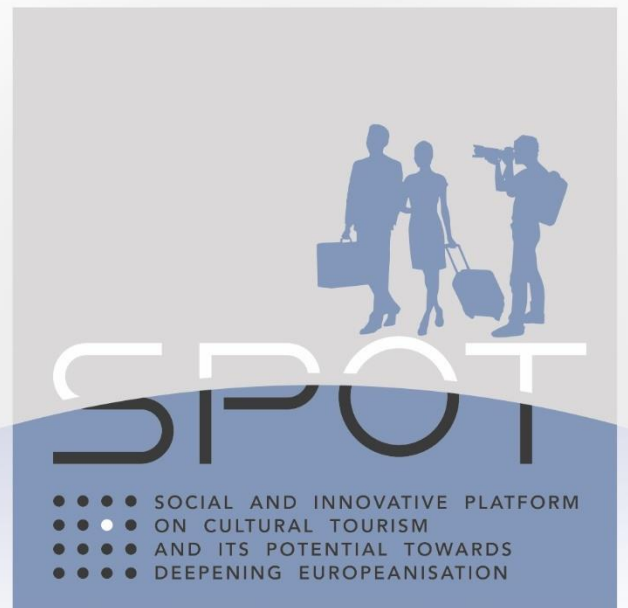


ROMANIA

POLICY BRIEF

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Buzău Carpathians and Subcarpathians

For regional and local policymakers

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Introduction

The study area is characterized by the complex topography of mountains, hills and depressions with specific physical-geographic characteristics, i.e., steep slopes, dense river network (Micu, Bălțeanu, 2011) and moderate temperate-continent climate, particularly relevant being the foehn winds (Grofu, Dragotă, 2013). As a result, the accessible relief, mild climate, the presence of mineral and hydrocarbon deposits, the mountain-plain contact propitious to intense trade relations, has encouraged the development of human activities since early times. Buzău Carpathians and Subcarpathians is one of the most populated geographic regions of Romania with a developed network of villages spreading along a dense river system with an average population density of 90 inh./km², raising up to 150 inh./km² along the main valleys (Buzău, Slănic, Râmnic) (Nancu, 2013).

The study-area is a predominantly rural region facing complex socio-economic and environmental challenges (Stoica, Munteanu, 2012). After multiple socio-economic transformations (following the implementation of Communist policy guidelines and of the post-1990 economic, social and political transition), the study-area, similar to all rural and urban areas in Romania, faced numerous difficulties which are reflected in the unbalance between the environmental components, the under development of the rural economy, finally reflected into wellbeing of the rural communities. During the last decades, the demographic and labour potential registered decreasing trends (Nancu, 2013, Stoica, Munteanu, 2012).



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Most of the active population is engaged in subsistence agriculture which generates low incomes, hiding some potential labour force that can be involved in various economic activities (Stoica, 2013). Tourist activity is one of them, but the labour potential is not capitalized through adequate qualification and entrepreneurial education. In some cases, the development of tourist sites has revitalized the countryside (Nancu, 2013), enhancing the social and economic cohesion. The development of study-area should be tackled while taking into consideration the local natural and human resources valorised through the tourist activity and the preservation of traditional customs and identity items.

