

## **TOURISM AND POLYCENTRIC DEVELOPMENT BASED ON HEALTH AND RECREATIONAL TOURISM SUPPLY**

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**Abstract:** This article outlined a polycentric development scenario through tourism within the balneary area of Bacău County and the rural-mountain area of Cluj County. Using research methods like analysis, comparison, cartographic, graphic techniques, the results concluded that within Bacău's balneary area, Moineşti could specialise in climatotherapy, Târgu Ocna in saline microclimate, and Slănic Moldova in hydrotherapy; whereas within Cluj's rural-mountain area, Muntele Băişorii should continue to rely on winter sports tourism, Beliş-Fântânele on water-based tourism, and Răchiţele on nature-based tourism. Thus, the participation of each centre to the general supply enabled the pursued tourist-functional cooperation, following the principles of polycentric development.

**Key words:** polycentricity, compatibility, Moineşti, Băişoara, cooperation

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Many regions of the world face uneven development, whether this situation is encountered at a local level or at a national one, such as in the case of all former communist countries within which the development process was apparently misunderstood and the attention was focused on a centralised development, rather than on a integrated one. The lack of an effective planning led to polarisation phenomenon, that solely encouraged the evolution of the urban centres that had already held influence on adjacent areas. Therefore, economic flows were only oriented towards polarising centres and, once again, the rest of territory did not receive the adequate amount of attention. However, the specialised literature came up with a solution for combating the

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territory disparities, defining it as polycentric development, that is opposed to monocentricity. Targeting urban centres, polycentricity aims at territorial cohesion and economic performance improving through establishment of functional urban cooperation, taking into account the territory spreading and socio-economic relations between those settlements. Thus, the actual study attempts to outline a new concept both related to tourism and polycentricity, in order to elaborate development scenarios for each case study. For achieving this goal, several objectives were engaged. Firstly, a series of concepts like polycentric development, tourist cluster and system theory were taken into consideration by adopting a theoretical analysis of those within which both common attributes and specificities were revealed.

Subsequently, a detailed look into the situation of tourist heritage, tourism infrastructure and tourism related services belonging to the examined settlements/resorts was presented, aiming to highlight the common and authentic aspects of each case study. Taking into account the tourism phenomenon analysis, a series of proposals were made to support tourist cooperation regarding tourist planning and the interrelations between accommodation units, catering units, travel agencies, tourist information centres, transport services, tourist attraction events, and promotion activities that concern the destinations' triad of each case study. We decided to center our attention on polycentric development theory on this paper because it is seen as one of the most realistic and promising solutions for solving the the lack of diversified tourist offer among Romanian resorts. In case of the absence of a diversified tourism supply that is not capable to satisfy tourist needs, the polycentric development could be seen as a solution, if each settlement specialised itself from tourism point of view, in order to materialise a tourist cooperation and to initiate a general supply that comprised the sub-supplies of several centres, characterised by service diversity, hence being revealed the importance of discussed subject. Moreover, collaboration in the area of tourism based on polycentric development is an under researched topic, reason for why this study has been designed in such a way to establish the necessary conditions for marketing all destinations into a single one.

The same situation can be extrapolated on the settlements/resorts taken into study, which presents two development scenarios, an urban one for three localities situated in the eastern part of Romania, more precisely in the balneary area of Bacău County; and a rural one, for three other territorial-administrative units located in the northwestern part of Romania, in the mountain area of Cluj County.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The polycentricity concept has its beginning in 1933, when Walter Christaller formulated the Central Place Theory. The next step was the appearance of development and growth poles theory, outlined by François Perroux in 1995. The polycentric development concept took shape thanks to scholars like Higgings (1963), Hanssen (1967), A. Kuklinski (1970), Hermanssen (1972), Faludi & Waterhout (2002), Faludi (2005), Hague & Kirk (2003). The polycentricity particularly occurs in those cases where certain urban settlements are willing to cooperate in order to beat the competition, through a functional relation, relying on their prevailing functions, their strengths and their specific elements (Beaujeu-Garnier & Chabot, 1971).

This attempt can be possible only in urban balanced development conditions, which can be considered, more or less, relative synonymous to territorial development (Krister & Meijers, 2006). In general, the polycentric development is favourable when two or more urban centres hold certain functions that complement each other (Olsson & Cars, 2011). The system concept was elaborated in 1950 by Ludwing von Bertalanffy, being defined as an ensemble formed by several components that are in interaction.

