

# Tourist Attraction Assessment of the Bran – Rucar Corridor (Romanian Carpathians)<sup>1</sup>

DANIELA DUMITRESCU, ADRIAN-AUREL BALTĂLUNGĂ

Geography Department  
Valahia University of Targoviste  
bdul Regele Carol I, no. 2  
ROMANIA

danieladro@yahoo.com; aa\_baltalunga@yahoo.com

GÉRALD BILLARD, GUILLAUME BAILLY

Geography Department  
Rouen University  
1 rue Thomas Becket, 76821 Mont-Saint-Aignan cedex  
FRANCE

gerald\_billard@yahoo.fr; Bailly.guillaume1@gmail.com

NADIA MANEA

Romanian National Bank  
str. Lipscani no. 25, sect 3, București  
ROMANIA

nadia.manea@gmail.com

**Abstract:** The Bran Rucar Corridor is an important mountainous area in terms of tourist activity, particularly intensified after 1990. This dynamic determined a high pressure on the elements of genuine potential, often sacrificed in favour of rapid financial benefits. In the same way though, there are a series of real threats amongst this area with a remarkable potential, yet fragile from the environmental degradation point of view, both natural and constructed. In this regard it should be implemented a reflection on the relationship between the national identity and economy or risk versus prosperity. On the other hand, we consider important in this context, the evaluation of the attractiveness grade of mountainous tourist localities of the interior corridor, both primary and secondary, through comparative analysis. These may indicate the major directions for action at local or regional level, the balancing possibilities of the exploitation degree of tourist resources, the capitalizing of completions on these resources between the north and south sector.

**Key-Words:** attractiveness index, disparities, evaluation, sensitive rural area, opportunities, real resort, risks, standard resort, socio-economic development, standard resort, Tecdev method, tourist attraction, tourist resource-offer.

## 1 Introduction

Romania's mountain areas, like all the European areas, face lately more obvious challenges, generated by the global environmental change and also by the political and economic ones, which come to create a considerable pressure on local territorial components.

Revitalization through the capitalization of the agro- tourist potential, represents a major opportunity, though being conditioned by the identification and the

correct evaluation of the outside of the mountain areas. The opportunities of the sensitive mountain areas can be valued in at least two directions: *prestige* together with the *quality and the purity of the products, and the innovative potential of development and services for the population.*

Such an area, which could be a model of a sustainable capitalization of the mountains areas from Romania, is represented by the *Bran-Rucar corridor* from the Carpathian mountains, an area with valuable

<sup>1</sup> This article is the result of an interdisciplinary and international research project, PN2-IDEI, ID\_2374, no. 988/2008, entitled "Evaluation of the sustainable potential development of a fragile rural area and the development of rural tourism. Model for the Bran-Rucar Corridor (Transylvania, Romania).

treasures, yet fragile environmentally speaking, which draws high costs and extra difficulties under terms of territorial setting. The sustained capitalization of its features can list it in the category of Europe's main tourist region, which can represent a real challenge.

## 2 Problem Formulation

Located in a favourable geographical position, of gateway towards and from *Transylvania*<sup>2</sup>, Bran-Rucar corridor, an area of indisputably tourist development, has to face the adjustment to contemporary history. At the same time though, the area has to confront with a series of real threats that can lead to a rapid degradation of both landscape and environment. The special concentration of activities and tourist activities upon the two poles of attraction Bran and Moieciu, produces a lack of poise in the spatial development of the passage way, in the central and south part it is undervalued, unexploited, up to a level of demographic extinction in some areas, in spite of all the features that it has. This fragility was caused by the excessive use of the Bran Castle myth, situated in the north part, in the Bran Platform, finally led to the increase of the local disparities.