The tourism potential and the attraction sights are important to understand the richness and diversity of the elements linked to Cultural Tourism, as they were perceived by the residents. In the following lines, the main objectives/sites/activities of the natural and anthropic potential are listed at local administrative units level: (A) *the natural tourism potential* represented by the mud volcanoes (in Berca), Ulmetu trovants (in Bozioru), Live Fires, Mociaru Lake, Salt Mountain and Cave (all in Lopătari), Cașoca Valley and Waterfall (in Siriu), Bottomless Lake, Meledic Salt Plateau, Salt Cave (all in Mânzălești). In the study area, Buzău Valley offers opportunities for rafting and kayaking and the relief favours outdoor activities such as trekking, hiking, climbing, mountain biking, etc.; (B) *the anthropic tourist potential* which are grouped into religious sites (Ciolanu Monastery in Tisău, Rătești and Berca monasteries in Berca), cave religious settlements (in Aluniș village in Colți and in Nucu village from Bozioru commune); museums (*Colți Amber Collection*, so called "*The Amber Museum Colți*", which belongs to the *Buzau County Museum - <https://www.muzeubuzau.ro/?lang=en&venue=colectia-de-chihlimbar-colti>, "*Vasile Voiculescu*" Memorial House in Pârscov, <https://www.muzeubuzau.ro/?lang=en&venue=casa-memoriala-vasile-voiculescu-parscov>, *The Museum of Shapes* - in Bozioru, <https://www.facebook.com/MuzeulFormelor/>, *Museum "7 story places"* - in Lopătari, <https://www.facebook.com/7locuridepoveste>), The Time of Man Museum - in Mânzălești, <https://www.facebook.com/MuzeulTimpulOmului/>); festivals (i.e., the Commune Day Festivals organized by almost each settlement, the Pietroasele "Tămâioasa" Feast, the most famous aromatic wine produced in Pietroasle village (Merei commune), the Sausage Festival in Pleșcoi (Berca commune); sculpture camps in Măgura - <https://www.muzeubuzau.ro/?lang=en&venue=tabara-de-sculptura-de-la-magura>) and Naeni, as the wine tasting, religious activities ("hram"), Cislău Stud, etc. The recently declared (April 2022) UNESCO Geopark "Buzău Land" (<https://tinutulbuzaului.org/>) supports the sustainable development, civic involvement, education, economy and environmental protection through different actions and activities among the promotion of cultural and human patrimonies.*



Fig. 1. Pietroasa Viticulture and Winemaking Research and Development Station

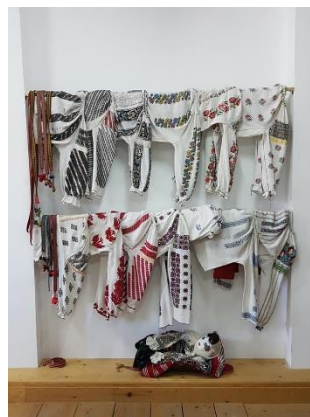


Fig. 2. "7 Locuri de Poveste" Museum, Lopătari



Fig. 3. Aluniș Cave Churches



Features related to the Survey applied to tourists. Communities with poor road infrastructure, where agriculture is the predominant economic activity, as the Buzău Carpathians and Subcarpathians area, are gradually returning to the attention of tourists looking for an unpolluted and quiet environment, traditional food made from organic vegetables, away from urban agglomerations. Within the Romanian study-area, the cultural tourist attractions are beginning to be known by an increasing number of visitors. During the survey, tourists from the nearby areas (under 250 km), aged between 30-50 years, having as main motivation, along with gastronomy and local traditions, visiting cultural attractions were mainly identified. These are tourists who return to the destinations and always find them attractive through new cultural events and local traditions that deepen their knowledge. Even if the infrastructure inside the area is not very developed, this shortage is compensated by the scenery of the natural environment, the tranquillity and the existing cultural heritage that gradually reveals its value.

Features related to the Survey applied to residents: The profile of the residents whose perception on cultural tourism was quizzed is outlined by the following characteristics: living in rural areas, middle aged (with an aging trend), high school graduates with a low level of income, with tertiary occupation but with agriculture as “background” activity. The study highlights that their socio-economic and demographic profile is an important factor in modelling the ways in which the cultural tourism attractions within the Buzău Carpathians and Subcarpathians are perceived. Thus, the residents recognized cultural tourism as a mixture of the natural and cultural dimensions of local reality, but the greatest cultural importance has the religious sites/events, local traditions/folklore, cultural heritage and historical sites and buildings and the cultural routes. The residents are well connected to the local context and feel their own inhabited environment as being a whole where the cultural tourism objectives are (or should be) integrated into the socio-economic and historic background. They also have a positive perception about the impact that an increase of cultural tourism has on the area (e.g., infrastructure, jobs, and quality of life). At personal level, the cultural tourism impacts show the potential job creation. To valorise the cultural tourism attractions within the study-area, the residents could play the role of informal advisers and advertisers. These two roles are significantly important as the lack of signalling/information regarding tourist objectives/sites and events, is high. These roles are important, but they are capitalized only on a personal level and from a kind of debt as a local, who is proud of his own place and he is happy to share its beauty with others, who are interested (as the tourists are).