The next research step referred to the system as a set of specific objects through their attributes, but characterised by an interaction relationship (Hall & Fagen, 1956), which were associated with a structural functionalism (Parsons, 1951). In 1973, the system concept received the characteristic of feed-back, considering that a system development consisted of several stages of receiving and releasing substance (Forrester, 1973) and in 1981, the main features of a system were established: each element has an effect on the performance of whole system, each element is affected by at least one other element in the system, all possible subgroups of elements also have the first two properties (Ackoff, 1981). The most basic definition of system concept refers to a group of interacting components that conserves an identifiable set of relations, "whose sum of components along with their relations, conserving some identifiable set of relations to other entities" (Macy, 1991, p. 72). An eloquent definition which holds useful key words for outlining the proposed concept, associates the system with a functional ensemble which is composed of different elements, but whose relational character move them toward a common goal (Ianoş, 2000). The cluster theory was developed by Porter in 1990, although the concept of agglomerations economies - local industry concentrations was elaborated by Marshall, 70 years earlier, in 1920. Initially, clusters represented groups of companies within an industry inside a geographical area (Swann & Prevezzer, 1996), where their concentration worked as a synergy producer, through their geographical proximity and their interdependence (Rosenfeld, 1997). These companies coincide with competitive industries and institutions (Feser, 1998) that act in a particular activity sector, whose interrelationships empowers the competitive advantage (Porter, 1994, 1998).

In 1999 the innovative clusters appeared, being associated with a large number of interrelated industries that operate in the same market with the same characteristics (Simmie & Sennet, 1999). Clusters are synonymous to competitiveness, given that they contribute to innovative processes, facilitate relations with other institutions, canalising knowledge and information need for technology development (Poter, 2000, 2003).

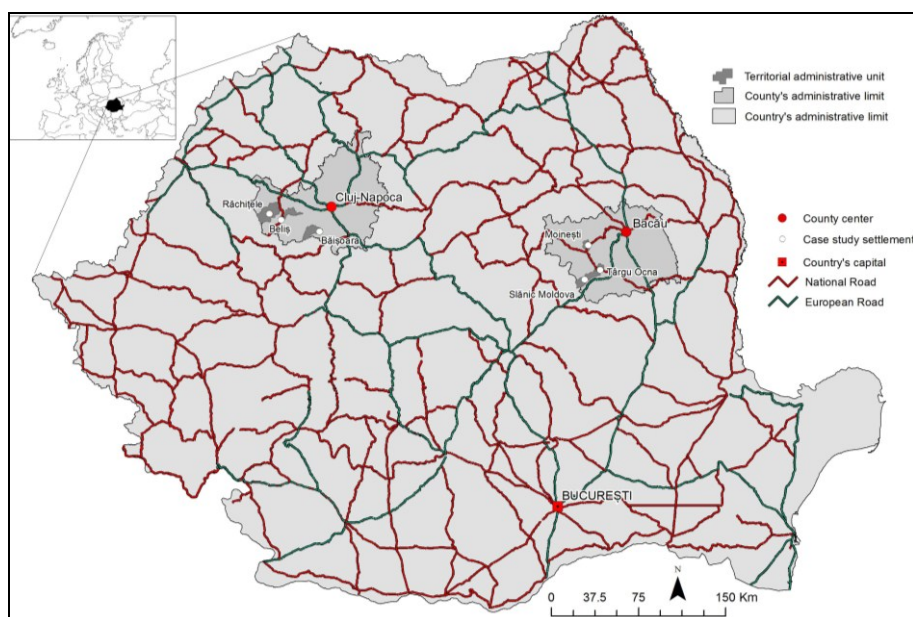
A more complete definition denotes cluster as a closed or interconnected group of companies, service providers, associated institutions in a certain domain, linked through analogy and complementarity (Porter, 2003). The cluster theory is based on two characteristics: *agglomeration* (geographic concentration of an industry or related activities) (Gordon & McCann, 2000), and *interconnection* (competitive/cooperative relationship which is established between local actors) (Simmie, 2004). Later on, the cluster concept is associated with system theory, being defined as an interconnected system of companies and institutions whose values are larger than the sum of their components (Flowers & Easterling, 2006). Concerning the literature that implied these case study areas, in comparison with the balneary area of Bacău County, the mountain area of Cluj County benefited by many studies that gave attention to resources of relief (Ciorogariu, 2009), climate (Gaceu, 2009) and their role in the practice of touristic activities.

## **THEORY AND METHODOLOGY**

Moineşti Municipality, Târgu Ocna and Slănic Moldova health resorts are situated in the western part of Bacău County, inside Subcarpathian zone. The tourism supply of each destination is based on the curative type because all of them possess resources with high therapeutic values. Furthermore Moineşti Municipality is also recognised for Tristan Tzara, for the Jewish spirit and for the oil extraction. On the other hand, while Târgu Ocna is also known for its salt mine (the deepest salt church in Europe), Slănic Moldova won its notoriety due to the presence of 21 mineral water springs and SPA Sanatorium services. An important detail that needs to be discussed in order to implement a polycentric development through tourism is the transportation connection that within

this case study is only ensured by National Roads (figure 1). The second case study, which also targets a triple-pole proposal, focuses on Cluj's rural-mountain area, situated in the central-southwestern part of the county. From a physical-geographical point of view, Băișoara Mountain Resort, Beliș-Fântânele Resort, and Răchițele village are located in the northeastern part of Apuseni Mountains (Western Carpathians), more precisely, in Muntele Mare Massif, Gilău Mountains, and Vlădeasa Mountains.