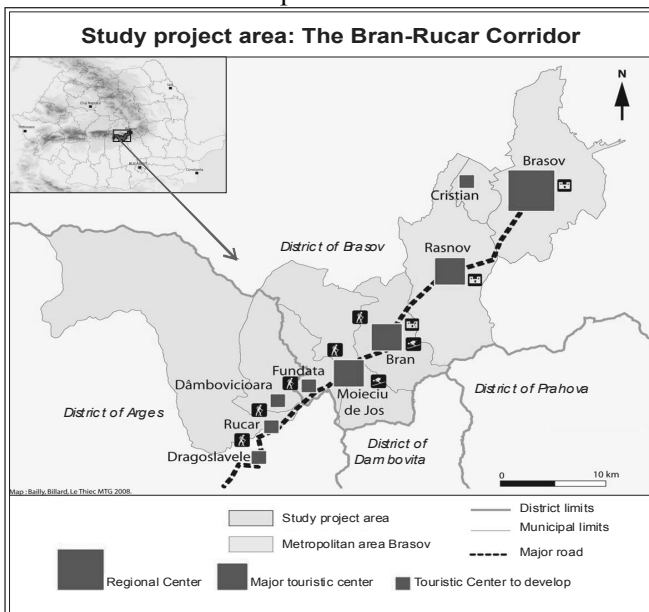


Fig. 1-The Bran – Rucar Corridor: geographical position

### 2.1. Favourability

*The image/ special international brand, favourable geographical position, and the purity of the environment*, represent the major features of the Bran-Rucar corridor. Bran - Rucăr Corridor's major strengths are related to the special international image/brand, to the natural capital (the potential of the mountains, valleys and clean environment), cultural and architectural heritage remarkable (Fig. 2). *Dracula's myth* started numerous disputes, at national and international level, the main controversy opposing *the reality and identity myth*. But, above these arguments, Dracula finds itself at the origin of some diverse subtypes of *special tourism*.

For most of the foreigners and Americans, Transylvania, particularly and Romania, by extension, means „Dracula's Land”. This appellation was gained due to Bram Stoker's „*Dracula*” novel, published in 1897 in London, which was very popular amongst the Anglo-Saxons (and not only) and which represents the foundation of a wide subculture of vampires. As seen from an economical aspect, this myth has unleashed, beginning with the sixties, a „wave” of tourists from Western Europe, USA, Japan, who came to Romania to see for themselves the places mentioned in B. Stoker's novel.

Therefore, a new type of tourism has developed, „*Dracula's tourism*”, which is based on a literary and film myth, built outside the borders and imposed to Romania without its will, and which came to a conflict with the national identity, because it perpetuates a stereotype: Romania- „*land of vampires*”<sup>3</sup>. This stereotype determined the appearance of the „*literary tourism*” (based on the literary myth) and „*cinema tourism*” (movie fans visiting the places mentioned in the movies, their main objective being „*Dracula's Castle*”<sup>4</sup>, that doesn't even exist in Romania).

<sup>2</sup> Old historical province, situated inside the Carpathian Arch, in the center of Romania; from latin: trans=beyond, silva=forest- “*the region beyond the forests*”.

<sup>3</sup> Light D., Dumbraveanu Daniela (2004), *On Imaginative Geographies*, Analele Universității București; L II.

<sup>4</sup> The most frequent associations are referred to Bran castle, built between 1377-1382 by the inhabitants of Brasov; the original historic denies this assertion, Vlad Tepe's connection with the castle being transiently.

