractive resource, of support for tourist infrastructure and activities, and of landscape background, respectively. While the first two undertaken roles are easily identified, in the third case, confusion may appear which is actually aroused by the different manner in which tourists perceive the morphological elements. For some tourists, elements such as Piatra Cetii, Colții Trascăului or the steep slopes of the Bedeleu represent first-rank tourist objectives, while, for others, they are just the landscape background for other objectives or for tourist activities whose development is not related to their presence. This role appears more clearly in the case of a less spectacular relief, which only frames, from the landscape viewpoint, a tourist resource of prime importance. The study of the relief's role as landscape background for tourism has high importance in the sense that in any attempt to create a hierarchy of the tourist objectives in the Trascău Mountains, the attractiveness coefficient of the background, of the landscape in which the objective is an integral part, must be taken into consideration.

**Key words:** landscape background, tourist objective, the Trascău Mountains, perception, motivation.

The development of tourism in a certain area is directly conditioned by the presence of some important tourist objectives, which can be either natural, be it morphological (unusual or picturesque elements of the relief), hydrological, climatic (properties of the micro-climate), vegetation and fauna, or human, situated into an as pleasant as possible environment, on whose basis a certain tourist infrastructure will be developed.

Among the environmental elements, relief has the greatest influence on the development of tourist activity by its triple contribution: as attractive source, as landscape background and as support. Through these, relief can determine tourism, can influence the development and the extent of the tourist activities, and shelters the constituent elements of the material base.

Firstly, when analyzing tourist resources, we observe that among the objectives belonging to landscape, relief has the most significant share (Cocean, P., 1984). This first rank is assigned by the multitude of forms with attractive valences: steep slopes, ridges, glacial erosion forms, gorges and defiles, caves and potholes, plateaus, differentiated erosion forms, etc., all elements that can determine the appearance and the development of the tourism phenomenon in a certain area.

When relief is not the attractive, tourism generator resource, it becomes a resource of secondary importance or a simple basic framework that will determine the personality and the features of the landscape in which another attractive resource is framed, offering harmony, spectacular background or contrast. On the other hand, in this case, relief may also act as a restrictive factor, or at least a factor that is not of much help in the conditions of some objectives framed by a monotonous landscape, or as an unattractive one, marked by elements belonging to the anthropogenic relief. By the findings, relief has a direct influence upon the main tourist objective of that framework, and thus, upon its attractiveness.

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Moreover, relief represents the support base of tourism, on which the tourist infrastructure elements, and not only, are located: ways of communication or accommodation bases and public food service establishments. In this case, relief may also act as a restrictive factor if it represents a barrier for the valorisation of some objectives (e.g. the access way is steep or impracticable). The last two functions explained above are well captured by Muntele and Iațu (2006): "Relief represents the essential support in tourist planning, being a basic element in creating the setting peculiar to each tourist site".

### **The features of landscape background**

The relief forms take over the tourist role of landscape background in the conditions in which they do not represent one of the tourism-generating objectives in the area (no matter of their type), being situated in a secondary or remote background, being observable, perceptible by the tourist who can admire them, but cannot confer them personality. Even if this relief, which creates the landscape background for the tourist objective, is not effectively realized, it is still perceived positively, its elements being admired, but they are not given identity.

The role as landscape background appears very clearly in the case of some higher peaks or knolls, which represent tourist objectives for the nearby area, but, as the distance grows, their role as tourist objectives proper decreases up to the point in which they come to represent a simple landscape background for other areas where they are visible, but they no longer meet the same attractive attributes.

Another situation where this function of the relief is easily identifiable is that of a less spectacular relief, without a sufficient attractiveness index in order to become a tourist resource proper, joining another element with real attractive valences existent in the landscape. Although the role of such a relief appears as obvious, it is difficult to quantify how much it would promote the main objective's valorisation and increase in attractiveness and, thus, the development of tourism.

On the other hand, if the morphological elements around an attractive objective are very spectacular, the following dilemma could appear: is relief, in this case, a landscape background or a tourist objective proper, but of secondary importance?