Territorial-administratively speaking, they are incorporated within three communes (Băișoara, Râșca, Mărgău), where although other localities hold the residence function, none of them attracts so many tourists as Băișoara Mountain, Beliș-Fântânele, or Răchițele do, due to their tourism supply relying on the recreational type. What made Băișoara Mountain famous was the homonymous tourist resort, mainly appreciated for the possibilities of practicing winter sports. Favourable conditions determined the emergence of sports competitions and events, not only ski-related, but also running, mountain biking and off-road competitions (Răcășan, 2015).



**Figure 1.** Country level contextualization of case study settlements

On the other hand, Beliș-Fântânele Resort became popular first because its location, on the shores of the homonymous water storage reservoir (Fântânele Lake), secondly due to the therapeutic benefits of the climate that mediated achievement of the „balneoclimateric resort” status (Ciangă, 2007), and thirdly because of the recreational activities and sports, mostly water-based (e.g. nautical sports, fishing). Răchițele village owes its notoriety to the homonymous waterfall (also known as Bride's Veil), measuring 50 metres in height (Pop, 2007), tall enough to climb on it during the winter season and to organise a National Championship of Ice Climbing in situ. It is worth mentioning the fact that every tourist resource that the three localities are valued for, namely Muntele Mare Massif, Fântânele Lake and Răchițele Waterfall, have all been declared protected natural areas of county interest, encouraging environmentally friendly activities such as hiking and trekking, cyclotourism, sightseeing. The transportation connection is enabled on both County and Commune Roads. Referring to the analysed concepts, the polycentric development is clearly

defined by the ESPON project as the situation in which two or more cities can complement each other, functionally speaking, by providing citizens and companies in their conjoined hinterlands access to urban functions that would usually only be offered by higher-ranking cities; cities should cooperate by joining existing assets, but not just any type of assets, but complementary ones (Nordic Centre for Spatial Development, 2005). Related examples are given by several studies, such as *“POLYCE- Metropolisation and Polycentric Development in Central Europe”*, elaborated by ESPON in 2012, which brings into question five European capitals: Bratislava, Budapest, Ljubljana, Prague and Vienna. The essential elements worth mentioning are the measures taken for polycentric development deployment, which influence tourism as well: the development and protection of recreational areas' quality, the improvement of public transport, the expansion of airports, the improvement of suburban railway service, the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, the improvement of tourism promotion techniques.

The European Metropolitan Network Institute, in *„A Strategic Knowledge and Research Agenda on Polycentric Metropolitan Areas”* study, examines six metropolitan areas: Linköping-Norrköping (Sweden), Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot (Poland), Leipzig-Halle-Dresden (Germany), Rotterdam-The Hague (Holland), Porto (Portugal), Milan (Italy). The main objectives were related to the main challenges that appeared within monocentric-polycentric transition and to the measures that concern the materialisation of the urban polycentric structure. Another study that discusses the polycentric development issue is the *„Tri-City Region”* which investigates the case of a famous academic centre in Poland, where the three cities - Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot – are situated. Although, Gdańsk tends to detach itself, from an economic and demographic point of view, Gdynia remains a strong competitor, whereas Sopot distinguishes itself from the rest through its tourist value, provided by its status of traditional health resort.

Another study examines the metropolitan region of Mitteldeutschland (Germany), integrating Dresden, Leipzig, Halle, Chemnitz and Zwickau cities. In this case, the impediment to polycentric development is represented by the fact that all these urban settlements are more in a competition than in a cooperation process. Another metropolitan region that has favourable conditions for polycentric development is Rotterdam--The Hague. Being located at short distance one from another, Rotterdam and The Hague cooperate especially by integrating public transportation systems (networks). Besides transportation infrastructure development measures, the attention also focused on economy (economic activities diversification and cooperation encouragement between Rotterdam harbour and The Hague enterprises), on science and innovation (universities collaboration), on culture and sports (Rotterdam supports The Hague to become the European Cultural Capital in 2018 and The Hague assists Rotterdam to become the host of Olympic Games in 2028). An eloquent study made by ESPON brings into question the metropolitan zone of Lyon and Rhone-Alps region, which aims to reunite all urban settlements around sectors of excellence through the cooperation of famous companies. Thereby both complementarity and collaboration are encouraged, a relevant example being Lyon-Grenoble team that complement each other within bio and nano technology (*The case for agglomeration economies in Europe*).