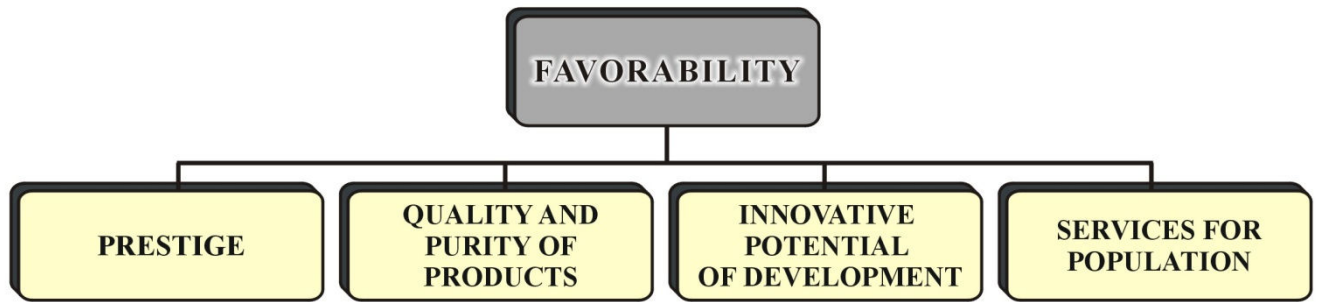


Fig. 2- The Bran Rucar Corridor - major features

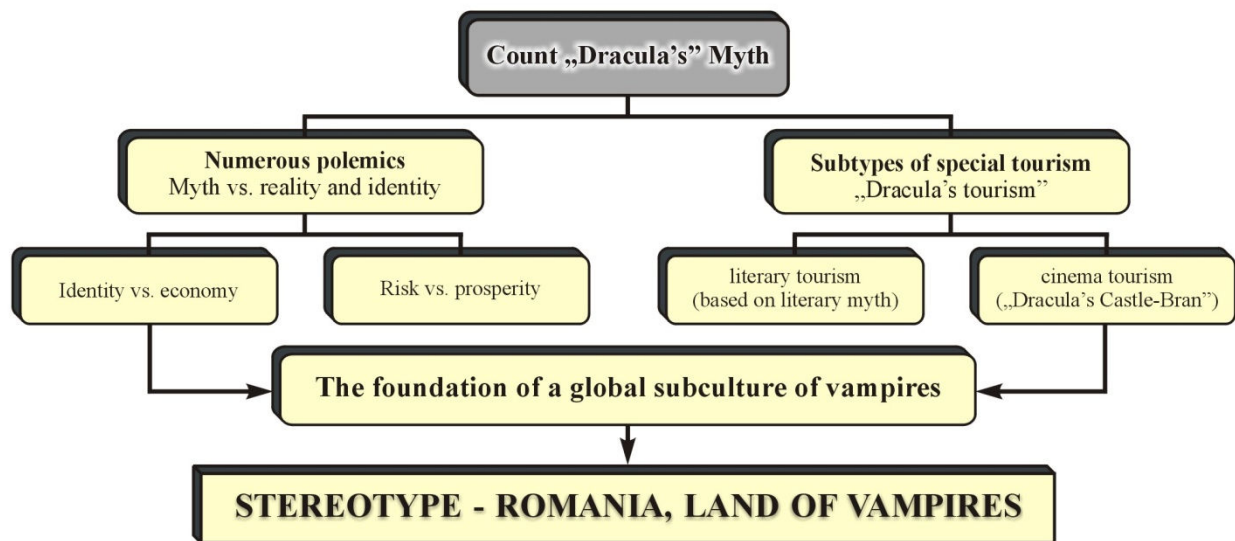


Fig. 3- The Bran-Rucar Corridor - keeper of a myth, numerous disputes and features

The mysterious Transylvania, Dracula and his castle- Bran, have thus become a metaphor, imaginary and unreal places and people, in which the fictitious character is mistaken with the historical character *Vlad Tepes*<sup>5</sup> (extremely popular), would evidently

disturb any nation who would see its national hero libeled or transformed into a vampire. The tourism related to Dracula places Romania in front of a dilemma: on one hand, this type of tourism is in a complete discord with the national identity, but, at the same time, the inflow of tourists contributes to the increase of the Gross Domestic Product, being a source of investments and return. In other words, *identity versus economy*<sup>6</sup> or *risk versus prosperity*. If to begin with, the attitude of the authorities was one of passive tolerance, not making any effort for the promotion and encouragement of this type of tourism, giving this way *priority to the national identity*, after the year 2000, they started to give a bigger attention towards using this myth in *economical purposes*. For the local authorities from the north sector of the Bran-Rucar corridor, the myth of the Count Dracula

<sup>5</sup> Vlad Tepes- son of Vlad Dracul, surnamed by the people « *Dracula* », i.e « *Son of the Devil* », or « *the little Dracula* »; law-maker , strategist, excellent officer ; his social and administrative initiatives have become legendary. He led an imperious policy, entering in conflict with the feudal lords and with the Transylvanian cities Brasov and Sibiu, against which he undertook numerous expeditions, often crossing the Bran-Rucar corridor, where he had an important custom point. The thieves were executed by impaling. From this reason, during his life, and right after his death, his actions have been registered in a manner more or less tendentious, by Byzantine, German and Slavonic chroniclers (please read the relevant reviews of Stefan Andreescu [1998], pp. 191-286).

<sup>6</sup> J. E. TUNBRIDGE (1994), *Building a New Heritage: Tourism, Culture and Identity in the New Europe*, London.

represents a treasure, a real brand, destined to draw prosperity. They are thus using this myth in financial purposes, not caring about the repercussions that it may bring to the national identity.

**2.2. Disparities and main threats on tourist attraction**

These devolve from the *excessive use of the Dracula myth* in the north part and from *the lack of an internal and national cohesion*. Following the course of its development along the years, we observe that this passage way continues to develop without a Master Plan. We assist to *an accenting polarization of the economical activities in the north sector*, highlighted through a general political interest, centred on the financial opportunities to the prejudice of the needs or local or regional identity, as well as the urban centres from the metropolitan area Brasov-Brasov, Rasnov, Zarnesti, considered not until long ago „vectors” of the rural intraregional development. The consequences of the uncontrolled evolution are diverse: breaking up of the passage way and an increase of the demo-economical disparities, ineffective and dangerous exploitation of the touristic potential, threatening of the patrimony and agricultural activities, degradation of the traditional, architectural patrimony(fig.4). The risk is of driving the local authorities, economical actors and people towards an inefficient and uncontrolled pattern of development.

