

NEW TRENDS IN WINTER SPORT TOURISM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *We have witnessed a growing interest of Romanians for winter sports during the last three decades. Today we are proud of more than 180 certified ski slopes across the country. Although the area Prahova Valley - Poiana Brașov remains the most important in terms of facilities and tourist flows, many ski slopes and smaller resorts have emerged in recent years, located in mountainous and even peri-mountainous areas. With the support of the central authority, the local authorities and the private investors have built modern ski slopes, with various degrees of difficulty, to suit all tastes, located near large cities, so skiing and snowboard are accessible to everyone, though the target groups are families with children and young people.*

Key words: *Romania, tourism, winter sports, ski slopes*

INTRODUCTION

Before the 1989 Revolution, there were fewer ski slopes, concentrated in the area Prahova Valley - Poiana Brașov and several resorts around the country. In recent years, we have witnessed an unprecedented development of facilities for winter sports not only in traditional resorts, but also in smaller resorts, located in mountainous and even peri-mountainous areas, but close to major cities emitting tourists. Beginning with 2003, the State, through the Ministry of Tourism and favorable legislation, involved more and more in programs of national interest for winter sport tourism development, allocating money to arrange ski slopes and trails for recreation. We are now proud of more than 180 certified ski slopes across the country.

Mass media (especially the TV stations offering details on ski slope conditions and weather daily, during the cold season), the attractive holiday packages offered by travel agencies, the internet with the social networks, the websites of travel and tourism promotion, the chain stores of winter sport equipment extended in all major cities of the country, the winter and inter-semester school holidays, made it possible to increase Romanians' taste for winter sports, during the above mentioned holidays and weekends in the winter.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is based on the author's experience as a tourist skier in her own country, and on literature research: books and articles in this field, laws and legislation, publications and information provided by the Ministry of Tourism, websites of tourism and tourism promotion, online ski maps and live webcams. The data were processed using Microsoft Excel computing functions.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Before the 1989, under communism, there were fewer ski slopes, concentrated in the area Prahova Valley-Poiana Brașov (with the most popular winter sport resorts: Poiana Brașov, Predeal, Sinaia, Azuga, Bușteni) and several resorts and ski centres in the counties Hunedoara, Sibiu, Caraș-Severin, Suceava, Maramureș, Bihor, Gorj, but with modest ski facilities.

The winter sport tourism was based on the existence of a ski domain, located at altitudes above 1000m, with an area exceeding 380 hectares, 72 slopes for alpine skiing with a length of 92 km, concentrated in 16 counties and 20 mountains (table 1). More than

50% of the ski domain was located in the counties Braşov, Prahova, Dâmboviţa, in the mountains Bucegi, Postăvaru, Piatra Mare, Clăbucetele Predealului, Baiu [1] and [2].

Table 1.

Evolution of ski slopes in the last 20 years

Year	Number of ski slopes	Length of ski slopes (km)	Counties involved
1998	72	92	16
2011	130	116	17
2016	186	162	21

Source: own processing of data provided by the Ministry of Tourism [3] and [2]

In the 1990s, things stagnated and the existing ski infrastructure deteriorated. After the year 2003, the State, through the Ministry of Tourism and favorable legislation, involved more and more in programs of national interest for winter sport tourism development, allocating money to arrange ski slopes and trails for recreation. We should mention, in addition, the contribution of local authorities (municipalities, local councils) and private initiatives in managing and maintaining the ski slopes.

For example, the Order no. 263 of 2001 [7] on planning, certifying, maintaining and managing ski slopes and trails for recreation stipulates that ski slopes and trails can be used only after their certification, for the protection and safety of tourists. The rules of certification, maintenance and operation are established by the Ministry of Tourism with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Water and Forests. Slope certification is the attribution of the Ministry of Tourism together with the county councils, within specially constituted committees, in consultation with concerned trade associations and local councils. Unauthorized ski slopes or improper maintenance of certified ski slopes constitutes a contravention and it is fined by law.

The Law no. 526/2003 [4] launched the program "Ski in the Carpathians", an important moment in Romanian white tourism development. The program specified the appropriate areas, identified by specialized studies, for practicing winter sports, the arrangement, development or rehabilitation of ski slopes, ski lifts, artificial snowmaking installations, maintenance and illumination of ski slopes. The funding sources for the national programs stipulated in the mentioned law were: sums allocated from the state budget and local budgets; domestic or external credits; non-reimbursable domestic or external financial aid grants; resources of the private sector; European funds and other sources.