Features related to the Survey applied to businesses: The overall businesses’ perspective on cultural tourism in the area shows that the largest share of respondents referred to the role of national or regional authorities (government) in the development of tourism in terms of helping businesses and supporting investments. Also, significant shares pinpoint the necessity to increase the number of tourists and/or the regulation of tourist flows. These statements indicate that cultural tourism in the area requires serious investments to attract as many tourists as possible. Local businesses do not have enough power to grow and sustain themselves, so top-down institutional support is needed. At the same time, the interviewees agreed to a large extent that the cultural tourism potential of the region is very high, so there is hope for the improvement of the tourist offer through investments and logistics.



Fig. 4. Gabiotti Pleșcoi Store



Fig. 5. Ciolanu Monastery



Fig. 6. Mud Vulcanoes



1. Evidence and Analysis

Within the Romanian case-study, the **gaps** in the current state and in the development of cultural tourism field are related to the following aspects: **Infrastructure, Business environment, Human resources in the field of cultural tourism and Tourism potential.**

1.1. Infrastructure

- the poor road infrastructure - with negative direct impact on the level of isolation, many rural communities being outside tourist circuits due to the poor accessibility;
- the poor infrastructure of public utilities (i.e., gas, drinking water and sewage networks) in the rural areas;
- the infrastructure for hiking, the forest roads and the mountain paths are unmarked and not properly maintained;
- the low development of tourism infrastructure;
- the lack of shops for tourists (souvenirs, maps, guides, leaflets) or the inappropriate type of shops (with „globalised,, products or manufactured in other countries, having no elements/specificities with local traditions);
- the existence of old and non-authentic tourist infrastructure such as accommodation units.

The issues linked with the poor different types of infrastructure are further aggravated by several risks, such as: the low capacity of the population and small business to take specific costs of operation and maintenance of infrastructure rehabilitation/construction, due to the limited financial and material possibilities; and the non-sustainable development of some rural areas, as a result of opting for an urbanized model of development (i.e., big and non-specific accommodation structures) to the detriment of the rural authenticity.

1.2. Business environment

- the unstable fiscal and legislative environment;
- the poor valorisation of the economic opportunities (i.e., the tourism activity based on the capitalisation of local cultural tourism potential) because of the less informed and insufficient motivated rural population;
- the limited investments, caused by the lack of local financial resources and by the lack of long-term mechanisms for the development of tourism activities;
- the low degree of association and cooperation of SMEs;
- the poor competitiveness of companies.

1.3. Human resources in the field of cultural tourism

- the poor cooperation between actors in the tourism market;
- the low levels of education and also, in tourism specialisations and training of the rural population have direct and significant effects on their real possibilities and capabilities to develop and maintain activity in the field of tourism;
- the lack of training-counselling centres or consulting centres for those interested in carrying out activities in the field of tourism industry;
- migration of skilled labour force to other areas of the country or other countries;
- the improper training and capitalising on the labour force through its integration programs.



1.4. Tourism potential

- the lack of cooperation between settlements for the development of tourism industry in the study-area;
- the degradation of the local cultural heritage (i.e., the art and architecture monuments);
- the tendency towards the loss or degradation of traditions and customs in the rural area;
- the “cultural pollution”;
- the lack of some complex tourist products that combine traditions, local heritage and innovation.

All these issues have policy implications, and the local and regional stakeholders should take in view them when they propose and promote the directions/trends of the development policy in the cultural tourism sector. Also, the academic actors should have as base of their policy recommendations these gaps above mentioned.

2. Policy Implications and Recommendations

The following recommendations can be formulated from the above analysis:

- **Policy Recommendation 1: Promoting the relevant Representative Business Organisations** such as **(a) the Chambers of Commerce** and **(b) Local Action Groups**.