On the subject of clusters, most studies focus on the manufacturing industry, despite the growth of the service sector. In a typical tourism cluster the quality of a visitor's experience depends on the primary attraction but also on the quality and efficiency of complementary businesses such as hotels, restaurants, shopping outlets, and transportation facilities (Poter, 1998). Similar to usual clusters, the tourism ones are characterised by interrelated companies, promoting joint actions, agglomeration formation (Jackson & Murphy, 2002), and they represent a geographical concentration of

interconnected institutions and companies in tourism activities (Capone, 2004). In other words, tourist clusters are differentiated sets of tourist attractions which are concentrated in a certain geographic area equipped with qualitative services and facilities, collective efficiency, social and political cohesion, network companies management that generate competitive and comparative benefits (Beni, 2003).

The tourist services should include static elements (accommodation, catering), mobility elements (transportation, travel agencies, rent-a-car services), dynamic elements (recreational, cultural services). However, a tourism cluster is associated with tourist product and destination (Costa, 2005). The objective of a tourism cluster is to bring together companies that usually act alone, in order to create a successful tourism product in a certain region. Besides, in order to develop a tourism cluster requires the existence of competitive companies, favorable geographic location, natural potential, cultural traditions, gastronomy, favorable hospitality, various partners among which formal and informal links are established (Novelli et al., 2006). Nevertheless, an efficient tourism cluster also depends on the participation of other actors such as; consulting firms, entire transportation infrastructure etc. (Brown & Geddes, 2007).

A proper definition that semantically approaches the proposed concept states that tourism clusters are geographic concentration of companies and institutions interconnected in tourism activities, whose value as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts, so that they can produce synergy, through their geographical proximity and their interdependence (Flower & Easterling, 2006). An illustrative Romanian example is represented by Carpathian Tourism Cluster Romania which is an independent network of regional and national tourism stakeholders in Romania. It is the first supra-regional tourism cluster of national interest that includes among target group and members, tourism development associations and related NGOs, local and national authorities, tour-operators, travel agencies, tourism guides, event agencies, accommodation providers, suppliers of the tourism industry, leisure and entertainment industry, transportation companies, service and consulting companies, universities, training institutes ([www.tourism-cluster-romania.com](http://www.tourism-cluster-romania.com)). Regarding the methodology that mediated the achievement of our research objectives, several methods were employed, among which are worth noting analysis, comparison, observation, as well as graphic and cartographic methods. The analysis method was mainly engaged within the theoretical framework establishment, from presenting both evolution and common features of the examined terms, to outlining a definition and characteristics for the proposed new concept of polycentric development through tourism.

Furthermore, this method also served for data procurement and interpretation process related to both urban and rural triple-pole destination case studies, where the transportation connection situation (links and distances) along with the tourist resources and infrastructure elements were equally analysed. The comparison method focused more on revealing the results of the two case studies, illustrating quantitative and qualitative aspects of the natural and anthropic tourist resources, elements of secondary tourism supply and tourist flows. Both common and specific features of the level of tourism development were examined inside each settlement in order to establish tourist hierarchies and to formulate possible proposals and recommendations, on the basis of the current reality, aiming to obtain a balanced tourism development inside each study area.

In order to achieve a better perspective of tourism present and future status, graphic and cartographic representations were equally used. While the graphic method materialised into tables and charts edited in Microsoft Excel 2011, the cartographic method employed ArcGis 9.3 instrument within the maps elaboration process. Thus, the contextualisation of the triple-pole destination proposals within the borders of Bacău and

Cluj counties was acquired. Thus, by means of the employed research methods, which brought their contribution to the identification of specific tourist elements and proposals for each examined destination, a general tourism supply integrating three compatible sub-supplies was finally configured. Worth noting that each sub-supply was carefully selected to participate with different tourism products, at least in terms of tourist resources, so that each of them could enter the tourism market, without having its existence threatened by unloyal competition. Considering the dominant type of tourism unfolded within each destination, on the subject of polycentric development through tourism, the balneary area of Bacău County should definitely rely on a general health supply specialised in a particular therapeutic factor (local bioclimate, salt mine, mineral water spring), whereas the rural-mountain area of Cluj County should count on a general recreational supply valuing specific activities tributary to winter sports tourism, water-based tourism, and nature-based tourism.

Thus, through these research methods was aimed to create a general tourist supply at the level of each study case, where was tried to form a compatibility inside tourist phenomenon components.. Subsequently, specific elements of the tourism potential of each settlement were identified or proposed in order to create a compatible supply of a case study. Each urban or rural center must participate in general supply level with different primary tourism products. Otherwise, one of them will fail because two similar supplies will not survive inside a tourist triade presented in each case study. Taking into account the dominant type of tourism, for ensuring an efficient polycentric development by tourism, it is necessary for each settlement to specialize in a particular therapeutic factor in the first case study's situation (local bioclimate, salt mine, mineral water spring) or in a specific activity belonging to one tourism type, in case of the secondary settlements triad proposed (watersports, winter sports, nature based activities).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Concept definition**

The proposed concept refers to an ensemble of two or more settlements that through connectivity, ensured by transport infrastructure, complementarity, compatibility of individual tourism heritage, and through cooperation between main stakeholders could form a general tourism supply composed of different tourist contributions of all settlements involved, in order to market them into a single destination.