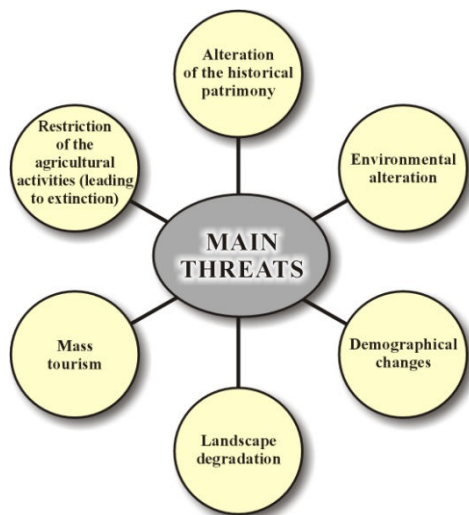


Fig. 4 - The Bran –Rucar Corridor: the main threats

From here, a series of questions follows: in what measure the constitutive sectors, unequally developed, would be able to share and take advantage of each other’s experience, or in other words, the ones with a

solid policy of local governing, promoters of success - Bran and Moieciu, would be able to transfer the success method towards the others, in a way that would generate development and local competition, while the elements of vulnerability (isolation, demographic extinction, etc.) would be transformed in opportunities? Which stake will win- the historical one, of preserving local and national identity or the economical one?

*The global fragility of the popularization*, in an area in which according to the last census (2002) were registered under 20.000 inhabitants and the existence of some strong disparities regarding the concentration degree of the buildings and the population, represents a distinct vulnerability. The survey correlated with the statistical data analysis points out a triple characteristic of types of population in the passage way: a *dichotomy* between spaces with high (minority) densities and spaces with very low densities (which are dominant), the presence of *two major poles of population* (Bran and Rucar) that act like entrance and exit gates from the passage and represent essential fulcrums for the touristic development and a *concentration of the population along the major axle of circulation* (the presence of corridor with intense population). Thus, can be identified three popular types (fig. 5) major pole of concentration, in grouped habitat (Bran, Moieciu de Sus, Rucăr), secondary passageway of population (Moieciu de Sus) and dispersed rural habitat (mainly).

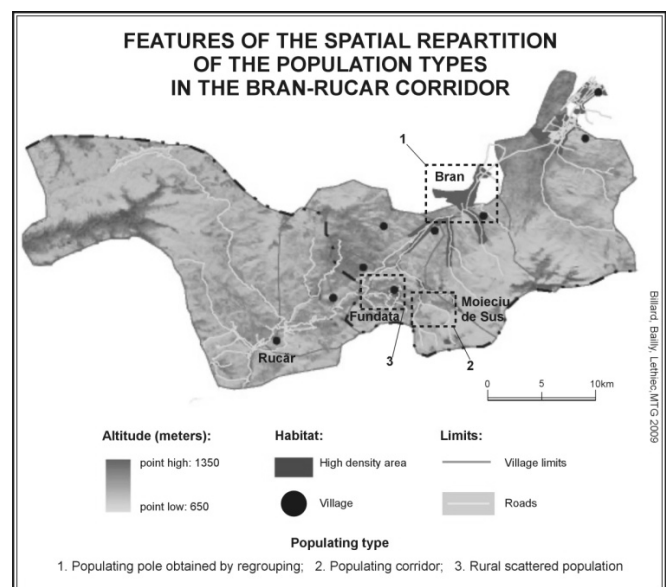


Fig. 5 The Bran- Rucar Corridor – Populating Type (2009)

Finally, another major risk is represented by the *deterioration of the environment and loss of local identity*. This threat has already become a reality around Bran Castle, where the uncontrolled exploitation of Dracula's myth, draws by itself a certain *disneyfication* of the touristic activity.

### 2.3. Opportunities of revitalizing balanced and durable touristic activities

By its position and complexity of phenomena, Bran-Rucar corridor holds all the features to become a pattern of deployment - for the first time in Romania, of a *regional park*, based mainly on a rational policy of growth of the tourist industry and utilization of the agricultural channels.

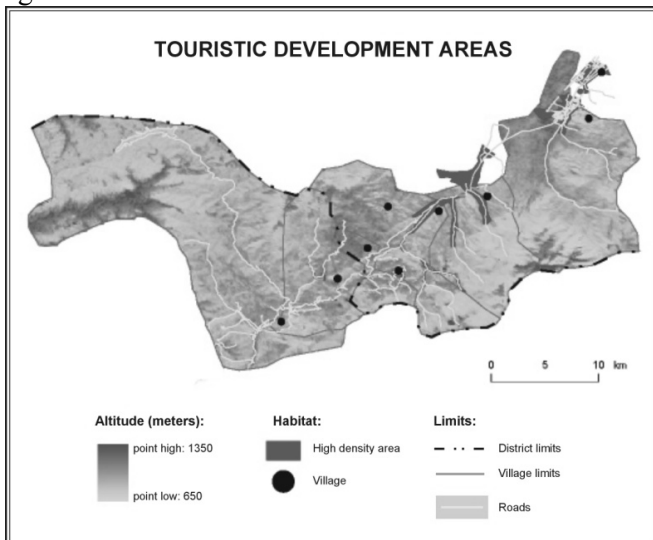


Fig. 6 - Touristic development areas (2009)

