

# ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF BISTRIȚA AND THEIR POTENTIAL FOR TOURISM VALORIZATION

Ileana-Cristina VASILIȚĂ-CRĂCIUN<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** *Analysis of the Cultural Landscape Elements in the Municipality of Bistrița and Their Potential for Tourism Valorization.* The study of the cultural landscape elements in the urban area of Bistrița determines clear tourist values that refer to the attractiveness of both natural elements and that of cultural ones. This study highlights the specific natural environment, the churches and other buildings that have a characteristic function, belonging to different historical periods, starting from the Middle Ages. All of these benefit from an appropriate infrastructure that favors tourist access and capitalization, currently to a modest extent, but which as a whole can constitute the basis of a new integrated development strategy of the city. Thus, the study reveals both the analysis of the elements with real tourist values, as well as the main objectives to be achieved for the subsequent development of the area.

**Keywords:** *Bistrița Municipality, cultural landscape elements, tourism potential, tourism valorization*

## 1. Introduction

It is well known that evolution, as a general approach, involves permanent adaptation to changes in the environment, be it natural, social, economic, political or of any other nature. Thus, in the given context, geographical research through a careful and permanent connection to them, offered answers to the times and trends' demands, thus marking its evolutionary process.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca Branch, Geographic Research Center, Republicii Street, 9, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, e-mail: ileana.vasilita@academia-cj.ro*



If around 1928, through Schlüter (quoted by T. Gunzelmann, 1987, p. 32), the concept of cultural landscape was at the beginning of scientific research, considering that “it arises from all the actions it exercises each era, each culture (according to its capacity of evaluation) on the landscape”, further research highlighted the fact that it is “rarely stable because people’s needs and opportunities are continuously changing; change which can be slow but inevitable. The new structures gradually replace the old ones being next to each other in the territory” (J. F. Hart, 1998, p. 14). Consequently, in order to be able to analyze or “interpret a landscape, one must know its history and culture attached” (Alexandra Kruse, Gloria Pungetti, 2009, p. 220).

The subsequent interest in it increased and focused mainly on practical aspects, the landscape being seen as “environment for the human species, in a living environment, built, shaped and adapted by the individual and the community according to its ideals of progress and civilization” (P Cocean, Nicoleta David, 2014, p. 176). Its intrinsic qualities can contribute to the increase of social well-being by valuing them especially in the tourism field.

When one approaches cultural landscape in its relationship with tourism, the association of the two essential elements is inevitable: the natural setting and the cultural elements, as human-made tourist resources.

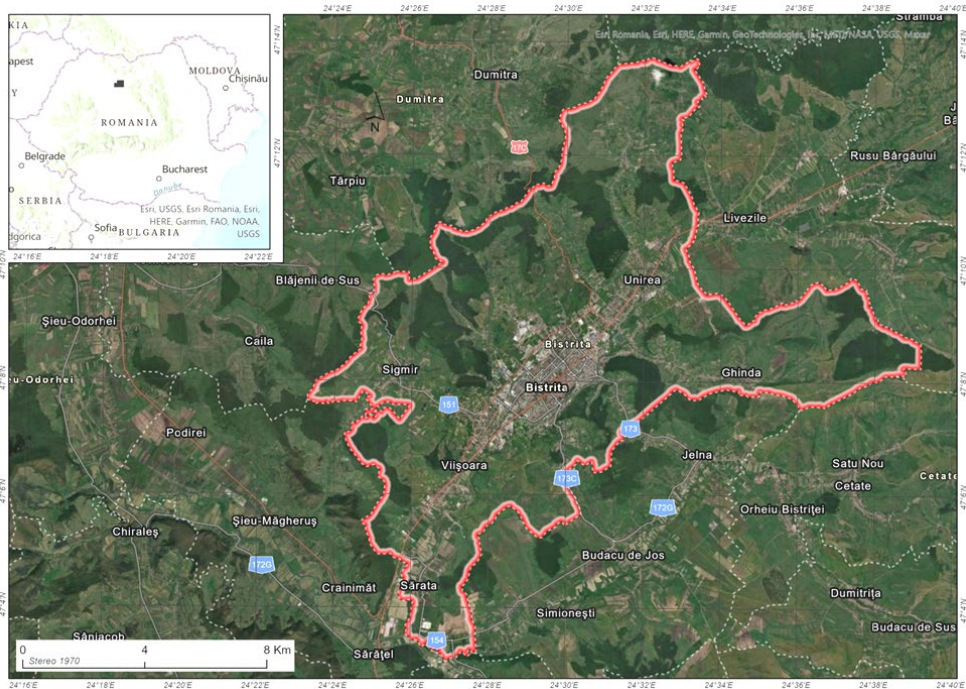
Embracing this last approach, the present study highlights the potential of the researched area, Bistrița, which represented “from the earliest times an environment of human habitation, whose continuity cannot be denied” (P. Cocean, C. N. Boțan, Oana- Ramona Ilovan, 2011, p. 92), an aspect demonstrated by the variety of cultural landscape elements, “which benefit of accessibility and visiting possibilities [...], in their absolute majority, constituting the raw material of cultural tourism, in a varied form of practicing it (religious tourism, information tourism, etc.)” (P. Cocean, A. Niță, Ș. Dombay, 2013, p. 251).

