

A research on mandatory and supplementary criteria for a local tourist resort. Case study: Albac, Romania

Adina-Maria JURJ^{1*}

¹ Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

* Correspondence to: Adina-Maria Jurj, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. E-mail: adina_jurj88@yahoo.com.

©2013 University of Suceava and GEOREVIEW. All rights reserved.
doi: 10.4316/GEOREVIEW.2013.23.2.76



Article history

Received: April 2013

Received in revised form: May 2013

Accepted: June 2013

Available online: September 2013

ABSTRACT: The aim of the present study is to analyze the situation of Albac tourist resort (Law No. 801/2005), and to verify the legitimacy of his status, by analyzing the reality in the field and comparing it with existing legislation in the field current (Law No. 852/2008 for approving the rules and criteria for certification of tourist resorts, published in Official Gazette no. 613 of 20 August 2008). In order to accomplish this purpose, we investigated the situation by questioning the owners of accommodation units, and by direct observations on the spot.

KEY WORDS: resort, criteria, questionnaires, investigation, accommodation units, managers

1. Introduction

Geographically, Albac commune is located in the Apuseni Mountains, and, in administrative terms, in the N-W of Alba county, Romania. Lithological appearance and structure of the relief is mountainous, but altitudes, in most cases, are less than 1000 m high, which include the resort in the Carpathian hills area.

Albac commune holds in the present a privileged status of local resort, and appears simultaneously on the list of communes developed in terms of tourism, which means there is allowed only modernization and expansion of tourist accommodation.

The commune was mentioned for the first time in 1773, as the Great River (Arieşul Mare) and had initially an impressive surface, by including the upstream settlements. Over time, the area gradually decreased, reaching its current size due to population growth and creation of new communes (P.U.G. Albac, 2005).

The main tourist attractions are represented, on the one hand, by **natural touristic potential**, such as Albac Gorge, a natural complex reservation, **hydro tourist potential**, nautical tourism proving particularly attractive to a mountainous area that seems to prioritize other forms of tourism, and for which there are necessary special facilities that are required for landing on the banks of the river as well as their canoes, kayaks and appropriate boats for leisure purposes, **biogeographic potential** (rare species of plants and animals of cynegetic interest), **climate potential** represented by mountain tonic bioclimate and sedative bioclimate, with real benefits in mountainous cure that "is recommended for healthy persons due to the thermal responsiveness

which takes effect on exposure to air and sun, depending on the thermal comfort condition“ (Ciangă, 2007).

Anthropic tourist potential is mainly represented by churches and monasteries of wood and stone, monuments, Memorial Museum "Horea", and the folk civilization and traditional ethos.

2. Methods

The research started by consulting various reference titles regarding the studied area, as well as documents held by local authorities (General Urban Plan of Albac, 2005; Monograph of Albac resort, 2010 etc.), the main information we were looking for being on the first hand the natural and anthropic tourist valences, and on the other hand those of urban basic amenities, structure of accommodation units, and other elements of the technical-material interest.

An important part of the study is the investigation on the spot, through which we intended to see how managers of accommodation units see the reality of their living place, aimed at capturing how the actives in tourism-the owners/managers of tourist units, capture birthplace' reality.

Personal assessment, resulting from direct observation on the issues taken in consideration was another important element, with significant impact on the development of the final conclusions.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Managers' accommodation units vision upon Albac resort status through the mandatory criteria

Managers' vision on Albac as a resort was regarded as an essential element in the effort to objectively assess the degree to which the tourist resort of local interest Albac meets the criteria required for certification under Law 852/2008. For this purpose, a field survey was carried out directly, face to face, initially considering the application of questionnaires to the all 14 accommodation units of the resort; therefore we intended to investigate every single unit.

At the end of the investigation we succeeded to cover 78.57% of the target, that means 11 structures. The remaining 3 accommodation units (representing 21.43% of the sample) represented non-responses. However, given the fact that we covered more than 3/4 of the sample set, the share of accommodation units is considered sufficient to ensure a high degree of representativeness and hence the relevance of the study. Causes of non-responses have resided either in subjects' reluctance to respond or impossibility to be contacted.

Subjects interrogated had an average age of 54 years, and concerning education level, 78% had graduated college. In terms of distribution by gender, women hold 55% of the total, so the situation is relatively balanced, although tourism is recognized as an area with female predilection. However, the investigation also revealed that tourism is the main source of income for 45% of respondents, while more than half of the managers of tourist accommodation units obtain most of their income from other activities.

The questionnaire developed on the basis of legislation above-mentioned contains closed questions with answers such as Yes/No, but also choice answers version, involving the use of a

scale with values from 1 to 5, in order to stimulate subjects to evaluate more accurately the fulfillment of the criteria for certification.