The distinction, main or secondary tourist objective and landscape background, is done on a case-by-case basis, as it depends on the motivation of the tourist act and on the tourist's personal preferences. The differences occur both between different individuals and between the journeys undertaken by the same person, whose recreational options have different purpose. Thus, the same element of the relief can be perceived in many ways that will be exemplified by taking an example from the field study, namely Colții Trascăului:

- as main tourist objective by the tourists who go to admire or to take pictures of the steep slopes, to carry out certain tourist activities or to practise certain forms of tourism directly linked to the form itself: mountaineers, paraglider pilots, hikers wishing to reach the top or the foot of the mountain;
- as secondary tourist objective for those coming to Rimetea, attracted by elements of interest, other than Colții Trascăului, but, once arrived in this place, decide, for example, to make trips towards the upper plateau, thus replacing the planned activities with others correlated with the massif; in this case, the massif can represent the attractive objective targeted in a subsequent travel;
- as landscape background for the tourists that choose Rimetea as destination on ethnographic, gastronomic, cultural, etc. considerations. We refer here to all tourists who arrive for other objectives and who will not carry out activities related to Colții Trascăului, including the tourists who practise mountain hiking on Ardoșcheia or Vidolm.

As stated above, the manner of perceiving the relief differs both between individuals and within the same person's options. Thus, a tourist who comes frequently to Rimetea in order to practise mountaineering, for which Colții Trascăului usually represents the main tourist objective, may choose to return to the locality for rest or for a tourist activity without any relation to the massif, thus, in this case, Colții Trascăului will represent a simple landscape background.

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The relativity of perceiving the relief does not stop here, it can be observed that on the spot, the tourist's perceptions and options may change; thus, from a landscape background, relief becomes a tourist objective of main or secondary importance if:

- the tourist travels especially to closely admire a certain relief form;
- the place or the relief from discovered when carrying out a tourist act based on other resources acquires identity for the tourist;
- whether the form will represent the motivation of the subsequent travel to the area, the main objective remaining the same or not.

### **Hypostases of the morphological landscape background**

We will analyse below the manner in which the relief of the Trăscău Mountains, as landscape background, highly increases the attractiveness index of some objectives in the same field or especially in different fields.

1. *Geomorphologic objectives, individualized and well inscribed in landscape.* First, we refer to certain natural objectives, altimetrically dominated by peaks or knolls that do not represent tourist objectives in this area (the section of Valea Galdei dominated by Piatra Cetii).

This is followed by the cases in which a morphological element appears as well inscribed in landscape, either because the surrounding relief is monotonous or the form is unusual, detaching itself from a spectacular landscape, but which will be important only as background. For the Trăscău Mountains, this situation is typical for the isolated limestone massifs. By their novelty, they eclipse the surrounding relief, which, in most cases, is not a remarkable one. The tourist's sight and attention are focused on the bare limestone, curiously appeared and inscribed in landscape, so to give an example, the tourist may often not even remember what lies on the other side of the road, in parallel with Pietrele Ampoitei.

A different situation is in the case of two important morphological objectives situated in proximity, which, according to the motivation of the tourist's travel, may be in several situations. Thus is the case of Huda lui Păpară Cave and of the steep slopes of Bedeleu, from the direction of Mount Bulz. In this case, four situations can appear, depending on the motivation and on the manner in which the tourist perceives them on the spot:

- if the tourist comes to admire both the cave and the steep slopes, both elements are tourist objectives, neither of them representing the landscape background of the other;
- if the tourist is interested in the steep slopes of Bedeleu, for mountaineering or for other activities strictly related to this form of relief, the opening from Mount Bulz is just a landscape element on the way to the foot of the mountain;
- if the tourist chooses this destination for Huda lui Păpară Cave, either for practising speleotourism or for simply admiring the huge opening in the limestone wall, the steep slopes of Bedeleu will represent just a background;
- if the tourist is attracted to the hamlet of Sub Piatră for something else, rural or religious tourism, both elements are just a more special background for practising these types of tourism.

