

## Aspects Concerning Tourism-Related Communication. Case Study: Poiana Ruscă Mountains (Romania)

Cătălina ANCUȚA<sup>1,\*</sup>, Elena CIOROGARIU<sup>1</sup>, Martin OLARU<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Geography, West University of Timișoara, 4 V. Pârvan Bvd., 300223, Timișoara, Romania

\* Corresponding author: [ancuta.catalina@cbg.uvt.ro](mailto:ancuta.catalina@cbg.uvt.ro)

Received on <21-08-2012>, reviewed on <02-09-2012>, accepted on <30-09-2012>

### Abstract

Tourism is a phenomenon where communication is particularly important, being largely responsible for converting prospective tourists, into actual tourists. The article is based on the paradigm, functions and factors of tourism-related communication, and analysis how tourism-related communication takes place in the Poiana Rusca Mountains tourist area. This is a mountain area with complex tourism potential, located within the 1.5 hours isochrone of several urban centers, which makes it attractive for weekend, proximity tourism. The analysis considered several components: communication within the emitting spaces, communication within the studied area, as well as communication using the cyberspace. Based on the general theory of communication and its practice in tourism, the conclusion reveals several restrictive elements on the side of the sender - advertising being in short supply and lacking a coherent message -, as well as on that of the receiver - the absence of a predilection for outdoor tourism and hiking.

**Keywords:** *communication in tourism, tourist signaling, local actors, Poiana Rusca Mountains, Romania*

### Rezumat. Aspecte privind comunicarea în turism. Studiu de caz: Munții Poiana Ruscă (România)

Turismul este un fenomen pentru care comunicarea este în mod special importantă, fiind responsabilă în bună măsură de transformarea turiștilor potențiali, în turiști efectivi. Articolul pornește de la paradigma, funcțiile și factorii comunicării în turism și analizează modul în care se realizează comunicarea turistică în cazul arealului turistic Munții Poiana Ruscă. Acesta este un spațiu montan cu un potențial turistic complex, situat în interiorul izocroniei de 1,5 ore față de mai multe centre urbane, ceea ce-l face atractiv pentru turismul de proximitate, de week-end. Analiza a avut în vedere mai multe componente: comunicarea din spațiile emițătoare, comunicarea din arealul studiat, respectiv comunicarea prin intermediul spațiului virtual. Concluzia evidențiază, în raport cu teoria generală a comunicării și a practicii comunicării în turism, concluziile relevă câteva elemente de constrângere din partea emițătorului – insuficienta atenție acordată publicității, nerealizarea unui mesaj coerent –, respectiv din partea receptorului – absența unui interes predilect către turismul în aer liber, de drumeție.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *comunicare în turism, semnalizare turistică, actori locali, Munții Poiana Ruscă, România*

### Introduction

A complex social and economic process, tourism starts with carrying tourist flows between places distant from each other: the emitter and, respectively, the receiver spaces. Tourist flows between the two spatial components are always preceded by information flows. In order to mobilize

the desired tourist flows, the information flows project images of the destination areas in the emitter areas. The images are far from being the result of spontaneous informing, left to chance.

The tourist space image, the image of the destination, is a key element of any tour operator strategy, being, therefore, the product of a sophisticated communication process.

## Communication in tourism: paradigm, functions, factors

### Communication: definition, evolution of models

Gerbner suggests that communication is social interaction through messages (as cited in McQuail, 2001). Communication differs from informing, as it occurs whenever a system – the source – affects another system – the recipient – by using messages sent through the channel connecting the two systems (McQuail, 2001). In other words, unlike plain informing, communication involves intentionality directed toward a targeted outcome (ibid.).

The initial, generally accepted model of communication highlighted a transmitter, a channel, a message and a receiver.