## **2. Features of Bistrița Municipality**

### ***2.1. Physical-geographical characteristics***

From a territorial-administrative point of view, Bistrița municipality includes 6 component localities (Ghinda, Sărata, Sigmir, Slătinița, Unirea and Vișoara), being the largest city of Bistrița-Năsăud County, in addition to having an administrative function, as the main and leading town of the county.

## ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF BISTRIȚA AND THEIR POTENTIAL FOR TOURISM VALORIZATION



**Fig. 1.** Bistrița Municipality Map. *Source: the author*

Geographically, the city is located, according to the map, in the western part of Livezile-Bârgău Basin, along the Bistrița River. The visible aspect is predominantly that of a basin, surrounded by hills (450-680 m). Thus, the study of the topographic map reveals prominences, such as Ciuha Hill (620 m) in the northwest, Cetății Hill (682 m) in the north, Budacului Hill (578 m), Jelnii Hill (536 m), and Ghinzii Hill (538 m) in the southeast.

These have found their usefulness over time through cultivation with fruit trees and vines, under the shelter of a favorable temperate continental climate, inscribed in the local latitudinal and altitudinal limits, “with an average annual air temperature of 8.2°C. The annual course of air temperatures is typical continental, with the maximum in July (average temperature 19.1°C) and the minimum in January (average temperature -4.4°C). The multiannual average precipitation is around 680 mm. The month with the lowest average precipitation amounts is January (35.2 mm) and the wettest is June (94.4 mm). Precipitation in the form of snow falls on average starting from the first decade of December to the second decade of March, the average number of days with snow cover oscillating between 75 and 85” (I. Buta, 1976, pp. 44-45).

## 2.2. Short history

In terms of historical development, the cultural elements describe the trajectory of local society over time. “Bistrița, capital of the county, located at the crossroads of old commercial roads, presenting numerous traces of a long Slavic coexistence with the native population of Dacian-Roman origin. The development of crafts and trade also accelerated the development of Bistrița, with great fame in the following centuries” (T. Morariu, I. Buta, A. Maier, 1972, p. 144).

Documentarily attested from 1264 (Villa Bistiche), Bistrița owes its appearance to German settlers. Already at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the long sides of the Central Square, as well as the main street routes of Bistrița, had already been outlined. The city had numerous planimetric similarities with central or northern European towns from the same period (P. Goja, 2006, p. 6).

Thus, it can be seen that the colonized German population is the primary factor in shaping the local cultural landscape, adopting the street structure and architectural style typical of the areas of origin, distinct from the local one. Subsequently, each historical era, marking its existence through successions of newly introduced elements in the local cultural landscape. Of these, “the Gothic and the Renaissance gave essential features to the building aspect of medieval Bistrița. The 16<sup>th</sup> century is, moreover, the peak moment of the urban development of the old city” (P. Cocean, C. Boțan, Oana-Ramona Ilovan, 2011, p. 130), culminating, naturally, with cultural elements belonging to the contemporary period.

## 3. Analysis of Elements that Have Tourist Value Within the Cultural Landscape

The context of the emergence and the long history of Bistrița favored the permanent introduction of new elements into the local cultural landscape, its complexity gradually increasing. Currently, it reveals a relatively homogeneous structure, naturally reflecting the various historical stages encountered, highlighted by specific authentic cultural elements.

The general contemporary trends of the proliferation of the tourism phenomenon, applied in the studied area, are able to lead to an efficient economic valorization of the cultural elements with tourist significance.

Among the elements with important tourist potential, the *Orthodox Church* stands out in particular, significant for its age, and for its massive structure, decorated according to the trends of the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, being “the oldest architectural monument in the city , [...] in which some valuable frescoes are preserved” (T. Morariu, I. Buta, A. Maier, 1972, p. 144);

The *Evangelical Church*, in fact “an architectural monument, built in the 14<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Gothic style and modified in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in the Renaissance style, by the Italian architect Petrus Italus de Lugano” (P. Cocean, C. N. Boțan, Oana-Ramona Ilovan, 2011, p. 133), to which the *Roman Catholic church* is added. They all add up to a treasure trove remarkable for their age, specific styles, paintings and well-preserved material objects.