The program was re-launched in 2008 [3], [5] through the sub-program entitled "Ski in Romania", whose main objectives were: modernizing and expanding the existing ski slopes and creating new ski slopes, in order to ensure the conditions for practicing winter sports at international standards; mountain tourism development and more qualitative offers in mountain resorts, in order to attract tourists. The state wanted to attract in the tourist circuit those areas that could offer winter sports at international standards and to support them, through a partnership between the central public administration, the local public administrations (respectively 14 counties concerned: Alba, Argeş, Bihor, Bistriţa-Năsăud, Braşov, Caraş-Severin, Cluj, Dâmboviţa, Hunedoara, Maramureş, Neamţ, Prahova, Sibiu, Suceava) and the private sector. In 2009, 12 local councils were to receive from the Ministry of Development a total of 40 million euros to start building ski slopes. The amounts came from the European Regional Development Fund, through which the European Union aimed to develop tourism in poor areas. However, some projects have not been finalized and the amounts of money spent have been the subject of investigation for the National Anticorruption Directorate.

In 2011, we witnessed a quantitative and qualitative jump in the winter sports infrastructure (table 1), when the central authority (at that time the Ministry of Regional

Development and Tourism) financed 12 projects amounting to 37.5 million euros in the counties Brașov, Covasna, Hunedoara, Maramureș, Prahova, Suceava and Vâlcea, resulting in: 8 new slopes, 14 existing slopes redeveloped, 8 ski lifts, 19 artificial snow installations, a nocturnal installation, a sleigh slope and a K90 ski jump trampoline. The resorts on the Prahova Valley benefited most from these investments, in order to organize the Winter Olympics of the European Youth Festival (FOTE, 2013). Therefore, the central public authority (the Ministry of Tourism) was directly involved in investing in the ski infrastructure necessary to organize an Olympic competition, so that Romania could enter the international circuit of winter sports, which would bring a series of benefits to all stakeholders.

At present (2016), Romania has 186 certified ski slopes with a total length of 162.48 km, most of them (131 slopes, representing 70% of total) being short and easy, under 1 km length, according to the data provided by the Ministry of Tourism [6]. Only 55 ski slopes exceed 1 km length, of which 22 slopes exceed 1.5 km length, 3 slopes exceed 3 km length and a single slope is longer than 4 km (tables 2 and 3).

Table 2.**Top 25 longest ski slopes in Romania (2016)**

Pos.	Ski slope name	Location (resort, county)	Length (m)	Difficulty	Administrator
1	Drumul Roșu	Poiana Brașov, Brașov	4,752	easy	Brașov Municipality
2	Sulinar	Poiana Brașov, Brașov	3,394	moderate	Brașov Municipality
3	Dealul Negru	Vatra Dornei, Suceava	3,000	moderate	S.C.Telescaun Negrești S.R.L.
4	Drumul de Vară	Sinaia, Prahova	2,972	moderate	Sinaia Municipality
5	Lupului	Poiana Brașov, Brașov	2,605	difficult	Brașov Municipality
6	Carp	Sinaia, Prahova	2,500	difficult	Sinaia Municipality
7	Telegondolă	Vidra, Vâlcea	2,257	moderate	Voineasa Municipality
8	Cocoșul	Predeal, Brașov	2,250	easy	Predeal Municipality
9	Sub Teleferic	Poiana Brașov, Brașov	2,200	difficult	Brașov Municipality
10	Mogoșa	Mogoșa, Maramureș	2,200	moderate	Baia Mare Forestry Directorate
11	Clăbucet	Predeal, Brașov	2,100	moderate	Predeal Municipality
12	Sorica	Azuga, Prahova	2,100	moderate	Local Council Azuga
13	Telegondolă	Straja, Hunedoara	2,086	moderate	Lupeni Municipality
14	Cazacu	Azuga, Prahova	1,920	easy	Azuga Municipality
15	Lăptici	Sinaia, Prahova	1,900	easy	Local Council Sinaia
16	Piatra Grăitoare	Băița-Vârtop, Bihor	1,880	moderate / difficult	Nucet Municipality
17	Roata	Cavniv, Maramureș	1,880	moderate	Cavnic Municipality
18	Aușel 1	Șureanu ski area, Alba	1,650	moderate	S.C.Ski Surianu S.R.L.
19	Telescaun	Borșa, Maramureș	1,606	difficult	S.C.Lorigem S.R.L.
20	Albastră	Cavniv, Maramureș	1,510	easy	Cavnic Municipality
21	Valea Dorului - variantă	Sinaia, Prahova	1,510	moderate	Sinaia Municipality
22	Șuior 1	Mogoșa, Maramureș	1,500	moderate	S.C.Turist Șuior S.R.L.
23	Kalinderu	Bușteni, Prahova	1,500	moderate	Bușteni Municipality
24	Șoimul	Gura Humorului, Suceava	1,462	moderate / difficult	Local Council Gura Humorului
25	Aușel 2	Șureanu ski area, Alba	1,430	moderate / difficult	S.C.Ski Surianu S.R.L.