As studies, guided by practical concerns, have multiplied and deepened, the model has undergone adjustments, integrating such aspects as:

- the context in which communication occurs, the relationship between the transmitter and the receiver, the contents the messages cover, the intent/purpose of the fact of communication or reception;
- two additional processes: the coding (at the end represented by the emitter), where the following are important: the technical changes, the choice of words, images, formats; and, respectively, the decoding (at the end represented by the receiver)/ the re-translation of the message to capture the meaning;
- the ineffectiveness of communication links (Gerbner, as cited in McQuail, 2001);
- the way in which the communicator refers to the receiver, in order to intercept the latter's needs and interests;
- the way in which communication is guided by the anticipated requirements of the audience, more than by the communicator's interests (Popa, 2005);
- the way in which the active audience is outlined;
- the progressive inadequacy of the ideal model of communication through a centralized media institution, which broadcasts the same content to large and stable audiences.

### Communication in tourism: factor, forms, means

As a specific form of commercial communication, communication in tourism refers to the transmission of messages to: tourists (present and prospective), partners (present and prospective), as well as to all

the other tourism involved actors in the public or private sector (institutions, associations, businesses, individuals), with the purpose of ensuring the growth of the economic and social efficiency of tourism.

In the field of tourism, communication takes place in/between several scalar levels: global, national, regional, departmental and local level.

Depending on the means employed, communication can be: publicized (print media, radio, TV) and non-publicized (via mail, including electronic means, event organization) (Rotar, Campeanu-Sonea, Ilieș & Ilieș, 2006).

Tourism-related communication carriers are diverse:

- advertisement carriers like booklets, brochures, catalogs, posters, postcards, maps, tourist guides;
- electronic carriers: audio and video cassettes;
- carriers provided by new information and communication technologies: the Internet, CD-s, DVD-s;
- complementary carriers like tourist objects (handicrafts, postcards, etc.).

An important part of tourism communication is the signaling, which is largely responsible for the satisfaction felt by tourists, once in the destination space.

Signaling carriers include: signs (tourist road signs, for tourist attractions), billboards (for directions and for information, for identification) markings, landmarks.

Recognition of the significance of signaling – as part of tourism communication – led to the international regulation of this activity (Huet, Rabeyrin & Sultan, 1999).

## Case study: the analysis of tourism communication for the Poiana Ruscă Mountains

### Premises of the study

The Poiana Ruscă Mountains are a component of the Western branch of the Romanian Carpathians, being accessible from a number of urban poles in less than two hours (Fig. 1) and having a complex tourism potential (Fig. 2).

More precisely, there are 7 towns (table 1), situated next to this mountainous area. All these are big towns, according to Romanian classification, 4 of them are county capitals (Timișoara, Arad, Alba Iulia and Deva) and one is the most important town from the Western part of Romania (Timișoara).

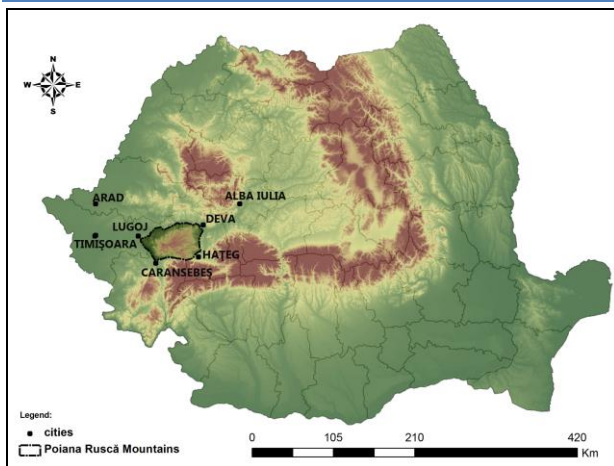


Fig. 1: Geographical Position of the Poiana Ruscă Mountains

These towns constitute the potential tourism market for the analyzed area for several reasons:

- as in all big towns from Romania, there is an important proportion of young adults, from which a great number have children - from which results the interest for week-end tourism in the proximity (with the form of team-building in nature, ecotourism, cultural tourism);
- these towns concentrate an important number of schools of all levels and an important number of pupils - the school tourism is a constant component of extracurricular activities, well related with the major objective of knowing the national space and nature and also with that of cultivating the values of ecology ;
- the Poiana Ruscă Mountains are surrounded by European and national roads and also bounded in North, West and East by rails, the journey from these towns last between 30 minutes to about 1,5 hours.