2. *Morpho-hydrographical elements.* Although in fewer cases, especially due to its small size and, thus, to a more modest attractiveness of this kind of elements that are present in the area, relief can represent the landscape background for the waterfalls in the Trăscău Mountains. Thus, for the tourists visiting the waterfalls of Șipote or the Ciucaș Waterfall, the defiles of the Arieș or the Hășdate can only be a pleasant framework they can admire.

3. *Biodiversity.* For the fauna or flora elements of interest, the landscape background is very important. Most of the tourists interested in a particular species will choose to observe it in picturesque places, even if these places will not act as a secondary tourist objective. Thus, for those interested in admiring the golden eagle, the Turda Gorge represents a very spectacular framework, which increases indeed the attractiveness of the initial objective. Similarly, for the tourists who wish to admire the edelweiss, the Întregalde Gorge represents the landscape background, although this situation should

not be mistaken for the conditions in which tourist comes to see the place where the edelweiss grows at the lowest altitude, situation in which the Întregalde Gorge represents the tourist objective itself.

4. *Historical edifices.* In the Trascău Mountains, the historical edifices are represented by the fortresses of Colțești and of Piatra Craivii. They enjoy a spectacular landscape background, marked by the presence of Colții Trascăului, of Vălișoara Gorge, and of Piatra Craivii, respectively.



**Figure 1.** *Colții Trascăului as landscape background for Colțești Fortress*

Both landscapes preserve the natural attribute, due to the steep slopes that man could not intervene on, which increases the attractiveness of the objectives due to the preservation of that genuine, historic atmosphere that facilitates the tourist's mental journey back in time.

The higher tourist potential of the presented fortresses can be noticed by making a simple comparison with similar sites situated in other areas that do not benefit by such surroundings, being situated in certain localities (Deva Fortress) or in less attractive hilly areas (Ciceu Fortress).

5. *Religious edifices.* Regarding churches, the ones in the Trascău Mountains are not very well known or intensely visited by tourists. Among them, the one having the highest tourist potential is not helped at all by the landscape background. The fortified church of Cricău, a potential tourist objective of maximum importance due to its old age and its very good preservation, is forgotten, isolated from



**Figure 2.** *Limestone steep slopes marking the landscape in the area of Râmeț Monastery*

the tourist flow for several reasons including the fact that the landscape background does not stand out, the depression area in which it is located does not impress too much.

Instead, the monasteries in the Trascău Mountains are generally framed by a wild landscape, dominated by heights or steep slopes. Even the two monasteries of Rimetea, although situated at the end of the village, are dominated by Colții Trascăului and by Vidolm, while the monastery in the hamlet of Sub Piatră is situated exactly at the foot of the steep slopes of Bedeleu. The clearest example is offered by Râmeț Monastery, situated downstream the Râmeț Gorge,

dominated by the 700-900- metre limestone cliffs. The background of this monastery makes us remember other edifices of this kind that looked for high or inaccessible places in the attempt to break away from the material world.

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Moreover, the pilgrimages to these monasteries, in the conditions in which they take place in a natural environment such as the Monastery Valley, add value to the feeling of spiritual purification and of proximity to Divinity.

6. *The human activities with tourist function*, peculiar to the area, would lose a lot from the tourist attractiveness in the conditions of a more monotonous or of a more intensely modified landscape, being generally manifestations referring to customs preserved from ancient times, when man was still at peace with nature. The various traditions preserved, such as Îmblânzitul Oilor (the Taming of the Sheep) of Ighiu or Cununa Grâului (the Wreath of Wheat) in Bucurdea Vinoasă, or the festivals of the Dacian Fortresses in Cricău, as well as the Dacian Wine in Bucurdea Vinoasă, receive an air of authenticity given by the mountainous landscape.

