

Evaluation of Tourist Flow Seasonality to Enhance Tourism Activities in Braşov - Prahova Valley, Romania

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ABSTRACT

The area under study is located between large urban centres from Romania (Braşov and Ploieşti-Bucureşti) and our approach focuses on finding new ideas and solutions for the optimisation of the tourism phenomenon in this area. In order to depict the essential aspects triggering the current and future state of tourism we need to consider the statistical information in relation with the territorial reality. The greatest challenge of the analysis on tourism phenomenon is to prove how and to what extent the systemic incapacity to suitably valorise the tourist request affects it since the tourist area covered by the project does not present branding related issues. The analysis on tourist flow demonstrates significantly the features of this phenomenon with economic, social and cultural impact.

1. INTRODUCTION

In terms of territory, the subject of our study corresponds to the well-known and highly visited mountainous tourist area in Romania represented by the Braşov - Poiana Braşov - Predeal - Râşnov - Azuga - Buşteni - Sinaia area. This research study is part of a larger project, having as main objective to efficiently evaluate the tourism potential of the area and also to propose and establish the most suitable specific facilities in order to be able to submit the application to become the organiser of the Winter Olympic Games in 2022. In addition, we have formulated a series of derived objectives managing to emphasize several essential aspects: to evaluate tourism resources; to provide easy access to tourism resources; to increase the diversity of tourist services; to avoid the excessive exploitation of the natural environment; to register high values of room occupancy rate; to improve and ease the tourist circulation; to implement systems of monitoring and control of the tourism phenomenon; to increase the performance of tourism companies; to generate new work places; to preserve authentic values; to prepare

suitably the tourist infrastructure both quantitatively and qualitatively; to set up the infrastructure supporting the organisation of great events. Therefore, statistical data processing and the spatial representation of the tourist flow emphasise on the seasonality related issues, the distinctiveness of the tourist resorts, but also on the numerous dysfunctions found.

2. DATA AND METHODS

The statistical information employed in the study represents combinations between the information achieved from direct field observations and provided by the following administrative bodies: The National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism, The Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, Prahova County Council [3] [4], Braşov County Council [5], the local governing authorities of Azuga, Buşteni, Râşnov, Sinaia and Predeal towns, the local governing authority of Braşov Town, The Tourist Information and Promotion Centres of Predeal and Sinaia, The National Park of Bucegi Mountains. The study methods result in

complex graphic representations based on statistical information, correlated with time and space variables and data on circumstantial cultural and social facts.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data processing, the mapping and the interpretation of the results were performed based on three directions: room occupancy rate (%), seasonality in tourism, and tourist flow.

a). *The tourist flow and the room occupancy rate (Ro. C.U.C.) (Data for the year 2007).*

$$O_r = \frac{N_{an}}{N_{bp} \times 365} \times 100$$

O_r – room/bed occupancy rate (%).

N_{an} – number of overnight stays/rooms sold per year.

N_{bp} – number of beds/rooms available per year.

Table 1. The tourist flow.

Territorial Administrative Units	Number of overnight stays/year	Number of beds	Room occupancy rate (%)
Brașov	307,999	3,012	28.20
Poiana Brașov	319,868	2,384	36.76
Predeal	374,222	3,954	25.93
Râșnov	11,180	621	4.93
Azuga	22,663	674	9.21
Bușteni	165,606	2,650	17.12
Sinaia	530,617	5,724	25.40
Total area	1,732,155	19,019	24.95

Data source: *Master Plan for tourism on Prahova Valley and the Brașov-Râșnov Area – September 2008* [1].

We need to consider and highlight several aspects for the tourist flow:

- the values recorded are the result of the great differentiation between the figures registered in the season and out of season periods, thus the occupancy rate frequently ranging between 20% and 30%;

- out of the territorial administrative units with large number of accommodation facilities, only Bușteni mountain resort records the least values of occupancy rate (17.12%) being unable to attract the necessary number of tourists to fulfil the accommodation offer;

- foreign tourists are present in the summer season especially in the areas where national or international well-known brands (attractions) are found (The Peleș Castle in Sinaia, The Historical Centre of Brașov etc.).

Additional information results much better from the spatial correlation of data with other information displayed on the maps.

b). *Essential features of seasonality in tourism.* Based on the information taken over from the study “Master Plan for tourism on Prahova Valley and the Brașov-Râșnov area”, statistically processed,

graphically and geospatially represented and analysed through correlative methods, we have agreed on a series of conclusions. The information used for this analysis is the monthly number of stays.