Table 1 Main characteristics of the towns situated in the proximity of the study area (2010)

town	no of inhabitants	type	% of people aged between 20 – 65 years	school population (nr.)	unemployment ratio (%)*	journey (minutes)
Timișoara	311440	regional pole	70.97	149161	2.69	90
Arad	165014	county capital	68.52	90074	3.10	90
Alba Iulia	68450	county capital	71.67	34194	4.91	90
Deva	66365	county capital	68.55	27829	5.42	30
Hunedoara	69916	2 <sup>nd</sup> rank town	66.54	27376	5.46	15
Lugoj	44596	2 <sup>nd</sup> rank town	68.07	19989	3.31	20
Caransebeș	28461	2 <sup>nd</sup> rank town	68.80	15719	3.21	20

- The unemployment ratio at the national level was 7.5% .

Source of data: INSSE (2010), Law no 351/2001 concerning the Approval of the Plan for Arrangement of the National Territory, Road Atlas of Romania (2010)

The quasi-unaffected by human intervention natural environment, the diverse landscape, the large share of forest vegetation, alongside with the punctual presence of elements of the traditional rural culture, all establish this area as one of the most suitable areas for the physical and psychological rehabilitation of the urban population.

Poiana Rusca Mountains are medium height mountains.

The complex petrographic structure, combining crystalline rocks, dolomite and limestone, provides a varied landscape:

- sharp peaks (Fades and Rusca) or special forms (a sphinx, like those close to the Crivina and Nădrag settlements);
- large plateaus, broad summits;

- steep slopes (Sohodol, Beghei, Sașa, Zlatul valley realms); sometimes the slopes stand 250-300 m above the valleys, which thus look like gorges (the gorges of the Cerna at Hunedoara) or even like canyons, on short sectors: the Cerna valley (between Hasdat and Cerna Meadow) and the valleys of the Runcu, Valerița, Sohodol, Bega, Zlata and Lăpugiu;

- small and medium-sized caves, known as fossil caves, grouped in the Bega, Lăpugiu, Dobra, and Runcu Sohodol pools; the caves Stanca lui Florian (Florian's Rock), Piatra Fetii (The Girl's Stone), Românești (Tomești village) Peștera Crucii (The Cross Cave – Roscani village) are among the best known (Ciorogariu, 2011).