This is possible by practical evaluation of certain fields of activity destined to contribute to the identification of the possible dangers and the understanding of the opportunities connected to the use of the lever effect of the Bran Castle brand: preservation of the natural and cultural patrimony, real and indiscriminating guarantee of access to services and all over the passage, and its balanced development, possibility of exploitation of the exceptional benefits/advantages that this area holds as far as local resources and products, gastronomically patrimony, acknowledge the positive external values. The results of these evaluations will allow the uniform and diversified development of tourism all year long, not only by exploiting the major poles (Bran, Moeciu), but also the features of the small mountain resorts (winter sports, summer activities), as well as the villages from all over the territory, thus contributing to the setting of the population in the territory. The isolation of some places (for example Sirnea, the first rural tourist settlement from Romania, today a peripheral resort) can become an important feature in transforming this unexploited place into an

attractive one, as they have managed along the years to best preserve their traditions, customs, architectural patrimony.

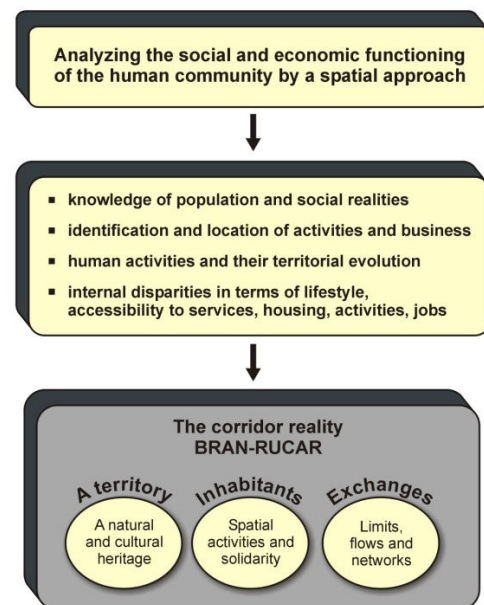


Fig. 7- The Bran – Rucăr corridor reality

We also believe that it is of extreme importance, to evaluate the touristic potential of Bran-Rucar corridor through circuits, trips, etc. of all the elements of spatial unity in the context of the traditional, architectural diversity, particular to all three constitutive sectors (Bran, Giuvala, Rucar), by implementing an architectural inventory and precise landscaper. In this respect, a special role is played by the *elaboration of an architectural guide for city halls and local councils*, in order to comply with the traditional, architectural standards in constructions. All these opportunities will have to be mentioned in a document similar to the *Sustainable Development Plan*, in order to guide the territorial policies on long term, which will have to be adopted by all the actors involved and that could become a pattern for the similar areas from Eastern Europe. Charta is the best way to set a common horizon of the project and to engaging moral the elected and the local actors on a strategic platform and operational one, shared and recognized. This chart is the best way to guide a common perspective on the development process by engaging the local authorities.

### 3. Evaluating the potential of the touristic resorts from the Bran-Rucar Corridor

The most complex and thorough method of defining the potential of a resort (territory) is the



„TECDEV” method (technique and development)<sup>7</sup>. By applying the TECDEV<sup>7</sup> techniques of describing and valuating the national patrimony is an efficient thing to do and it also adapts to the research in the field of tourist resources. We consider the use of these methods to be eloquently for the identification of the attraction force of tourism for each sector of the Bran-Rucar corridor, as ground of determination and adapting types and forms of tourism which vary from case to case.

The method comprises the touristic value of the areas by decomposing in objective and subjective components. When evaluating the potential of the resorts from the *Bran-Rucar* corridor, two stages were examined: *reference to standard mountain resort* (decomposing the standard objective, respectively the touristic resort) in its constitutive elements until the last possible partition and granting a certain part, equivalent to its importance in the functioning of the whole, as well as ( a qualitative level) and *building the real resort* (same decompositions of the elements of offer were kept and same percentages of the components of the standard resort in order to have a comparison base between standard and real, and the qualitative level- the score was different, established according to the real situation from the respective resort) (fig. 8, 9).

<sup>7</sup> It is a technique taken from the heavy industry, being made in this way an analogy between the complex and heterogeneous elements specific to a tourist attraction (tourism infrastructure, natural heritage, architectural, cultural, gastronomic, etc.), with the same type of specific elements of an industrial unit (machinery, equipment, facilities etc.)