### **Features clarifications**

A notable feature of the concept of polycentric development through tourism concept concerns the existence of at least two settlements/resorts, which are characterised by a relatively high tourist value, a uniform distribution across a territory and a good accessibility. Tourism phenomenon must be seen as one of the most prolific economic branches in present and future, and for an efficient polycentric development to be achieved, only small differences in both distances and travel times between the examined settlements/resorts are allowed. Consequently, the tourists' options of benefiting from the services of a destination or another, should not be conditioned by these variables, or by a low level of transportation accessibility. All settlements/resorts, or at least most of them, possess similar tourist attractiveness levels and benefit from specific conditions of tourism development. As in the previous case, settlements/resorts whose tourist attractiveness values display major differences, must be avoided if a proper unfolding of polycentric development process is aimed. Though, minor inadvertences could and should be eliminated – through proposal sessions for instance – so that tourists who choose destinations solely based on the quality of tourist services continue doing it without having to compromise. All settlements / resorts taken into

account form a general tourism supply based on a single type of tourism (health tourism, recreational tourism etc), but in order to display a pertinent case study the sub-supplies must be different. For example, if we were to imagine a scenario within which the general supply of three settlements relies on event tourism, then each of the examined settlements should specialise in one of the following forms: cultural, scientific, or sports events. In order to complement each other, all settlements/resorts involved in a polycentric development process should equally bring their contribution to the configuration of the general tourism supply, by means of their tourist services.

For instance, if a triple-pole health resort integrates destinations specialised in climatotherapy, salt mine microclimate therapy, and hydrotherapy, the infrastructure elements and related services should be numerous enough in order to provide a diversified experience (e.g. recreational activities, tourist events) for a tourist patient who seeks treatment. All tourist destinations involved within a polycentric development tourism process act like a system whose interacting parts aim to create and develop a general tourism supply. These destinations are not only interrelated, sharing common goals, but they are marketed into a single destination. In this train of thought, the informational materials promote the entire area where these settlements/resorts are located, presenting them as a unitary concept of destination, not separately.

Other advantages of the implementation of polycentric tourism development retrospects to the fact that during a single stay one could benefit from tourist services in all the settlement/resort. Exemplifying the case of a health resort, the tourist-patient could take advantage of several treatment methods belonging to a destination, or could simply use one type of treatment, depending on the medical prescription, and enjoy the tourist facilities provided by another destination. In another train of thoughts the distance factor should be the last concern while travelling between settlements/resorts. Thus, given a general tourism supply integrating several destinations, whose tourist services appeal to a tourist, he should feel free to travel between destinations, without worrying about comfort and time spent on his way from a place to another. In order to build an operational general supply, several interrelations must be established between the elements of the tourism infrastructure belonging to each settlement/resort. The interaction process between the triple-pole destinations within the two case studies is not achieved on the basis of natural and anthropic attractions, but on the basis of the tourism material base related components such as accommodation, catering, recreational, treatment, information and promotion units, thus aiming for a functional polycentric development gained through tourism.

#### **Interrelations assignation between elements of tourist infrastructure**

Acknowledging the fact that interrelationship is the key to a sustainable polycentric tourism development, all elements belonging to the material and technical base of tourism should be interrelated, not only inside a settlement but also in-between destinations. In these circumstances, all types of accommodation units (hotels, villas, guesthouses, campings, chalets, bungalows etc.) should be interconnected, holding and providing information about the status of each structure integrated within the destination, so that tourists continue to benefit from services that the accommodation unit finds itself in a position of impossibility to offer. The most efficient solution for ensuring the connection between all accommodation units situated in the addressed settlements/resorts is to implement a software program that links them all together to form a network (Gaman, 2014). Through this software, each accommodation unit is supposed to be aware of the global situation regarding the occupancy rate, number of clean rooms, number of tourists, personal information about the clients (age, nationality etc.), current and future booking situation, and other general information about other units (comfort level, number and type



of rooms, number of beds in each room) along with details concerning catering services, recreational facilities, auxiliary services (conference room, laundry facilities) and other useful information that tourist might need (parking places, wireless etc.). According to the interrelationship principle, accommodation units that cannot provide services that other units can, are expected to recommend those accommodation structures that can satisfy the tourist's needs, regardless of their location (in the same or in other co-destination), as long as they are compatible with the tourists preferences.