(a) the Chambers of Commerce = Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Buzău County which is created to represent, defend and support the interests of its members and of the business community of Buzău in relation with the public authorities and with the bodies in the country and abroad. Their mission is to be the main promoter of local, regional and national economic development and to provide specialized and professional services, to current and future traders, in a competent manner, fair and efficient. The Chamber offers services related to Events for information and business meetings (ex: the Forum Food and beverage for tourism) and Fairs and exhibitions.

(b) Local Action Groups (LAGs) = "Buzău Hills"/"Colinele Buzăului" (*Berca, Bozioru, Brăești, Cănești, Cozieni, Măgura, Odăile, Pârscov, Scorțoasa, Tisău, Unguriu*), Local Action Group (LAG) "Slănic Valley"/"Valea Slănicului" (*Beceni, Cernătești, Chiliile, Lopătari, Mânzălești, Săpoca, Vernești, Vintilă-Vodă*), Local Action Group (LAG) "The Wine Road"/"Drumul Vinului" (*Breaza, Merei, Năeni, Pietroasele*), Local Action Group (LAG) "Buzău Valley"/"Valea Buzăului" (*Cislău, Viperești, Calvinii, Cătina, Chojdu, Pătârlagele, Pănătău, Gura Teghii*). They are private-public partnerships whose purpose is to support the potential beneficiaries (private entrepreneurs, mayors, associations, etc.) from the territory covered by the LAGs to access non-reimbursable European funds, available through the National Rural Development Program (PNDR) to finance some projects focused on different types of investments and activities (included the non-agricultural ones, such the tourism etc.).

- **Policy Recommendation 2: The cooperation between local administration and NGOs, between all local players.** This cooperation capitalizes the good practice since cultural tourism encouraged the engagement of community members within the study-area (the involvement of locals - e.g., craftsmen or performers of traditional music) in cultural events with local and even regional importance. This dialogue will increase the possibilities for investment and local business innovation to make cultural tourism more attractive. The collaboration will facilitate the networking and the transferability of “good practices” examples between stakeholders.

- **Policy Recommendation 3: Elaborating a general strategy focused on the ways of developing Cultural tourism in the area.** This strategy should be based on a common vision that is owned, agreed upon and shared by the community, is placed-based, authentic and realistic, always being underlined that the local level/places are most important in terms of cultural tourism development.

- **Policy Recommendation 4: Elaborating a strategy focused especially on the preservation of the uniqueness/otherness of the place.** This strategy should be based on cultural heritage or/and local traditions. The idea of “otherness” is mirrored by those elements of local culture that are distinctive and different from other areas, creating the personality of study-area. Among them, we could mention: - *the unicity* within the Romania (or even within Europe – the case of Sărata Monteoru oil mine) of several cultural attraction, such as the religious cave settlements from Aluniș and Nucu villages, and natural tourist attractions (but, according to the opinion of locals, authorities/stakeholders and tourists are integrated into the place culture/place identity) such as the Mud Volcanoes, Salt plateau of Meledic, Colți amber (called “rumanit”, after the name of Romania, being older than the Baltic amber and having a distinctive and unique black-green colour); - *the mythical elements*: Luana’s Land, the mythical place located in Buzău Mountains, between Colți and Buzioru, where other unique and mythic attractions exists, such the Old ladies/Trovants from Ulmet (Bozioru), the stone which grow, and amber, named “the Earth’s tears” or “the Sun’s drops”;

- **Policy Recommendation 5: Promoting the involvement of residents (locals) in different local and/or regional events.** This will rise the interests of locals for cultural tourism, and will added real value to these events (through the inclusion of the “local dimension”). This involvement could be way of local volunteers, but even more useful by employing “locals”, which means local businesses, local vendors and artists.

- **Policy Recommendation 6: Raising the awareness of cultural tourism as an educational tool for communities’ development and for regional and local development.**

- **Policy Recommendation 7: Increasing the digital promotion and facilitation of information about Cultural Tourism to improve the visibility of cultural tourism attractions and promote social inclusion.**



Project Identity

Project name	Social and innovative Platform on Cultural Tourism and its potential towards deepening Europeanisation (SPOT)
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