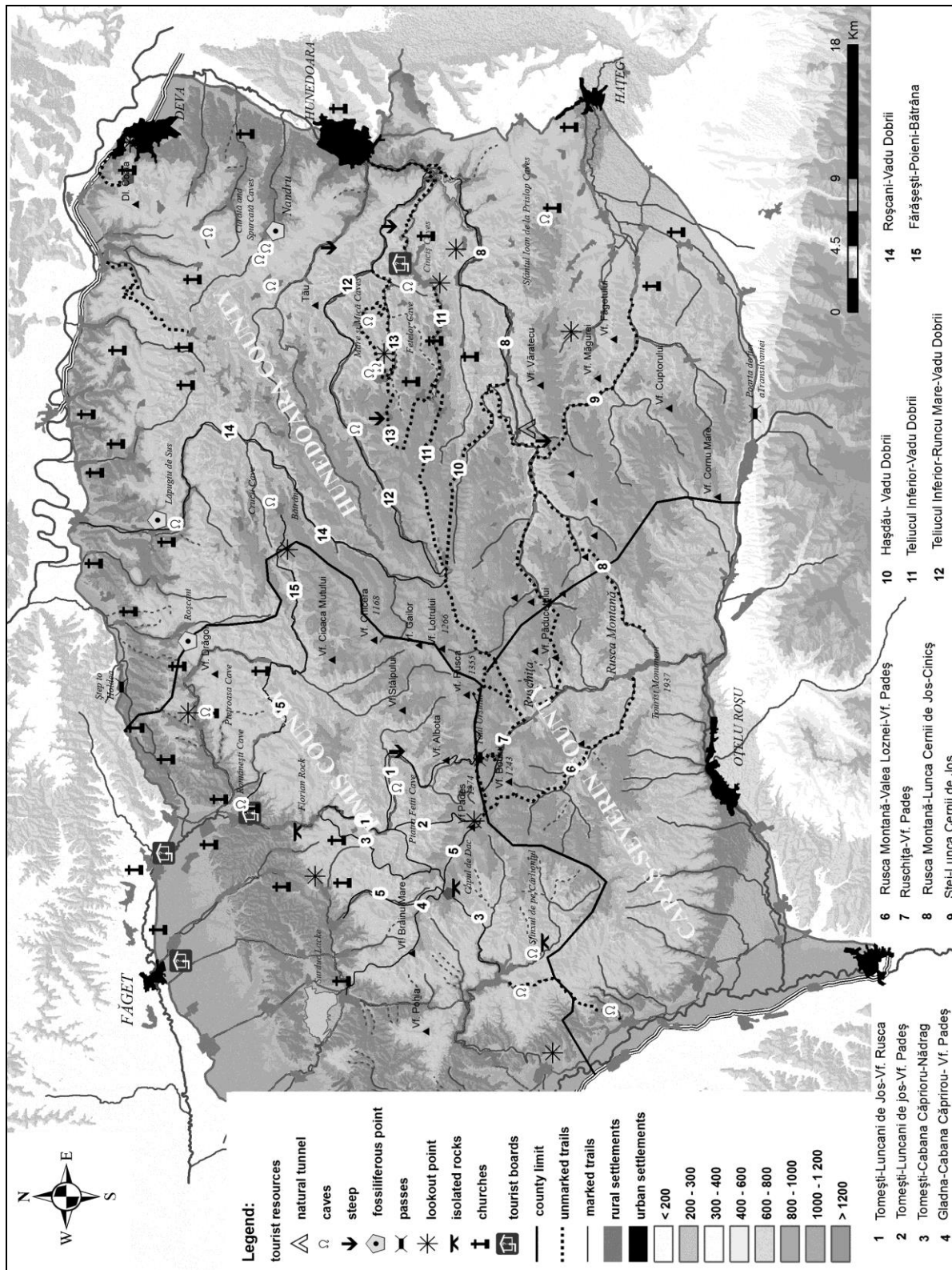


Fig. 2 : Tourism Resources and Signaling for Tourism in the Poiana Ruscă Mountains (©Ciorogariu, 2012)

The length and continuity of human settlements in the territory afferent to the Poiana Rusca Mountains is attested by numerous archaeological sites that exist in this area. Sites from the Geto-Dacian, Roman, 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD are prevalent, and the most important locations are: the

archaeological site at Deva, with the “dealul Cetatii” (“Citadel hill”) point, the archaeological site in Hunedoara, with the „dealul Sânpetru” (“St. Peter hill”) point, the archaeological site of Bucova, with the “Iron Gate of Transylvania” point, the

archaeological site from Nandru, and the "Water cave" archaeological site - Românești.

Besides these archaeological sites, the Poiana Rusca Mountains area and the immediate vicinity include important cultural buildings, religious buildings (the wooden churches in the Făget area and on the Mures Valley, monastic establishments: Prislop, Luncanii de Sus, Românești), ethnographic resources (all over the mountains, represented by local architecture, costumes and artistic manifestations).

Starting, therefore, from the premise that the Poiana Rusca Mountains present a certain tourism value in a regional context (Figure 2), the main objective of this study is to analyze the forms and means of tourism-related communication concerning this mountain.

We considered:

- communication with target audiences (prospective tourists), performed in the emitting spaces and on the Internet;
- tourism signaling within the studied area.