<sup>8</sup>The method comprises the touristic value of the areas by decomposing in objective and subjective components. When evaluating the potential of the resorts from the *Bran-Rucar* corridor, two stages were examined: *reference to standard mountain resort* (decomposing the standard objective, respectively the touristic resort) in its constitutive elements until the last possible partition and granting a certain part, equivalent to its importance in the functioning of the whole, as well as ( a qualitative level) and *building the real resort* (same decompositions of the elements of offer were kept and same percentages of the components of the standard resort in order to have a comparison base between standard and real, and the qualitative level- the score was different, established according to the real situation from the respective resort)

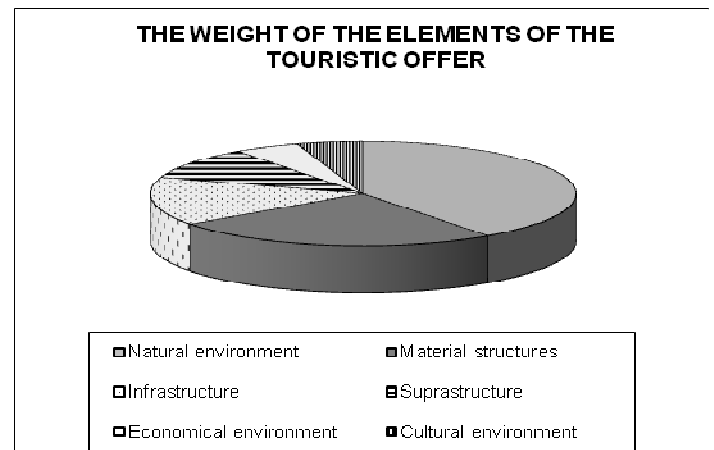


Fig. 8 - The weight of the elements of the touristic offer

The results of using this method are comprised in *Table 1*. The values of the potential index thus obtained, differ from the general image, mass perception, and justifies the necessity, more the real possibility of valuating the passage unitary, with all the derived benefits mentioned above. The most conclusive example is Moeciu, situated on the last place, but which is connected almost all the time with Bran, in the words *tourist area Bran-Moeciu*, proving thus the importance of the geographical position (proximity to Bran and *Dracula's Castle*). At the same time, places like Dambovicioara, with a high potential index, are much less valued and promoted, due to the far distance from the polarizing tourist centre and more difficult access, led to isolation. Moreover, the scores that have resulted demonstrate the role and influence that a brand can hold upon the power of tourist appeal - in our case more than the particular characteristics of the natural environment.

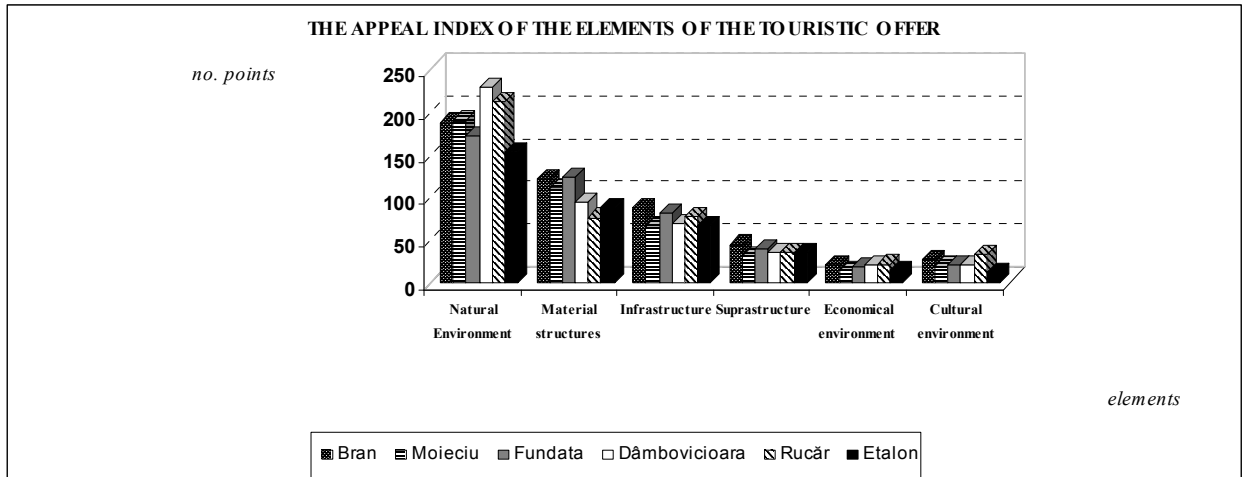


Fig 9 - The appeal index of the elements of the touristic offer

Tabel 1- Evaluating the potential of touristic appeal (TECDEV Method)