The analysis of the information and interpretation of data are performed taking into account the location of locality in the territory, the configuration of the communication network, time and seasonality. Through a simple analysis, we clearly notice that the localities have a similar evolution during a year according to the county they belong to. In particular, Brașov, Poiana Brașov and Predeal show a similar evolutionary curve, delineating the subsystem of Brașov, whereas Sinaia, Bușteni and Azuga similarly develop within the subsystem of Prahova. The graphical representation of the information within the two subsystems allows a more expressive analysis (fig. 1 and 2).

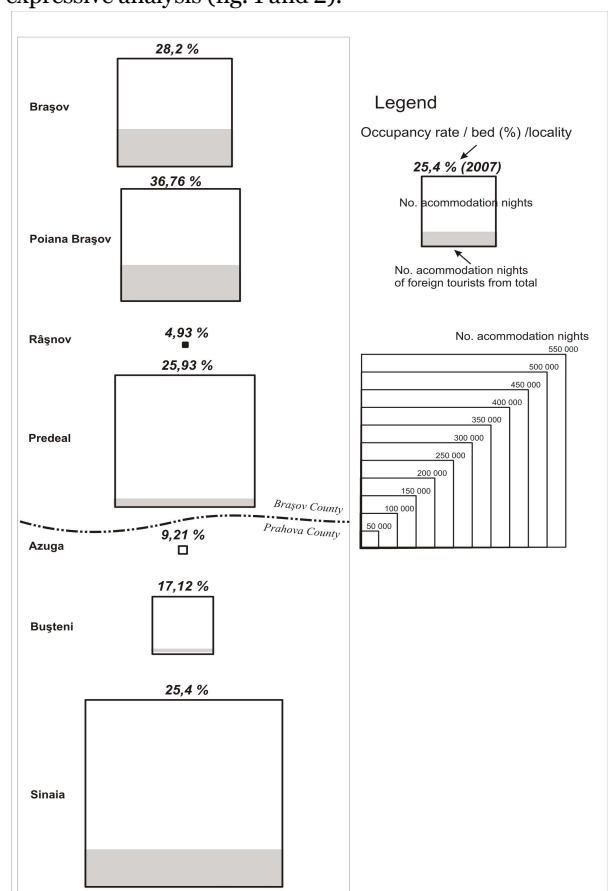


Fig. 1. Prahova Valley – Brașov area. The tourist flow calculated by the number of stays in 2007 [1].

The subsystem of Prahova. Its particular feature lays in the existence of a single important transportation axis, located along Prahova Valley. This communication system facilitates the access of tourists from the south area (Ploiești, Bucharest, etc.) to the tourist area but also to the central, the northern and the north-western areas of Romania.

According to the monthly number of stays (year 2007), the graphical representation of the three tourism resorts has allowed the following findings:

- all three resorts present similar configuration of the evolutionary trend of the monthly number of stays, which denotes a similar tourist profile, with the main maximum value registered in the summer season, two minimum values in March and November, as well as a secondary maximum in the December - February period;

- the most important characteristic results from

the comparison between the occupancy rate of the three resorts when the maximum values are recorded, showing once again the major dysfunctions related to the access of tourists from the south to these resorts. Although the accommodation offer as well as the tourist number are different in case of each of these resorts, the occupancy rate decreases as we go further north: Sinaia (35%) – Buşteni (29%) – Azuga (14.5% - M1, M2, M3);