Source: own processing of data provided by the Ministry of Tourism, 2016 [3]

Table 3.

Current situation of ski slopes, by county

Pos.	County	Length (m)	Number of ski slopes
1	Braşov	26,355	22
2	Prahova	25,845	24
3	Maramureş	15,249	16
4	Harghita	14,903	25
5	Hunedoara	12,500	17
6	Alba	11,920	12
7	Suceava	11,621	11
8	Caraş - Severin	10,102	14
9	Cluj	8,244	10
10	Vâlcea	5,542	7
11	Sibiu	4,952	8
12	Gorj	3,460	6
13	Covasna	3,356	4
14	Bihor	2,430	2
15	Bacău	1,414	1
16	Neamţ	1,371	2
17	Bistriţa Năsăud	1,200	1
18	Mureş	1,100	1
19	Iaşi	480	1
20	Constanţa	256	1
21	Arad	180	1
	Total Romania	162,480	186

Source: own processing of data provided by the Ministry of Tourism, 2016 [3]

These values demonstrate that the entire Romanian ski area is the same as in a single Alpine ski resort. Although Romania does not even compare with the existing ski infrastructure in the traditional Alpine countries (France, Italy, Austria, Germany, Switzerland), things have evolved rapidly, especially in the last 10 years. Romania could not compare with the Alpine countries for at least three reasons:

- the natural resources (the relief of the Alps compared to that of the Romanian Carpathians) and the climate (reflected in the thickness and duration of the snow layer);
- the value of investments in the ski infrastructure;
- the experience in developing tourist resorts, in general and in practicing winter sports, in particular.

However, last year (2016) not less than 37 new slopes were certified, of which 8 in Şureanu Ski Area. Named "Switzerland of the East" for its landscapes and panoramas visible from the alpine level, Şureanu Ski Area is located in the Şureanu Mountains, in the counties Alba and Hunedoara, consisting of 10 slopes with a total length of 11,5 km, different degrees of difficulty and ski lift connections between different geographical areas; it is considered to become the largest ski infrastructure in Romania, comparable to the Alpine ski resorts. Other ski slopes inaugurated last year are in the following resorts: Petroşani-Parâng (6 slopes), Bran (4 slopes), Semenic (3 slopes), Mărişel (3 slopes), Cavnic (3 slopes), Praid (2 slopes), Covasna (2 slopes), etc. The winter sport facilities will continue to develop, hopefully at an equally fast pace, through "Ski in Romania" National Tourism Development Program, which will be updated in 2017.

CONCLUSIONS

We have witnessed a growing interest of Romanians for winter sports during the last three decades. Before the Revolution in 1989, there were fewer ski slopes, concentrated in the area Prahova Valley - Poiana Brașov and several resorts around the country. In the years immediately following the 1989 Revolution, the situation stagnated and the existing infrastructure deteriorated. Beginning with 2003, the State, through the Ministry of Tourism and favorable legislation, involved more and more in programs of national interest for winter sport tourism development, allocating money to arrange ski slopes and trails for recreation.

In recent years, the facilities for winter sports have developed rapidly not only in the traditional mountain resorts (the area Prahova Valley - Poiana Brașov remains the most important in terms of facilities and tourist flows), but also in some smaller resorts (Șureanu, Râncea, Bran, Toplița, Sovata, Praid, Petroșani-Parâng, Miercurea Ciuc, Harghita-Mădăraș, Cavnic, Gura Humorului, etc.), located in many other mountains or even peri-mountainous areas, but close to major cities emitting tourists. Today we are proud of more than 180 certified ski slopes across the country.

Mass media (especially the TV stations offering details on ski slope conditions and weather daily, during the cold season), the attractive holiday packages offered by travel agencies, the internet with the social networks, the chain stores of winter sport equipment (Intersport, Decathlon, Hervis) extended in all major cities of the country, the online stores of winter sport equipment (SportAddict, Spartan Sport, Sport Depot, SnowSports, etc.), the winter and inter-semester school holidays, made it possible to increase Romanians' taste for winter sports, during the above mentioned holidays and weekends in the winter. There are also a number of websites of travel and tourism promotion (such as romaniaturistica.ro [8] for all ski slopes in the country or schisureanu.ro [9] for the respective ski area), where tourists find all updated information for their ski holiday: weather and snow conditions on the ski slope; detailed characteristics of ski slopes and ski lifts; program, price and offers; online lift pass; location and GPS coordinates; live webcams; ski equipment rental centers; ski instructors; news and events; accommodation and restaurants; entertainment facilities; tourist spots; travel agencies; mountain rescue; photos; tourists' comments.

With the support of the central authority, the local authorities and the private investors have built modern ski slopes, with various degrees of difficulty, to suit all tastes, located near large cities, so skiing and snowboard are accessible to everyone, though the target groups are families with children and young people.

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