Elements of touristic offer	Percentage (qi) - % -	Index of appeal (I)					
		Standar d resort	Bran (1) <sup>1</sup>	Moieciu (5) <sup>1</sup>	Fundata (3) <sup>1</sup>	Dâmbovicioara (2) <sup>1</sup>	Rucăr (4) <sup>1</sup>
1. Natural environment	40,0	153,0	188,0	190,0	172,0	229,0	213,0
2. Material structures	25,0	88,5	122,5	112,0	124,5	95,0	76,5
3. Infrastructure	15,0	68,0	89,0	66,0	82,0	70,0	77,0
4. Superstructure	10,0	36,0	45,0	32,0	40,0	35,0	35,0
5. Economical environment	5,0	14,0	21,0	15,0	19,0	21,0	22,0
6. Cultural environment	5,0	13,0	28,0	20,0	21,0	21,0	34,0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>372,5</b>	<b>493,5</b>	<b>435,0</b>	<b>458,5</b>	<b>471,0</b>	<b>457,5</b>

<sup>1</sup>Numbers in brackets represent the degree of potential within the analyzed area.

The index of attractiveness of the five real settlements from the Bran-Rucar Corridor exceeds the index of the attractiveness on the resort station, hence the result that are attractive for tourists and help in their overall development to an unitary, integrated model. A series of natural environmental components and material structures (such as topography, water and air quality, accommodation) significantly exceed the benchmark in most cases. Also, both the economic and cultural environment exceeds the standard. Other, related to catering establishments, transport and leisure, are far below the standard set by the resort (the largest gap in this regard appears to Rucăr). In contrast, the southern sector, distinguished by the special attractiveness of the natural environment evidenced by the high values of scores obtained. Promoting and enhancing it could be a

variant of a balancing tourism development and in the same time, of a diversification of the practiced tourism types, with multiple beneficial effects on the area.

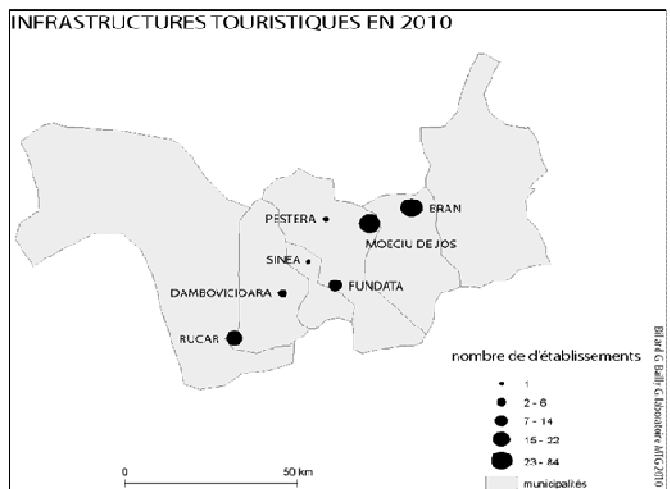


Fig. 10 Tourism infrastructure in 2010

Briefly, the accommodation facilities and catering in the studied area are as follows (fig.10):

⇒ Total number of accommodation units : 333

⇒ Total number of places: 4.467

⇒ Average number of rooms/accommodation unit: 7,03

⇒ Average number of places/accommodation unit: 13,62

Results a high density of accommodation structures (*comparable with the ones of popular mountain resorts*)

⇒ Total number of public supply unit: 40

⇒ Total number of places in public supply units: 3.380

⇒ Average number of places/public supply units: 86,66

These analyses reflect an insufficient public supply unit =  $0,75/1$  (sub standard -1.5 places of public supply structures/1 place of accommodation)

The data obtained allow also the calculation of some synthetic indicators such as the *density fitting sights*<sup>8</sup> - with two variants:

a. reporting the accommodation capacity of a territory to the permanent total population

b. accommodation capacity reporting to the surface of the analyzed territory

We considered most relevant the use of the first, obtained values being represented in Fig. 11.

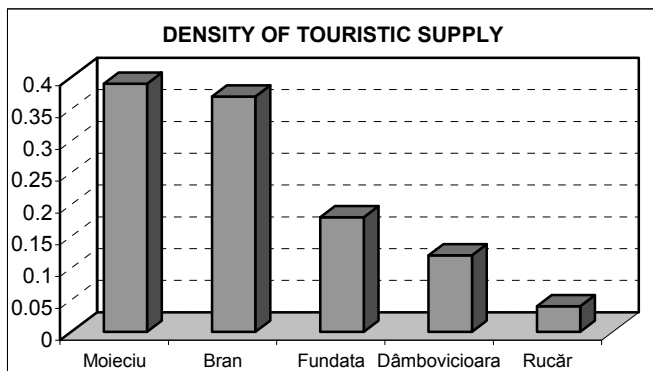


Fig. 11 - Density of tourist supply

The necessity for an objective assessment and application of its results is illustrated also by the indicators of tourist traffic, which proves that the current capitalization of a tourism potential is quite inefficient.

