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# The Rebirth of the Colibița Resort

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## ABSTRACT

The Colibița Depression is suggested to become a recreational resort area due to the increase in the number of lodging facilities in recent years on both sides of the Colibița Lake, but also thanks to the presence of several protected areas. After the former Colibița resort was flooded by the reservoir, tourism in the area recorded a decades-long drawback, and only several private weekend cottages were erected around the lake. Eventually, after the fall of the communist regime, the area surrounding the lake was purchased by individuals or entrepreneurs who gradually built up one side of the reservoir and erected several cottages on the other. Thus, the access to the body of water is widely restricted to tourists, except the cases where lodging and dining facilities were established. The local economy depends on the region's natural resources, forestry, livestock breeding, milk processing, and traditional handicraft as the main activities. Therefore, a stronger tourist infrastructure (through a planned development of the future resort) is required to boost economy and to revitalise tourism in the region.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The erection of a dam and the subsequent reservoir formation has a dramatic impact on every landscape, causing irreversible changes of the environment, infrastructure, local communities and economy. Even under such circumstances, the touristic and spa tradition of the old Colibița resort did not vanish but, after a decade-long drawback, it continued in form of a developing holiday village.

The water body attracted more and more private investors who erected cottages, week-end homes, or B&B facilities around the lake. Although the old function of the climate resort is no longer present, as tourism focuses on leisure activities, local authorities claim to have a project to regenerate the climate resort.

## 2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The present paper contains two main subjects of study: historical geography and tourism geography.

The first aims to show and explain the landscape changes from the first erected buildings in the area to the present-day tourist village bordering the reservoir from Colibița; the latter analyse how geography and tradition can preserve tourism activity in a location that suffered a dramatic landscape shift, from a small depression along a valley to a more than 3 km<sup>2</sup> wide water body.

The preliminary research consisted in gathering information about the history and geographical features of Colibița, using former research material, bibliographical sources, and various maps. By means of field research and satellite imagery we completed the present-day layout of the region, thus being able to draw several map sketches in temporal sequence showing the main stages of the changes in the resort's environment.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Colibița Reservoir - geographic features

The Colibița reservoir is situated on the Bistrița valley, between the Călimani Mts. to the south and the Bârgău Mts. in the north, at the intersection of the 47°10' N lat. parallel with the 24°54' E long. meridian. It fills a small depression behind a 92 m high asphalt-concrete core dam with a top length of 205 m and a base thickness of 210 m.

The water body itself has a mean volume of 90 million m<sup>3</sup> and a maximum depth (at the foot of the dam) of 85 meters. The water surface lies at a medium absolute altitude of 785 m and covers 3.14 km<sup>2</sup>, being 5.5 km long and a 1 km wide (fig. 1).

*Climate facts.* The main reason for the establishment of a resort in the region at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the climate with beneficial effects on persons suffering from lung diseases, mainly tuberculosis.

The Colibița depression has a mild, relaxing, low mountain climate, as the region is protected from high climate variations by its topography.

The ozone-rich, aerosolized air offers a tonic feel and is a very good physiological recovery factor (table 1, fig. 2).