7. *The ethnographic resources*, especially the traditional architecture of settlements, have much to gain in the conditions of a more spectacular or more harmonious relief. The fact that rural tourism is generally better represented in the mountain area is not a simple coincidence. Certainly, in these areas, the urbanisation trends were more reduced, activities have remained largely traditional, and thus, customs and mentalities have been preserved more easily, but landscape, mountain plays an additional role to the creation of this genuine framework. The tourist who practises this form of tourism appreciates more a natural landscape, with aesthetic qualities. For the localities where rural tourism is more developed, such as in Rimetea or in Sub Piatră, the heights of Colții Trascăului, the slopes of Vidolm and Ardoshei, or the steep slopes of Bedeleu or Mount Bulz complete that authentic, archaic landscape.

8. *The ethno-gastronomic resources* of the area are still less exploited, but several observations can be made. First, as regards wine tourism, the localities where this shows the first signs of development, Bucurdea Vinoasă and Țelna, have a higher tourist potential than in other similar localities of the country, being supported by the mountain landscape, much more spectacular than the hilly, lower landscape from other regions.

As regards the boarding houses whose cuisine has been awarded to various fairs and contests, and which will be visited for this reason, such as the Sub Piatră or the Izvorul Muntelui Boarding House in Ampoița, their location in places where the relief has spectacular, as well as harmonious features, is an advantage in comparison with other such units. Furthermore, the lack of such a framework can be noted as a possible impediment in the development of these bases. Thus, a boarding house whose food service is the main concern and whose catering services have exceeded the limits of the region, such as Sfântu Gheorghe Inn in Ighiu, suffers from the fact that its location in the centre of the village of Ighiu does not offer panorama towards novel or picturesque elements of the relief.

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that relief represents the landscape background not only for other objectives but also for the tourist accommodation bases. Thus, tourist boarding houses will look for places with an enjoyable view, which again, as the case may be, can be objective or landscape background. Thus, that percentage of customers that chooses that boarding house on considerations other than the novel elements of the surrounding relief, maybe simply for rest or for team building (the case of the boarding houses in Sub Piatră or in Ighiu, intended for companies and for businesspersons), will appreciate the boarding house more, due to the background in which it is situated. The examples of boarding houses that are helped very much by the landscape background are very numerous: Conacul Secuiesc, from whose garden the panorama towards Colții Trascăului is wide open or Casa cu Dor Boarding House, situated a few hundred metres, at an angle of great visibility, from Pietrele Ampoiței. Of course, the recommendation addressed to these boarding houses is to not adversely affect the landscape in which they appear integrated, both for the aesthetic side of the landscape and for their own success, as generally, the infrastructure elements are positively perceived unless they adversely affect the landscape, harmoniously integrating themselves into it.

As it can be noticed, the objectives for which relief plays the role of landscape background are numerous and of several types in the Trascău Mountains. In these conditions, it should not be a surprise that the same morphological element can represent the landscape background for several

tourist objectives or for several tourist activities by simply dominating the other objectives altimetrically, marking the nearest or the farthest horizon of the tourist. There are two situations where this occurs:

- the altimetric domination of some remote areas: the case of Piatra Cetii, visible both from the Galda Valley and from the Mureş Corridor;
- the presence of several tourism-generator objectives in a small area, dominated by the same form of relief: the steep slopes of Bedeleu in the Sub Piatră area can represent the landscape background both for the cave and for the monastery; Colții Trascăului, both for the Colțești Fortress and for the ethnographic resources of Rimetea or even for the Siloş and the Bedeleu gorges.

The study of the landscape background of a tourist objective and, therefore, of the relief as its most striking component, is particularly important in estimating the attractiveness of the tourist objective, including the operation of creating a hierarchy of the objectives with a view to their planning. This importance derives from the fact that landscape can increase or decrease the attractiveness of a tourist objective, directly influencing its valorisation.

Thus, when quantifying the attractive potential of an objective, specifically when estimating the positional tourist potential, the landscape background of the objective must be taken into account separately, and then in relation to the objective itself. For a start, the elements of the relief that form the background of an objective must be seen in terms of spectacularity, the degree of harmony, the number of elements of potential interest and then in relation to the object itself, following the degree of contrast or harmony. Of course, the attribution of values according to these criteria involves a great deal of subjectivity, almost impossible to surpass within the aesthetic quantification.

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