Other type of interrelations should be established between travel agencies and tourist information centres, that should constantly provide for mutual promotion. For example, a travel agency situated in Slănic Moldova should be able to provide informational and promotional materials related to all co-destinations (general characteristics, natural and athropic tourist attractions, accommodation, catering, recreational, treatment base) (Gaman, 2014). Beyond classic services, each travel agency should hold a specialised staff, from reception officer to tourist guide and entertainer, willing to offer assistance not only inside one destination, but within all settlements/resorts involved in the tourist cooperation team.

Interrelationships can also be developed between travel agencies and local accommodation units (e.g. reception officers, members of the travel agency staff escorting tourist to the accommodation units), as well as between travel agencies and transportation companies (e.g. tourist guides working for travel agencies being hired by transportation companies on routes between destinations). Concurrently, tourist information centres in all tourist destinations should provide information regarding the tourist attractions and routes, accommodation units, catering units, treatment units, tourist events and other services that a settlement/resort can offer, either in a verbal form, or in a written one (tourist maps and guidebooks of each destination), preferably edited in several international languages, shared for free. Regarding transportation connection, which is definitely the most important element in polycentric development, the global trend that affects these services by enhancing their role within tourist product gets to reflect in the collaboration between settlements/resorts engaged in a polycentric tourism development process. Thus, a functional transportation system is required in order to allow tourists to travel from a destination to another whenever they are willing to do it. In this line, links between destinations must be ensured, by minibuses and buses (especially during summer when a higher number of tourists exists) at least at 30 minutes intervals, to effectively direct tourist flows and to keep a fluency of tourist's stay (Gaman, 2014).

Concerning events endowed with tourist attractiveness and related connections, the most effective measure should consider installing display panels in public locations in order to communicate essential information such as type of event (cultural, sports, scientific), significance (local, national, international), periodicity (daily/monthly) (Gaman, 2014). Prior this action a common calendar of events should be outlined so that no event hosted by a destination involved in a polycentric development process would take place at the same time an international or national one unfolds.

Given the fact that promotional activities address both tourists and scientists (in the case of a health resort), the information provided should be consequently presented. Thus, for doctors, medical science associations, researchers from related fields of study, the promotional materials should contain scientific information regarding the therapeutic values of different natural sources such as mineral water springs, local bioclimate, salt mine microclimate and other natural resources; whereas for non-academic tourists, they should incorporate less-specialised information, using common language and focusing on tourist attractions and activities (Gaman, 2014). Irrespective of their form, contents and users, all promotional materials should follow the "all in one" principle and should be published in

national and international languages such as English, French, German, Spanish, Norwegian, and Swedish. They should definitely include posters, brochures, video presentations, tourist guide books, tourist maps, albums. On the other hand, local authorities should participate at national and international conferences, medical reunions (health resorts case), and they should also regularly organise local conferences where international medical personalities, travel agencies, foreign journalists would be invited (Gaman, 2014). Taking everything into account, both features and aforementioned interrelationships that concern the polycentric tourism development process, two case studies are about to be illustrated, presenting an urban triple-pole destination and a rural one, within which a proper collaboration within settlements/resorts was targeted, on the basis of the elements of the tourism supply corroborated with several related future proposals aiming to reduce the current qualitative and quantitative disparities of tourism.

#### **Moinești - Târgu Ocna - Slănic Moldova case study**

On the strength of the main features related to tourism sector, transport connection, and territorial distribution of destinations in the balneary area of Bacău County (figure 2), the idea of developing a general tourism supply based on the contribution of all settlements/resorts involved, encountered favourable circumstances. Hence, by having in common the possession of mineral water springs, the three destinations within this case study brings into question health tourism, as a dominant tourism type. While Târgu Ocna detaches itself through the saline equipped with a treatment base, Slănic Moldova stands out due to the internationally recognised therapeutic value of mineral water springs. Implementing the proposed concept, would imply that each destination creates a health-based supply relying on different therapeutic factors.

Concurrently, although the mineral water springs from Moinești are recommended for the treatment of numerous affections, due to their high concentration of sulphur, compared to the mineral water springs in Slănic Moldova, they are not competitive enough to stand out. Therefore, Moinești should create a health supply based on climatotherapy, the more so as both the hypsometric level and the local bioclimate provide proper conditions. Regarding the proposals for the balneary area of Bacău, most of them refer to the tourism infrastructure, where the largest gaps exist. According to a comparative quantitative analysis, Slănic Moldova has a leading position within both accommodation and catering sector, while within the treatment one.