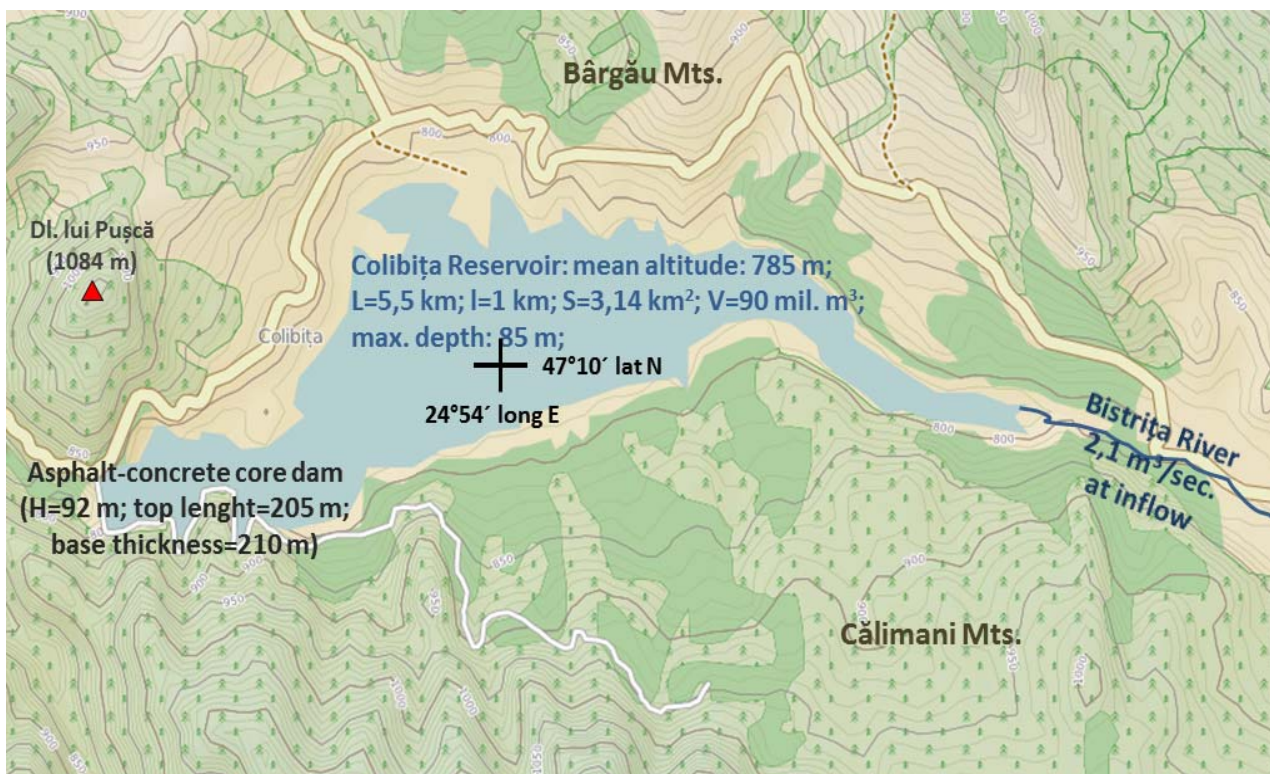


Fig. 1. Geographical features in the Colibița region.

Table 1. Climatic indicators in the Colibița Depression (after N. Ciangă, 1998).

Indicators	Values
Average year temp.	6,2°C
Sunshine duration	1800 h/year
Average cloudiness	6,5
Rainfall	850 mm/year
Days/year with snow pack	90
Avg. Snow pack thickness	40 – 50 cm
Thermic comfort* (July)	8 days
Skin bioclimatic stress	12 (low)
Pulmonary bio-climatic stress	25 (low)
Total bioclimatic stress	37 (low)
Tourism climatic index** (August)	57 (medium-high)
* 16,8°-20,6° equivalent temperature (at body level)	
** Tci=(S+T+5R)/5, where S=sunshine (h/year), T=mean year temp. (°C), R=daytime rainfall (h/year)	

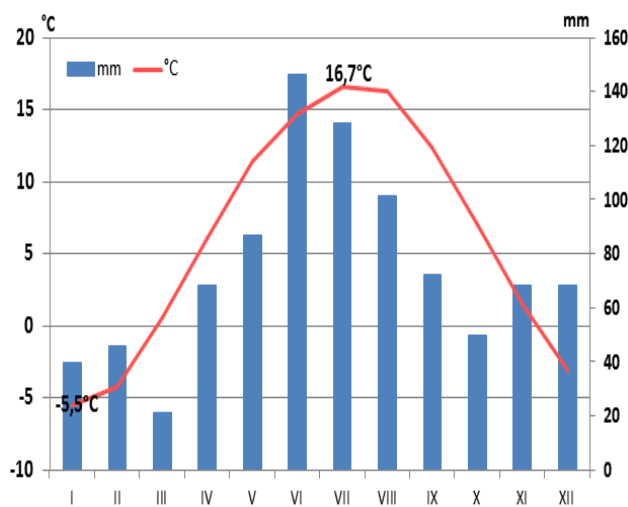


Fig. 2. The Climograph of the Colibița region.

### 3.2. Historical background

At first, this territory was a Crown Domain under the direct rule of the kings of the Hungarian Kingdom.

In 1317, the mountains in the region were donated to Count Bethlen, before becoming the inherited property of Count Apafy. In 1766, the communities in the area were declared free, but in 1783 the zone was militarized, and the land was bought from the former owners and offered to the militarized border communes, which were part of the Năsăud Border District.

Therefore, between 1787 and 1798 the land was re-parcelled to accommodate each settlement's population. After the dissolution of the Border District (1851), the indebted peasants sold their land to Count Kelemen, or to a forest company.

*The early period of the climate spa resort.* In 1887, the first tuberculosis sanatorium with 16 rooms was erected at Colibița, and in 1900 a second sanatorium was built, so that, by the year 1916, Colibița was recognised as a *climatic establishment*.

After the First World War, Colibița gained popularity and the region experienced further development.

Thus, in the year 1920 a narrow gauge railway was built from Bistrița Bârgăului to Colibița – Mița, functioning until 1970, and more treatment and leisure facilities were erected. In 1925 a third sanatorium is opened by a medical association from Cluj, and between 1926 and 1933 the *Caritatea* (Charity) Society from Cluj gradually bought the establishments and treat patients suffering of tuberculosis for free.

In 1930, the SKV (Transylvanian Carpathians Association) built a first mountain lodge.

*Tourism development until World War II.* Gradually, tourism activity at Colibița increased, and tourists almost tripled between 1935 and 1939 (table 2).

Table 2. The evolution of tourists at Colibița in the second half of the 1930's (after I. Goga, 1940, cited by I. Bica and I. Șteff, 2010).

Year	Tourists
1935	578
1936	700
1937	1329
1938	1640
1939	1680

*Student Camp and Spa Resort until dam rising.* After the Second World War, all the facilities had been nationalised, and were put under the authority of the Bistrița-Năsăud County Office for Tourism (Băca et al., 2011).