**Fig. 2.** The Evangelical Church.  
*Source: the author*



**Fig. 3.** The Coopers' Tower.  
*Source: the author*

The city is also distinguished by secular constructions, which often have historical significance, through various aspects related to them during the various eras. Thus, *the House of the Silver crafts Man* is an architectural monument that reveals the specifics of the medieval era and at the same time the social manner of division into guilds. On the same note, *the Coopers' Tower* bears witness once again to social segregation, having as a criterion the various crafts practiced. “With a height of 25 m, it dates from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century” (P. Goja, 2006, p. 9), it had a significant role in the defense of the fortress thanks to its solid and imposing structure, in the same category as the Cetății Hill.

Also, the series of medieval constructions continues with representative architectural elements such as: Ion Zidaru House, the architectural ensemble “Șugălete” visible in the form of a row of storied buildings distinguished by 20 vaults supported on 21 columns.

Recent eras are highlighted by buildings that overwhelmingly serve activities in the tertiary sector such as the Palace of Culture, the Old Post Office Building, the Andrei Mureșanu National College Building, the Bistrița-Năsăud County Center for Popular Creation, the Bistrița-Năsăud County Library.

Public monuments, intended to remind the society of various historical events or related to certain personalities, are distinguished in the perimeter of the squares and parks, usually in the form of statues, busts and various monuments. One may list the statue of the poet Andrei Mureșanu, the author of the anthem of the 1848 revolution, of the poet George Coșbuc; the statue of the writer Liviu Rebreanu, the statue of the photographer Alexandru Roșu (the first Romanian photographer who captured various snapshots related to the city of Bistrița). From the category of busts, we can distinguish those that are completely related to representative historical leaders such as Avram Iancu, Petru Rareș, ruler of Moldova, or the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza, and the monuments, in particular, the Jewish Monument, the Monument to the Heroes of the Nation, the Monument to the Soviet Soldier, the Monument to the Former Political Detainees and so on, all this reconstructing fragments of local and national history.

A foray into the perimeter close to the settlement brings to completion varied and significant cultural elements, such as the Roman fort in Livezile, the Evangelical Church in Herina, a monument of medieval architecture, the old salt mines in Sărățel, the dendrological park and the castle in Arcalia, and “the Doll Hill” from Domnești. They are all added in the category of cultural elements suitable for tourism.

#### **4. The Potential for Tourism Valorization of the Elements of the Cultural Landscape**

The municipality of Bistrița, in accordance with the above, sums up a homogeneous local cultural landscape, harmoniously structured by the successive introduction into the natural environment of elements specific to various historical eras and derived from the particular manner of social evolution. Overall, it is a valuable tourist resource that lends itself to being exploited, the specific infrastructure fully supporting this activity.

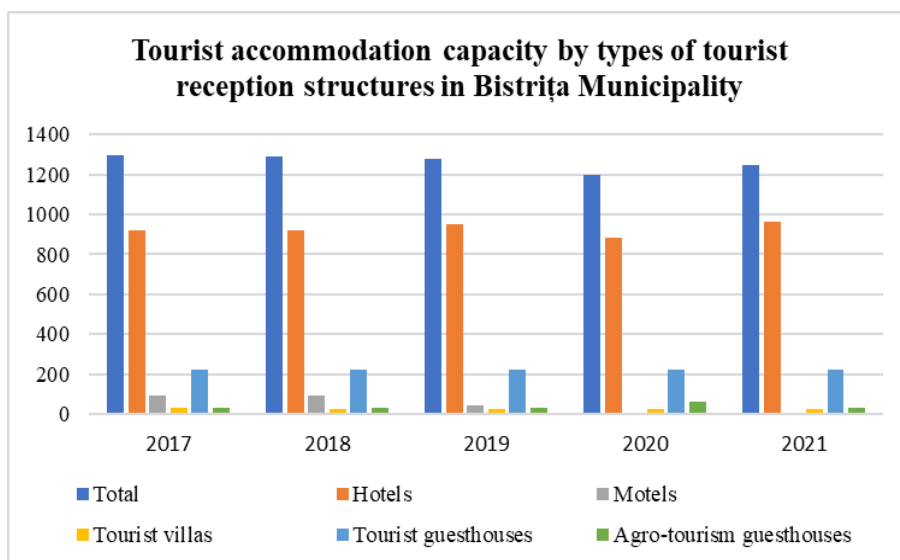
Thus, the access of the flow of tourists to the mentioned area is ensured by various road access routes such as the European road E58 (DN 17) which connects Transylvania and Moldova (Dej – Vatra Dornei), national road DN 17C (Bistrița – Năsăud), county road DJ 173 to Budacu de Sus and the origin of Budacu Valley in Călimani Mountains. The DN 15A branch provides access to Herina-Teaca-Reghin-Târgu Mureș-Toplița and Gheorgheni. In addition, rail access is possible by means of Sărățel railway junction and main railway no. 4.