3.1.1. The natural frame, natural factors, healing factors and environmental quality

The first criteria group takes in consideration the natural elements that define support base. More than half of the managers of the accommodation units consider that the degree of pollution of the resort is very small (55%), while 27% think there is no question of pollution. However, 18% believe that the resort suffers from high levels of pollution.

Most respondent (82%) are not aware of the existence of studies and documents attesting the presence and the value of natural healing factors (tonic mountain bioclimate and sedative climate), and of the natural reservation of Albac Gorge, while 18% have notions about the existence of such documents, even if they are not familiar with their content.

Requested to give marks for natural cure factors in the broader context of the overall natural environment, 37% of respondents believe that the value is large, 27% assign an average, 27% believe that the value is rather small, and only 9% assigned a high value, and naturally, special qualities of the natural environment. Given that 73% qualify the natural factors as having a medium value, as the value of the natural medium, high and very high, they tend to associate to the natural factors a medium to high tourist value.

Because the natural healing factors of Albac resort are basically bioclimatic, we considered Albac Gorge Nature Reservation, which participates positively to ensure a healthy bioclimate through forest vegetation, responsible by atmospheric ionization. We try to identify whether respondents know the existence of environmental protection perimeters of the Reservation. From the survey results that 55% were not aware of the reservation as such, and by default neither the existence of protective perimeters, while 45% know about the reservation and the fact that it is environmentally protected.

3.1.2. Access roads to/in resort

Communication infrastructure that facilitates access to and within the resort was estimated in terms of quality by reporting firstly to the quality of roads, to their modernization level, and secondly, to the quality of public transport. The results of the analysis of the respondents' answers are alarming: nearly half of them qualified roads as of a very poor quality (46%) and 27% as poor quality. Those who declared themselves satisfied represent 18% of the total, and 9% rated quality roads as good. Therefore 73% consider that road infrastructure is poor, compared to 27% who consider it satisfactory or even good.

As regards public transport, 36% of respondents believe that it has good quality, 37% complain of its very poor quality, 9% give poor rating, 9% are satisfied and the rest of 9% believe that public transport services has a very good quality. With a share of 46% in favour of poor and very poor on the one hand, and with a share of 54% in favour of a satisfactory, good or very good quality on the other hand, the quality of public transport is superior to the road infrastructure, as respondents were rather satisfied.

From the above data it appears that the main problem are the roads, less transportation, which of course is not just the resort Albac case, but of the most rural areas of the country. Romania is known for the efforts it leads to build a sustainable and effective communication infrastructure.

3.1.3. *Urban utilities*

In terms of resort endowment with first-aid point and means of transport for medical emergencies, 82% of respondents know about the existence of a first-aid point, while 18% do not know about its existence, and, as concern means of transport, 73% deny their existence, while 27% say that there are such means. Asked if they have called or not the first-aid point and/or transport for medical emergencies, 45% responded positively, from which 60% qualified their services as very good and 40% as good. As about the existence of a pharmacy, all subjects responded positively, 90% of them considering its services as good or very good and 10% as satisfactory.

More than half (55%) of the subjects were not aware of any promenade spaces, while 45% of them consider that the resort benefits from such facilities. Those who have responded positively, 40% appreciate that they have a good quality, while the rest of the subjects said that their capacity is satisfactory, low, or very good, the proportion of these three versions being equal to 20%.

Regarding the public water supply system, 73% of the subjects said that their accommodation unit is connected to it, and 27% that their unit are not connected. More than half (55%) have their own water supply system, including those not connected to the public system, and 45% do not have their own water supply system, but are connected to the public system.

Centralized sewerage system is considered non-operating by 73% of the respondents, only 27% said that it works normally. In contrast to the public water supply system, to which there are connected more than 2/3 of the accommodation units analyzed to the public drainage system there are connected about 1/3 of them. Instead, 82% of the units have their own sewerage system (septic tanks), only 18% being served exclusively by the public system. Public electricity system serves all accommodation units.

3.1.4. *Accommodation units and leisure amenities*

Number of beds in classified accommodation units is 217, out of which are found 47 beds in category of 3 and 4 daisies. That means 22% of the total, compared with 30%, which is the minimum required by law.

Regarding the mountain rescue service, 73% of respondents stated that there are such services in the resort, while 27% of them say that they benefit from such services by paying a tax to the County Mountain Rescue, but they are provided by Rescue units outside the Albac resort.

More than half (55%) of the subjects were not aware of any facilities and equipments for outdoor leisure activities and strolls (footpaths, promenade places), while 45% of them consider that the resort has such facilities. Those who have responded positively, appreciate them as having a good quality, while the rest of the subjects consider their capacity to be satisfactory, low, or very good, the proportion of these three types being equal (20%).

Children's playgrounds are found in 82% of the accommodation units surveyed, while 18% do not have such facilities for recreation by reason of the lack of space.

3.1.5. Tourist information and promotion

Regarding mandatory criteria that provide signalling the sights by guidance and information signs, in electronic or printed web site versions, and also promotional materials for the tourist resort area, all managers of accommodation units stated that these criteria are fulfilled.