## **Main findings**

### **Communication of messages with tourism content in potential tourist-emitting areas**

The research carried out at the level of the travel agencies from the 7 towns located within the 1.5 hours isochrone (Figure 1) pointed out that none of the travel agencies promotes the Poiana Rusca Mountains area.

It should be noted that the regional area in general, and even the national area, are poorly promoted by these agencies.

The interviews performed with tour operators revealed the following explanative factors:

- most of the urban population has relatives or homes in the close proximity rural areas, which satisfies the need for recreation in unpolluted areas;
- the prospective tourists favor foreign destinations, which are relatively easily accessible, due to the Western location of their towns and to the presence of an international airport in the region;
- the relatively modest accommodation-related infrastructure in the Poiana Rusca Mountains is improper for a significant holiday tourism, hence the disinterest of tourism agencies.

In cyberspace, the Poiana Rusca Mountains are present in two categories of sites: sites of

associations working in the regional area and conducting their businesses in an area including the Poiana Rusca Mountains, and sites of the politico-administrative units responsible for the areas that include these mountains.

In the first category of sites, namely those of associations, in relation to the type of information provided about the study area, we distinguished between:

- sites providing tourist information (web pages of the following associations: Concordia Travel Club from Lugoj, SPEOTIMIȘ Speleological Association from Timișoara, Carpathians Mountain Association)
- sites including touristic and scientific information (web pages of the following associations: Prusik Speleological Association from Timișoara, Proteus Speleological Association from Hunedoara;
- sites providing only scientific information (web page of the SpeleoTeam Association, from Timișoara).

The sites of the administrative units of the Poiana Rusca Mountains differ in relation to the type of information provided about the mountains, as follows:

- sites providing tourism information (web pages of the following communes: Ghelari, Lelese, Cerbul, Vețel, Lăpugiu de Jos, Bunila, Pietroasa, Tomești, Nădrag, Fârdea, Rusca Montana);
- sites that provide tourism-related information and information about their geographical characteristics (web pages of the following communes: Dobra, Bătrâna, Teliucul Inferior, Toplita);
- sites that include only geographical information about the mountains (as in the case of Lunca Cernii de Jos).

### **Onsite tourism signaling**

In the Poiana Rusca Mountains area, signaling is performed through tourist billboards, and through tourist road markings and signs.

From the 40 communes from within the mountain area, only one has produced tourist billboards: Ghelari village, located in the Eastern mountains, has two billboards, each presenting one characteristic aspect of the cultural patrimony (the churches) (Fig. 3) and of the local occupations (mining and steel work) (Fig. 4).

Another two billboards are identical and provide information on the wooden churches in the proximity and within the mountains, churches that

are on the list of national cultural patrimony. Both billboards are placed in two localities situated on the westerly access axes (in Faget and Margina

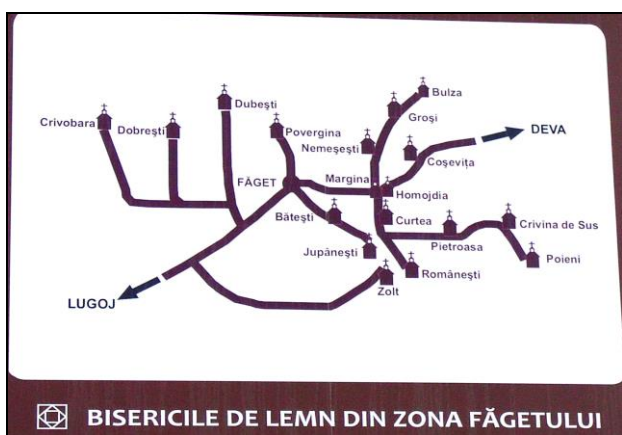
settlements). In addition to the information about churches, the billboards include a distribution scheme of these tourist objectives (Fig. 5).



**Fig. 3: Billboard about churches – Ghelari (Ciorogariu, 2012)**



**Fig. 4: Billboard about local occupations - Ghelari (Ciorogariu, 2011)**



**Fig. 5: Wood churches billboard in Faget and Margina (Ciorogariu, 2011)**

A fourth billboard presents the tourist map of a small area around the village where it is located - Românești.