Târgu Ocna comes first because of the two units. Despite the fact that Moinești Municipality holds the largest number of recreational units, Târgu Ocna has a higher level of notoriety—conferred by supplementary swimming pools with saltwater and freshwater, along with the recreational base inside the salt mine. In the same train of thought Slănic Moldova's recreational infrastructure also incorporates a ski slope, but its notoriety is quite low due to high seasonality level. Moinești Municipality hosts the largest number of tourist events, generated by: settlement's status of first locality where oil extraction was documentary attested, Tristan Tzara's local spirit, local crafts, rallies and bike competitions supported by an optimal territory planning, local winter customs and traditions.

#### **Beliș-Fântânele - Băișoara Mountain Zone - Răchițele case study**

The central core of the three tourism supplies, which brought fame to Băișoara Mountain, Beliș-Fântânele and Răchițele (figure 3), was the primary resource: mountain, water storage reservoir, and waterfall. At first glimpse, they do not seem to have something in common, but in terms of tourist valorisation, sports tourism, adventure tourism, and even ecotourism – as subcomponents of the general recreational supply – could be practiced within destinations that have this kind of attractive resources. Not to mention the fact that all three of them gained the status of protected natural area of county interest, which represents a further guarantee of their value, at least from a landscape perspective.



resources with sports, three tourist-related categories emerge: winter-based activities in Băișoara Mountain Resort, water-based activities in Beliș-Fântânele Resort, and nature-based activities in Răchițele village. Although predictable, the locality-activity relationship becomes more nuanced when the variable called „season” interferes. Hence, during winter months, Băișoara should focalise on downhill skiing (alpine skiing) and related competitions due to the fact that the area benefits from favourable natural support in terms of relief and climate, which also led to the creation of both ski runs and resort. Conversely, Beliș’s contribution to the general tourism supply, in the same hibernal-recreational manner, should concern cross-country skiing (nordic skiing) and associated contests. By contrast, Răchițele could put itself on the map of sports supply through an extreme winter activity that depends on the waterfall’s freezing process: ice climbing. For the rest of the year, the general tourism supply, which joins together the three destination from Cluj County’s mountain sector, could consider other sports that would eventually customise each of the three component sub-supplies.

In order to implement the above-mentioned proposals of tourism sub-supplies as part of a general one which would valorise the attractive potential from the rural-mountain area of Cluj County, the current situation of the related infrastructure must be reviewed as well. As shown below, Băișoara holds supremacy in every aspect of the material and technical base of tourism, being constantly followed by Răchițele, referred to as Mărgău, the name of the commune where this village is situated. One can observe that this pattern in which Băișoara Mountain Resort always comes first in line and Beliș-Fântânele Resort (located in Râșca commune) always comes last, applies inside each tourism sector. As for the accommodation, Băișoara stands out through a prevailing guesthouses supply (seconded by bungalows), similar to Mărgău whose structure is, however, individualised by the presence of hostels, and different from Râșca’s supply where the predominant accomodation units are chalets.

### **Proposals**

First proposal for balneary area of Bacău County reffers to the specialisation of Moinești Municipality on climatotherapy in order to complement the general health tourism supply within this case study. The main reason in shaping this proposal is represented by the existence of hills bioclimate, the only one known for lacking contraindications, recommended for both healthy and sick people. In this line, the related objectives dealt with the identification of suitable areas for climatotherapy, followed by the planning process of paths, terraces, solariums that enables terrain cures, aerotherapy, and heliotherapy. The second proposal concerns the diversification of the accommodation sector in Moinești Municipality, where hotels are missing.

The next proposal is centred upon recreational base, the element that has the largest influence on the diversity level of a tourist stay, targeting all destinations from this case study. In these circumstances, not only the planning of multipurpose halls that allow different sports activities (football, handball, basketball, table tennis, field tennis, billiards etc) is recommended, but also the planning of outdoor units. The most favourable situation coincides with the largest level of activities diversification. The fourth proposal recommends the planning of specialised catering units providing specific food and beverage, health catering units, in all destinations. This can be very usefull especially for those patient tourists who have medical prescription and need to combine their treatment based on natural factors with dietary restrictions. An evidence of cooperation, compatibility and interdependence between Moinești, Târgu Ocna and Slănic Moldova is a five-day program of a pacient-tourist’s usual stay that includes a chronological progress in a logical meaning of medical and tourist services from each destination. Also noteworthy is the fact that although Moinești is specialised on climatotherapy, Târgu

Ocna on salt mine microclimate therapy and Slănic Moldova on hydrotherapy, the tourism supply must be composed of other types of treatment too. For example, besides climatotherapy, Moinești can offer hydrotherapy as well, even though the quality level would not be the same as the one that Slănic Moldova provides.