As regards the quality of signalling tourist attractions by guidance and information signs in electronic printed or web site versions, it was revealed that 46% of respondents believe that it is good, 27% consider it very poor, 18% considered it satisfactory, and 9%-poor. Assessment is more positive, with 64% of respondents considering the quality of conditions mentioned above as satisfactory and good, while 36% of respondents believe that it is rather weak and very weak. In terms of quality of materials which promote the tourist resort and area, 55% of subjects rated it as good, 27% as poor and 18% as satisfactory, 73% therefore welcome this.

3.2. Supplementary criteria

The fulfillment of supplementary criteria for certification is shown in the following table, where it appears that the tourist resort of local interest Albac achieves a score of 93 points out of 90 points, the minimum set out in legislation.

Table 1. Supplementary criteria for attesting a tourist resort of local interest

No.	Supplementary criteria	Score
1.	Trains with seat booking arrangements, including sleeping carriages, have to stop at the station that serves the tourist resort	0
2.	Line buses serving daily bus station	0
3.	Commercial places for activities and services: bank, money exchange, travel agency	0
4.	Festivals and conference halls with a total capacity equal to at least 40% of the places in the resort	30
5.	Medical spa assistance, where appropriate, approved in accordance with existing laws	0
6.	Technical features for operation, protection and use of therapeutic mineral resources	0
7.	Endowments for revival services in the buildings, maintenance rooms (fitness)	10
8.	Landscaped park	3
9.	Tourist routes approved, labeled and displayed, if necessary	0
10.	Basis for therapeutic exploitation of natural resources, where applicable	15
11.	Facilities and equipment for sports (water sports, tennis, football, etc.)	0
12.	Settlements or parts of settlements that have skiing conditions must have arranged at least one approved ski track and appropriate means	10
13.	Organization of tourist, cultural, sports events, based on calendar	15

14	Information centers and tourism promotion, with permanent staff to serve only the center	0
15	Permanent on-line connection between the accommodation units and tourist information and promotion center	10
16	Centralised sewerage	0

TOTAL: 93 points

4. Conclusions

Comparing the current situation of the local touristic resort Albac to the mandatory and supplementary criteria for attesting tourist resorts from Law No. 852/2008, there can be issued a series of conclusions concerning the level of consistency between field reality and the law strictness.

In terms of the **mandatory criteria required for certification**, the tourist resort has gaps on the following norms, presented below.

The condition of **being located in a natural environment, free from polluting factors**. Among the elements that affect the integrity of natural environment, we mention the huge grubbing of forests near the slopes and residual water discharges in Arieșul Mare, with negative effects on the ichthyologic fauna. Another polluting element is represented by the phonic pollution caused by the intense traffic on the DN 75 and DJ 108.

The modernized traffic roads marked with road signals. Their quality is still on a poor level, which is proved by the field inquiries.

Regarding **public transportation**, the observations on the spot emphasized a level of relatively contentedness on the quantitative aspect, but on the other side the qualitative aspect concerning the buses and the minibuses show a high level of wear.

The promenade places are not arranged and lit up properly. There are also fulfilled the criteria of **daily water** (daily water in centralized system), and **electric energy**, and also **sewerage system**, mentioning that the sewerage systems are mostly private, the public sewerage system being on the way to be rehabilitated.

It is not accomplished the criterion of the **minimum number of 30% accommodation places ranging from 3 to 5 stars/daisies**, which represents only 22% from the total of 217 accommodation places.

The arrangements and the supplies for the open air recreation activities and promenades, pedestrian roads and promenade places are precarious, inadequate and affected by the rehabilitation work to the sewerage system in a centralized way.

From the point of view of the supplementary criteria, it is carried out close to the minimum of 90 points.

As a final conclusion, the resort of local interest Albac not currently meets all the criteria required for certification. The most obvious shortcoming is the lack of sufficient accommodation at 3-5 stars/ daisies, while the other mandatory required criteria are accomplished in a greater or a

lesser extent (for instance, roads whose quality is quite low, putting under question their degree of modernization etc.).

References

- Ciangă, N. 2007. *România. Geografia turismului*, Edit. Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.
- ***.2005. *Planul Urbanistic General al comunei Albac*.
- ***.2005. *HG nr. 801/2005 pentru aprobarea atestării localității Albac, județul Alba, ca stațiune turistică de interes local*, publicată în Monitorul Oficial nr. 695 din 2 august 2005, București.
- ***.2008. *HG nr. 852/2008 pentru aprobarea normelor și criteriilor de atestare a stațiunilor turistice*, publicată în Monitorul Oficial nr. 613 din 20 august 2008, București.
- ***.2010. *Albac-Inima Țării Moșilor, monografie*, Ed. Nereamia Napocae, Cluj-Napoca.