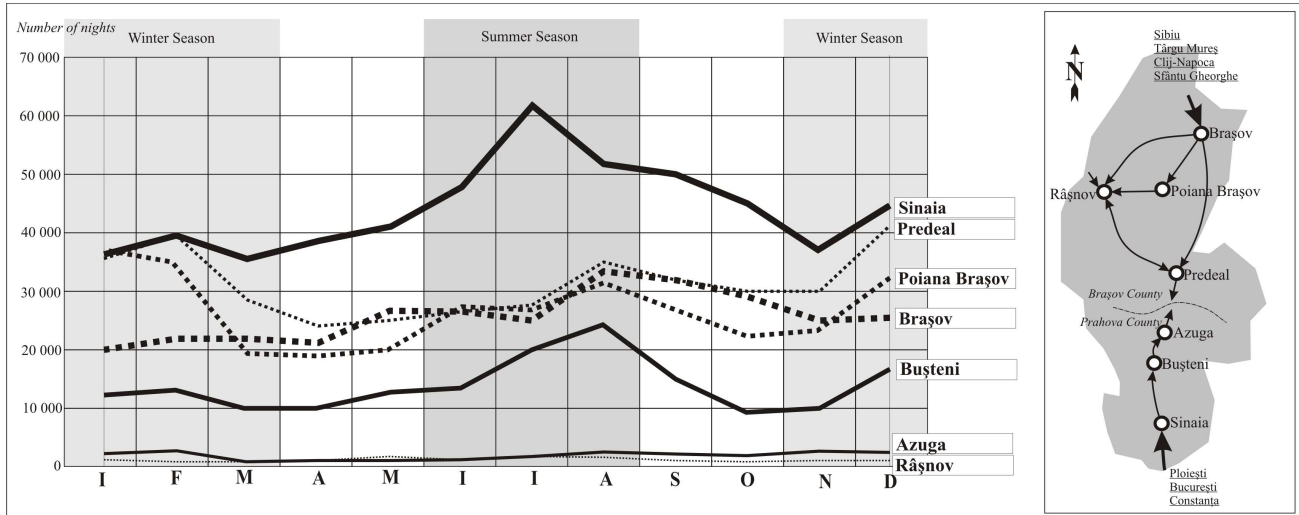


Fig. 2. Prahova Valley – Braşov area. The tourist flow evaluation according to the number of stays in 2007 [2].

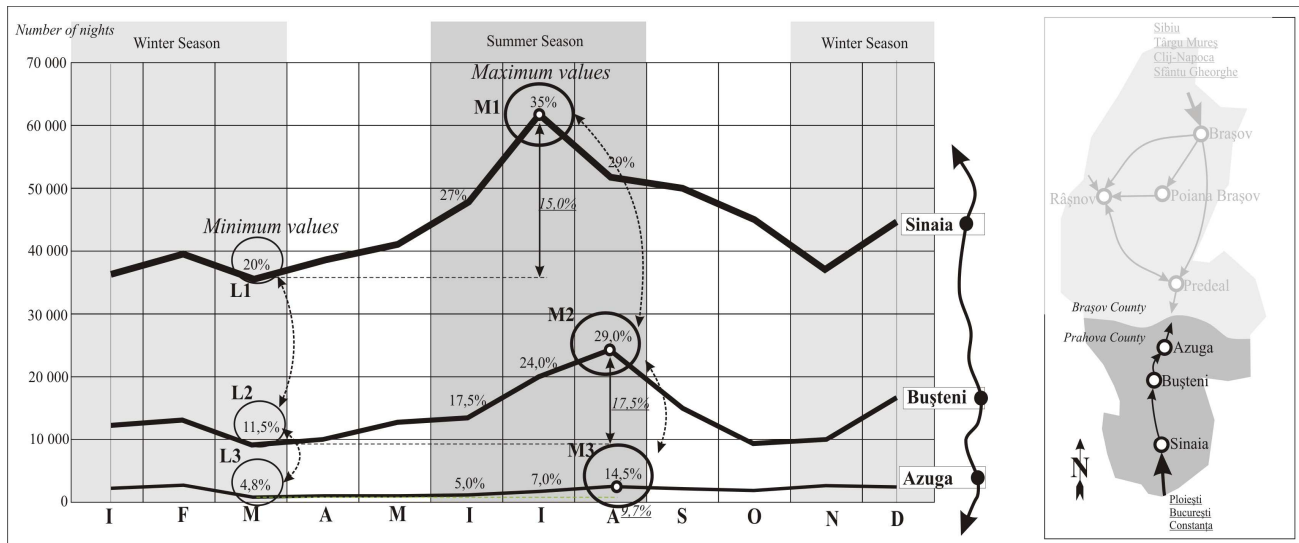


Fig. 3. Prahova subsystem. The tourist flow evaluation according to the monthly number of stays in 2007 [2].

- although the attention of local authorities is directed mainly to develop facilities for the practice of winter sports in this area, the main maximum value are registered during summer, which leads to the idea that they are complex tourism resorts, defined by a series of factors;

- the high values of occupancy rate registered in Sinaia resort is determined by the presence of an important brand (The Peleş Castle) and due to the new cable transport installations providing the easier access to the Bucegi Plateau. Also, we should not forget the fact that Sinaia is the first resort that tourists come by

when travelling from Bucharest, the Romanian capital city, to other tourist areas;

- the advantage of having access to the Bucegi Plateau could be employed by Buşteni resort as well, if the cable transport installation was modernised, presently being only able to support the transportation of a reduced number of people (100 persons/hour) thus determining long waiting periods;

- despite the subsystem of Braşov, the subsystem of Prahova registers higher fluctuations of the occupancy rate noticeable during short time intervals.