The tourist infrastructure is complemented by adequate accommodation and food establishments. According to the data provided by *the Bistrița-Năsăud Regional Directorate of Statistics*, for the period 2017 – 2021, generally the capacity of tourist accommodation has registered a slight decline in accommodation units (hotels, motels, tourist villas, tourist guesthouses, agro-tourism guesthouses), from 1299 beds in 2017 to 1246 in 2021. Positive fluctuations can be noticed among hotels and tourist guesthouses at the expense of motels, which denotes a general decrease in the preference of tourists for accommodation in motels.

**Table 1.** The existing tourist accommodation capacity by types of tourist reception structures in the municipality of Bistrița

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Total</b>	1299	1291	1280	1195	1246
Hotels	921	917	951	884	966
Motels	96	96	46	-	-
Tourist villas	29	25	25	25	25
Tourist guesthouses	221	221	226	224	223
Agro-tourism guesthouses	32	32	32	62	32

*Source: Bistrița-Năsăud Regional Directorate of Statistics*



**Fig. 4.** Tourist accommodation capacity by types of tourist reception structures.  
*Source: Bistrița-Năsăud Regional Directorate of Statistics*

Also, at the level of Bistrița municipality, there is an adequate network of public catering units (covering various types of catering structures and categories), which has registered a significant increase during the studied period. They complete the infrastructure elements supporting the tourist activity and not only that.

**Table 2.** The number of public food establishments in the municipality of Bistrița

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
<b>Total</b>	86	99	110	127

*Source: Bistrita-Năsăud Regional Directorate of Statistics*

## 5. Conclusions

All these previously identified, analyzed and exposed elements, benefit from an adequate infrastructure, which facilitates access and tourist exploitation, currently in a relatively modest way, but which can mean, as a whole, the basis of a new integrated development strategy of the city.

Thus, in accordance with the local development strategy 2015-2030, established by the Bistrița Local Council, which also provides for tourism exploitation, we propose the following suitable interventions for the development of the tourism sector: the development of projects in collaboration with institutions interested in tourism development; expanding tourism collaboration with neighboring localities on whose territory there are elements of the cultural landscape that lend themselves to being exploited; the diversity of services offered and the attraction of investors; tourism promotion through various means (e.g. social networks, websites, etc.); the implementation of policies for planning, protection and conservation of the cultural landscape at the local level; projects that support the concerns for the quality of landscapes and the sustainable development of local characteristic elements.

## REFERENCES

1. Buta, I. (1976), *Bistrița-Năsăud, Ghid turistic*, Editura Sport-Turism, București.
2. Cocean, P., Boțan, C., Ilovan, Oana-Ramona (2011), *Județul Bistrița-Năsăud*, seria Județele României, Editura Academiei Române, București.
3. Cocean, P., Niță, A., Dombay, Ș. (2013), *Județul Harghita*, Editura Academiei Române, București.



ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF BISTRIȚA AND THEIR  
POTENTIAL FOR TOURISM VALORIZATION

4. Cocean, P., David, Nicoleta (2014), *Peisaje culturale*, Editura Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca.
5. Goja, P. (2006), *Bistrița-Năsăud, ghid turistic*, Editura Ad Libri, București.
6. Gunzelmann, T. (1987), *Die Erhaltung der historischen Kulturlandschaft*, im Selbstverlag des Faches Wirtschaftsgeographie der Universität Bamberg.
7. Hart, J. F. (1998), *The Rural Landscape*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland.
8. Kruse, Alexandra and Pungetti, Gloria (2009), *Euca Land, European culture expressed in Agricultural Landscape*, in Sixth meeting of the Workshops of the Council of Europe for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, Sibiu, România 20-21 sept. 2007. European spatial planning and landscape, No. 88 Council of Europe Publishing, (2009), Printed in Belgium.
9. Morariu, T., Buta, I., Maier, A. (1972), *Județul Bistrița-Năsăud*, Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, București.
10. \*\*\* (2023), *Statistical data*, Direcția Regională de Statistică Bistrița-Năsăud.