We can assume that the billboards comply with the conditions of visibility, size, and aesthetics.

Field verification of the way in which tourist routes are marked on the tourist maps pointed out that only approximately 50% are identified by markings.



**Fig. 6: Markings made by a local (Ciorogariu, 2011)**

There is a clear distinction, in this regard, between the Eastern and Western mountain areas (Figure 2).

Thus, the markers are present on the western board of the mountain, which are administrated by Timis County, and specifically around the Pades - Rusca ridge and of Nădrag, Ruschița, Luncani settlements.

It is notable that around Nădrag town, the markings are made in a primitive style (Fig. 6), being the result of the private initiative of a connoisseur and enthusiast of the area.

In the rest of the Western area, the markings are restored in a standardized manner, on an almost yearly basis, by members of two associations: the Association of Geography Students in Timisoara - GEOTIM and the Banat Travel Club (Fig. 7).

Sometimes the marking signs are posted at longer distances from one another, which endangers tourist safety, especially in areas where tourist routes do not overlap forest roads or trails.



**Fig.7: Markings made by the Geotim ONG (Ciorogariu, 2011)**

The Eastern side of the Poiana Ruscă Mountains, belonging to Hunedoara County, has no markings, except a single route, marked by the owners of the neighboring guesthouse.

Tourist road signs are only present in localities that have wooden churches and are used solely for their signaling.

## Conclusion

The performed analysis allows us to appreciate tourism-related communication concerning the Poiana Ruscă Mountains as being modest in nature, by considering the following:

- tourism-related messages concerning the researched area are nonexistent in the regional level poles, which are potential tourist emitters;
- only 25% of the sites of the territorial administrative units across the Poiana Ruscă Mountains provide information about them;
- there is no special site dedicated to tourism in the Poiana Ruscă Mountains;
- signaling is minimal, unsatisfactory for the (orientation-related) tourists' security requirements; there is no signaling at all for 50% of the trails, lookout points, natural sites; there are no such signs as terminals and flags at all.

Considering the fundamental premise that the researched area has a real potential for regional tourism, as well as the positive effects that tourism could have on local development, we believe it is highly needed that the regional development institutions, respectively the local authorities concerned, improve the communication gaps, including signaling, thus ensuring the inclusion of this space in the regional tourism circuits.

## Acknowledgements

This contribution was partially supported by POSDRU 89/1.5/S/63663 "Trans-national network of integrated management for post-doctoral research in the field of Science Communication. Institutional construction (post-doctoral school) and fellowship Programme (CommScie)".

## References

Cioragariu, E. (2011). Tourist Potential, Organisation and Tourist Development in Poiana Ruscă

Mountains (Unpublished PhD Thesis). University of Oradea, Romania.

Huet, A., Rabeyrin, N. & Sultan, M.-D. (1999). Action touristique. *BTS Tourisme-Loisir, 2em année, Rosny Cedex, France: Bréal.*

McQuail, D. (2001). Modele ale comunicării pentru studiul comunicării de masă, Bucharest, Romania: Comunicare.ro, 2001.

Popa, D. (2005). Comunicare publicitate, Edit. Tritonic, Bucharest, Romania.

Rotar, G., Câmpeanu-Sonea, E., Ilieș, M., Ilieș, G. (2006). Comunicare în turism, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj Napoca, Romania:.

\*\*\* Carpathians Association (2011). [http://www.carpati.org/ghid\\_montan/muntii/poiana\\_rusca-38/prezentare](http://www.carpati.org/ghid_montan/muntii/poiana_rusca-38/prezentare).

\*\*\* Concordia Travel Club (2011). [http://www.concordialugoj.ro/readarticle.php?article\\_id=49](http://www.concordialugoj.ro/readarticle.php?article_id=49).