Thus, between 1945 and 1967, Colibița had functioned as a Student and Pioneer Camp.

From 1967 to 1976 (when the work at the dam started), Colibița re-became a climatic spa resort, offering 19 villas with rooms of 1–5 beds, accommodating from 144 patients (winter) to 386 patients (summer), and a tourist chalet with 40 places in rooms with 2 or 4 beds.

After 1976 (the start of the dam construction), the resort was evacuated, so that for approx. 15 years, the region remained largely unpopulated, except for the village of Mița, at the upper end of the future reservoir, where some tourist activity persisted, although to a much smaller extent, and only for leisure purposes.

The evolution of the region's landscape between 1971 and 2010 is shown in figure 3.

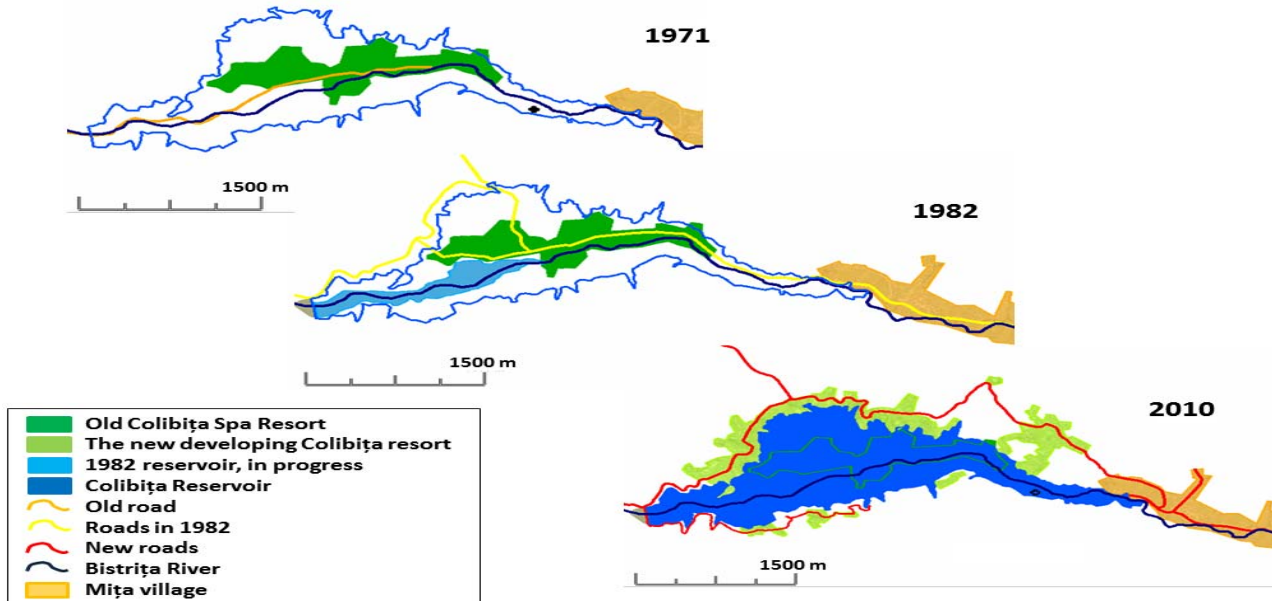


Fig. 3. Map sketch of landscape development in the Colibița region between 1971 and 2010.

### 3.3. Accommodation facilities

A total of 30 authorised lodging facilities offer 467 beds (table 3). Besides them, tens of individual housings can accommodate tourists. However, in the absence of specialised medical treatment facilities, all these lodging facilities serve only leisure purposes, without the possibility of offering special medical care for potential patients suffering of lung diseases.

Table 3. The structure of lodging facilities around the Colibița reservoir.

Accommodation type	Units	Beds
Boarding houses	11	140
Chalets	8	118
Villas	7	91
Hotels	2	90
Holiday cottages	2	28

### 3.4. The developing Colibița holiday resort

Although the reservoir is practically enclosed on its northern and eastern front, with signs of increasing buildings rising activities on the southern line, the new want-to-be resort offers no healthcare facilities, and therefore fails to take advantage of the region's main therapeutic factor, namely its climate. So it remains for the time being a simple holiday resort, even if political decision-makers expressed their intention to transform Colibița in a new climatic health-resort which should carry further its tradition.

Another possible problem for Colibița to regain its status as a climate resort is the fact that, even if locals tend to focus their activity at tourism, the population of the surrounding area is still occupied, at a large extent, in exploiting the local resources, mainly

forestry, livestock breeding, milk processing, and traditional handicraft. Attracting more of this workforce in the tourism business might prove a winning move, as tourism services are not yet at their best.

### 4. CONCLUSION

Even if tourism remains the central activity in the Colibița region, tourism planning is simply missing in the area of the reservoir. Therefore, the intervention of local and county authorities by means of regional development projects is imperative in order to shape a true resort around the reservoir. Furthermore, if the true touristic potential of Colibița is to be reached, planners have to implement special medical facilities for the treatment of lung diseases (mainly tuberculosis, but not only) in order to transform the present-day holiday village into a real climatic health resort.

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