Thus, for example, the average length of accommodation (in Bran case) show reduced values: 2,1 days for the Romanian tourists and 1,7 days for the Foreign tourists. In addition, the number of nights spent in the touristic pensions represents 70%

Romanian tourists and only 20% foreign tourists (the others prefer a different unit of accommodation), which shows a pronounced character of transit for foreign tourists, an aspect which has negatively affects on the level of use of the accommodation capacity.

## 4 Conclusion

Mountain Area through its features is essentially a fragile area. Bran - Rucăr Corridor, like all sensitive mountainous areas in Romania and in particularly, of the rural areas, needs, with priority, an integrated development, balanced, than an artificial "conflict" between the environment and economic development, between tradition and economic development, or between the last ones and historical dimension. Thanks to concerted activities of the local actors, along with researchers and specialists in regional planning and their power of increase, in terms of a favourable legislation, of some programs of local and regional development and concrete actions, these critical environments can become areas with highly attractively, through the capitalization of the agro - tourism potential.

Assessment of the *Charta for sustainable development* of Bran - Rucăr Corridor and promoting a *culture of Regional Parks* will establish a monitoring system or for observation of actions taken to register a logical evaluation and a continuous improvement of public policies. In addition, it will be an essential element of the permanent information for local actors on their progress and to mobilize them permanently, for heritage preservation and its sustainable preservation.

By using the method of determination of the degree of appeal of the resorts will allow the pension owners to establish their own prices, viable comparisons between different tourist resources compiled in a resort, to also establish a hierarchy of the tourist resources according to their degree of appeal with visible consequences upon their strategy of capitalization and the objective definition of the directions in which development, variation, and investments need to be met (this aspect is important to both local and regional authorities).

<sup>8</sup> Nicolae I., Dragomirescu Ș., Cernea D. (1977) – Zonarea turistică a R.S.R. – CCEPTI, București.



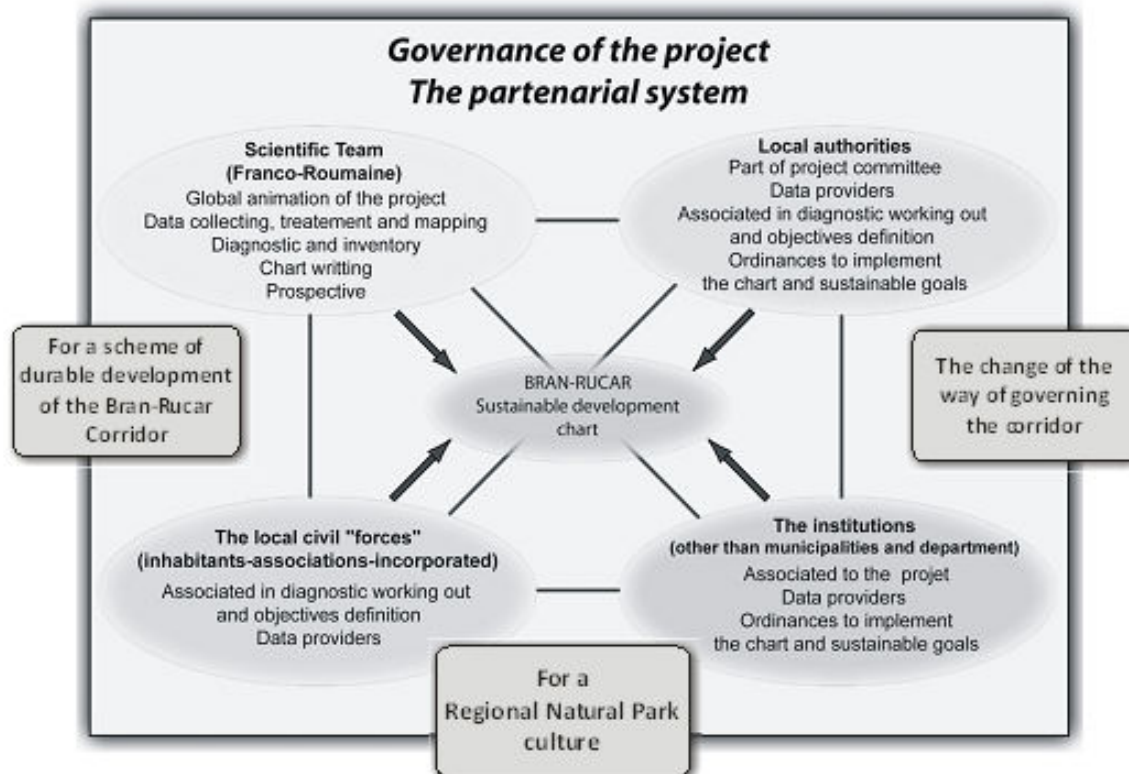


Fig. 12 - The partenarial governance system of *Bran-Rucăr corridor*

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