\*\*\* Law no 351/2001 Concerning the Approval of the Plan for Arrangement of the National Territory. Retrieved from [http://legestart.ro/Legea-351-2001-aprobarea-Planului-amenajare-teritoriului-national-Sectiunea-IV-a-Reteaua-localitati-\(MjAyMDc-\).htm](http://legestart.ro/Legea-351-2001-aprobarea-Planului-amenajare-teritoriului-national-Sectiunea-IV-a-Reteaua-localitati-(MjAyMDc-).htm).

\*\*\* Proteus Speleological Association (2011). <http://proteushd.blogspot.com/>.

\*\*\* Prusik Speleological Association (2011). <http://www.prusik.ro/>.

\*\*\* Romanian National Institute of Statistics (2010). Tempo on line. Retrieved from <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>.

\*\*\* Speotimiș Association (2011). <http://www.speotimis.ro/concert-in-pestera-romanesti.html><http://www.speotimis.ro/concert-in-pestera-romanesti.html>

\*\*\* SpeleoTeam Association (2011). <http://www.speleoteam.ro/index.php?id=articol&sub=10CB1>.

\*\*\* The City Hall of Vețel Commune (2011). [http://www.primaria-vetel-hd.ro/vetel\\_turism-214.html](http://www.primaria-vetel-hd.ro/vetel_turism-214.html).

\*\*\* The City Hall of Pietroasa Commune (2011). <http://primariapietroasa.ro/index.php?rewriteparam=turism>.

\*\*\* The City Hall of Tomești Commune (2011). <http://www.tomesti.ro/monografia/turismul>.

\*\*\* The City Hall of Nădrag (2011). [http://www.nadrag.ro/strategia\\_de\\_dezvoltare.php?cat=turism](http://www.nadrag.ro/strategia_de_dezvoltare.php?cat=turism).

- \*\*\* The City Hall of Dobra Commune (2011).  
[http://www.comunadobra.ro/dobra\\_cadrul-geografic-107.html](http://www.comunadobra.ro/dobra_cadrul-geografic-107.html).
- \*\*\* The City Hall of Bătrâna Cimmune (2011).  
<http://www.primariabatrana.ro/>.
- \*\*\* The City Hall of Teliuce Inferior Comune (2011).  
<http://comuna-teliucu-inferior.ro/turism.html>.
- \*\*\* The City Hall of Toplița Commune (2011).  
<http://www.toplita-hunedoara.ro/localizare/localizare.htm>.
- \*\*\* The Council of Hunedoara Department (2011).  
<http://www.cjhunedoara.ro/index.php?menuId=25&viewCat=163.htm>.
- \*\*\* The Guide of the Communes - Bunila Commune (2011).  
<http://www.ghidulprimariilor.ro/business.php/PRIMARIA-BUNILA/96053/>.
- \*\*\* The Guide of the Communes - Fârdea Commune (2011).  
<http://www.ghidulprimariilor.ro/business.php/FARDEA/114254/>.
- \*\*\* The Guide of the Communes - Ghelari Commune (2011).  
<http://www.ghidulprimariilor.ro/business.php/PRIMARIA-GHELARI/98065/>.
- \*\*\* The Guide of the Communes - Lăpugiu de Jos Commune (2011).  
<http://www.ghidulprimariilor.ro/business.php/PRIMARIA-LAPUGIU-DE-JOS/98068/>.
- \*\*\* The Guide of the Communes - Leleș Commune (2011).  
<http://www.ghidulprimariilor.ro/business.php/LELESE/201115/>.
- \*\*\* The Guide of the Communes - Lunca Cernii de Jos Commune (2011).  
<http://www.ghidulprimariilor.ro/business.php/PRIMARIA-LUNCA-CERNII-DE-JOS/201119/>.
- \*\*\* The Guide of Communes - Rusca Montană Commune (2011).  
<http://www.ghidulprimariilor.ro/business.php/PRIMARIA-RUSCA-MONTANA/44076/>.
- \*\*\* Romanian Road Atlas 1: 500 000, Szarvas Publishing House, Budapest, Hungary.