The subsystem of Brașov. It has an important advantage due to the better configuration of the communication network connecting the localities. Based on the graphical representation, we conclude the following:

- the resorts of Poiana Brașov and Predeal register the main maximum values of occupancy rate during the winter season, showing that they are winter sports resorts. In case of resorts included in the Prahova subsystem, the main maximum is recorded during the summer season and only a secondary maximum during the winter season. Not being recognized for winter sports, Brașov resort registers the lowest values of occupancy rate during the winter season;

- during the period of March - November (B1), all three destinations included in the Brașov subsystem host a similar number of tourists, even though their capacity to provide lodging is different. Thus, the occupancy rate registers different values (Poiana Brașov 42.0%, Brașov 35.0%, Predeal 28.5%), but showing a balanced distribution of tourists within the subsystem;

- Poiana Brașov is the most representative winter sports resort in both subsystems, with a 50% occupancy rate in January;

- Brașov city registers the lowest fluctuations during a year, not being affected by sudden modifications from one month to another;

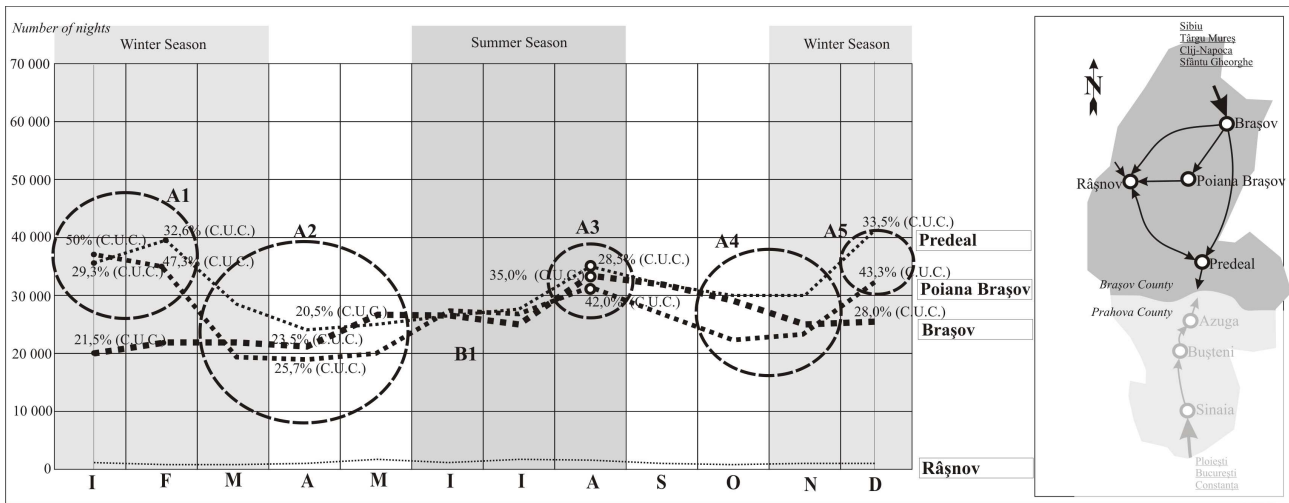


Fig. 4. Brașov subsystem. The tourist flow evaluation according to the number of stays in 2007 [2].