Regarding the rural-mountain area of Cluj County, as concerns the accommodation sector, although all localities would require additional lodging places, the situation in Beliș-Fântânele (Râșca commune) appears to be needing more attention. However, the 15 accommodation units in Beliș commune should provide enough rooms for tourists who spend their weekend or holiday in Beliș-Fântânele. Therefore a more suitable proposal should aim to adapt the accommodation's structural and functional features to the specifics of the tourism sub-supply. This proposal anticipates the following one, related to the recreational infrastructure within which equipment rental centres are regarded. In this line, the three examined localities should provide the possibility of renting ski and snowboard equipment, depending on the dominant winter sport activity unfolded during the hibernal season; both nautical and fishing equipment (in Beliș-Fântânele); off-road and bikes rentals, for hard activities (e.g. mountain biking, enduro etc.) and for soft ones (i.e. cyclotourism).

The aforementioned link to the accommodation refers to another proposal which requires all lodging units to provide a minimal equipment for the prevailing activity in the area, such as fishing accessories in the case of Beliș-Fântânele Resort. In order to fully enjoy their experience, tourists should be constantly informed of new opportunities to spend their vacation, inside and outside the destination, reason for why, the existence of a tourist information centre in each of the three locations is a must. Beside information, these centres should be permanently aware of the existing number of tourists who spend the night inside the resorts and village, not only for establishing the occupancy rate of each accommodation unit, but also to facilitate the booking process for the new arrivals which seek for accommodation. The other proposal that aims to improve the quality of the conditions in which sports are practiced involves reviewing the current status of all marked trails and paths in order to make them more visible or to complement them where needed.

Yet another important proposal refers to the events' calendar belonging to Băișoara, Beliș-Fântânele, and Răchițele, which should be updated accordingly to the last proposals within the recreational tourism supply. Given the fact that most activities already benefit from an event, more precisely from a sports competition, what they all should do is to focus on promotional campaigns and to invest more in the marketing policy in order to attract more tourists and participants (Răcășan, 2015). Worth noting that this is only an example of how a tourism product of medium-length time interval could be created, although more complex and long-lasting ones, could be proposed, such as thematic camps, as well as less complicated ones, in terms of activities, within which tourists spend a weekend enjoying one or maximum two soft sports. In spite of being specialised in one tourism form or another, each destination integrates within its general supply, the possibility of practicing complementary activities. Some of them are common to all resorts/villages, such as hiking and trekking, cyclotourism, sightseeing and photo-tours, rural tourism, event tourism, or winter sports that do not require special infrastructure; and others join together the two resorts or the village and one resort.

The former situation reveals the link between Beliș-Fântânele and Băișoara Mountain whose therapeutic effect induced by climatic conditions put them on the map of climateric resorts. Furthermore, both of them host events such as winter sports competitions inside or within their surroundings which bring into prominence skiing and/or sledging (i.e. Dog Sled Racing Contest in Beliș), and cultural manifestations such as traditional celebrations (Răcășan, 2015). The latter case is illustrated by Răchițele and Băișoara Mountain Resort,

which share running competitions and winter sports that depend on the existing natural tourist resources (ski slopes in Băișoara and Bride's Veil Waterfall in Răchitele) and special equipment; along with local cultural events linked to the rural lifestyle and traditions.

## CONCLUSIONS

The polycentric development through tourism is useful in tourism development practice, given that each destination should adapt its tourism supply to the preferences of modern tourists who look for continuity, diversity and quality services inside of their stay. This applies even more to the developing countries where the low number of destinations is a minor problem compared to the situation of the tourism infrastructure, which needs serious improvements, and tourist services, which require diversification in order to fully satisfy the tourist. Thereby, the proposed concept promotes tourist cooperation between two or more destinations in order to create a general tourism supply, that would eventually integrate the sub-supplies of each co-destination.

A prerequisite for creating a general tourism supply consists in a pre-existing compatibility between a destination's tourist services, which lies in the specificity of each destination's sub-supply, ensuring a functional tourist cooperation. Antithetically, the tourist coherence disappears because when two settlements/resorts offer identic services or services that do not belong to a common tourism type, one destination will end by facing a considerable recession, influenced by the services quality level previously offered.

When polycentric development through tourism becomes functional, the quality, quantity, diversity, interrelations and inter-dependence of tourist services are stimulated.

This study aimed to highlight the fact that polycentric development through tourism could be implemented both in urban and rural areas. Although the first case study proves that urban areas hold an enormous potential of qualitative and diversified services making them more suitable for this type of development, its implementation in rural areas can also turn into a success in the presence of all aforementioned conditions.

Certainly, a general tourism supply can be based on all tourism types and forms, but the present study attempted to reveal development scenarios for health and recreational (sports) tourism, being quite complicated to ensure a compatibility between destinations. The health tourism needs natural therapeutic factors so polycentric development through tourism depends both on the location and compatibility of these natural factors. On the other hand, recreational tourism also depends on a destination's tourist resources which, similar to the previous situation, are quite hard to find jointly in the circumstances under which a certain compatibility between settlements/resorts that are located near each other is being discussed.

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