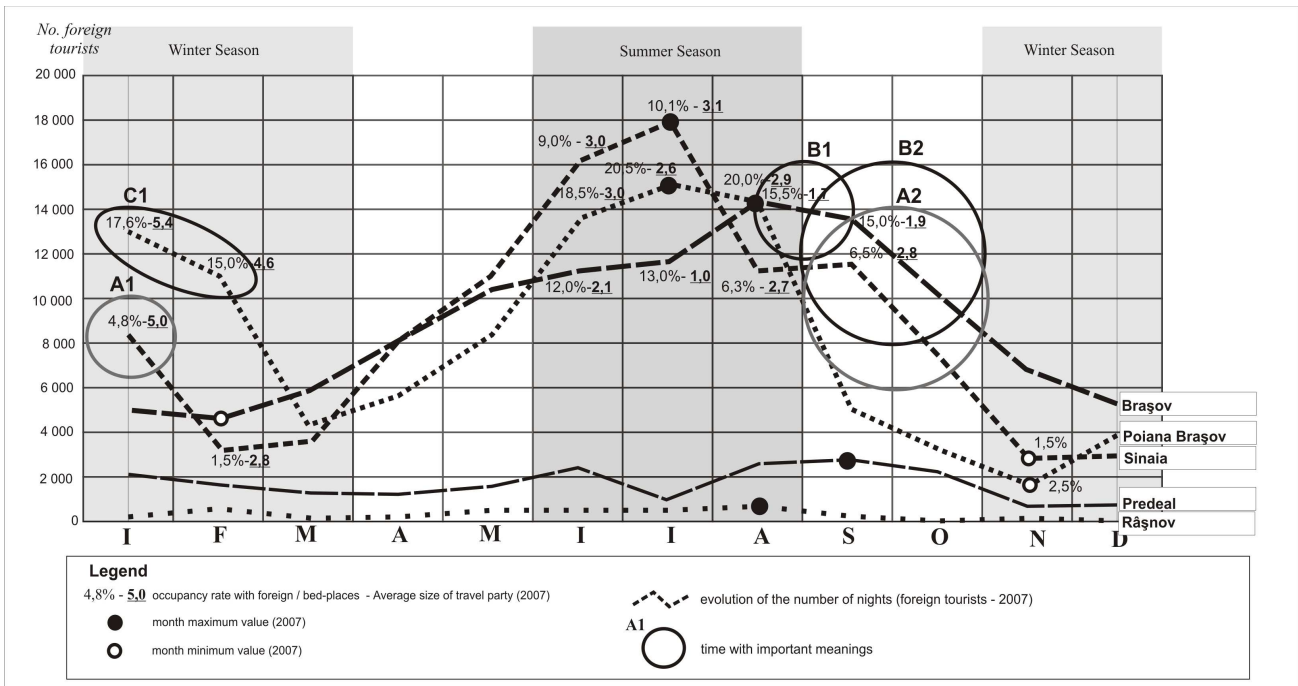


Fig. 5. Prahova Valley – Brașov area. The tourist flow evaluation according to the number of stays in 2007 [2].

c. *The evaluation of tourist flow according to the number of stays of foreign tourists.* Only the resorts

of Sinaia, Brașov and Poiana Brașov register significant values, followed by Predeal at quite a distance.

The other locations are not representative from this point of view, either due to the small number of foreign tourists (Buşteni), or due to insufficient lodging facilities (Azuga, Râşnov). Even so, the summer season is the most important for all three administrative units registering high values of the foreign tourist flow:

- in case of Sinaia the share of foreign tourists in the occupancy rate is of 9.0% in June, 10.1% in July, and 6.3% in August;

- in case of Braşov the share of foreign tourists in the occupancy rate is of 12.0% in June, 13.0% in July and 15.5% in August;

- in case of Poiana Braşov the share of foreign tourists in the occupancy rate is of 18.5% in June, 20.5% in July and 20.0% in August.

High number of the foreign tourists is recorded only in the acknowledged resorts (Braşov, Sinaia, Poiana Braşov), easily accessible in the transportation network; Predeal resort presents a similar trend to that of Braşov, but with much lower values, indicating influences imposed by the same factors; Sinaia does not represent a winter sports resort, fact proved by the high values of occupancy rate only in January (A1), correlated with the old rite traditional holidays of Christmas and New Year's Eve, the number of East-European foreign tourists decreasing very much in February; on the other hand, Poiana Braşov represents a winter sports destination for foreign tourists, because it records high values in January as well as in February, without a strict coincidence with old rite winter holidays (C1);

The high number of incoming foreign tourists in September and October (A2, B2) is very much influenced by the presence of anthropogenic tourist attractions in Braşov and Sinaia. The maximum values of the foreign tourists in Braşov is registered in August and September (B1), probably being a result of the combination between the Festival of "Cerbul de Aur" hold every year and the anthropogenic attractions of the city.

4. CONCLUSION

If the weekend tourism practiced by the Romanian tourists in the Prahova Valley - Braşov area is not characterized by seasonality, the destination is a definite brand favoured by the short distance to the tourist-generating area and the number of potential tourists exceeds the accommodation capacity, according to a simple calculation, the following conclusions can be drawn.

If the weekend represents 3 days from 7, by reassessing the current tourist flow during this time interval, the occupancy rate can reach a maximum value of 40%, which in practice could represent slightly over 30%. However, besides weekend tourism, we can consider other 4 weekdays, which are fully booked during holidays and other seasonality peaks, thus the

values occupancy rate during a year ranging between 20-30%, with a maximum of 36.76% in Poiana Braşov (2007). Under such conditions, we may ask for answers regarding a series of questions, such as:

How many persons coming from other areas use the uncertified secondary housing or the local population's housing as an accommodation space, especially at the weekends? Are the official statistics reality based? And, to what extent?

If the first two questions do not clarify the problem, then the third one refers exactly to the subject of the study:

What are the dysfunctions that impede the valuation of the tourism potential at a suitable level?

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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