

THE NATURAL POTENTIAL AS A PREMISE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN DÂMBOVIȚA COUNTY, ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT. *The Natural Potential as a Premise for the Development of Tourism in Dâmbovița County, Romania.* The tourism potential of a region is influenced by all the specific elements of the natural and man-made environment. A region can be integrated into the tourist circuit if it has a series of natural and anthropogenic resources that can be exploited (Bacal, Cocos 2012). In this paper we have approached the natural resources specific to Dâmbovița County by analysing the following types of tourism potential: geology, relief, climate, water, biogeography and nature reserves. Dâmbovița County has a diversity of mountain, hilly and lowland landscapes that provide a varied habitat for a wide range of biotic species, which creates a significant tourism potential linked to the biogeographical components. The mountainous area of the county, including Bucegi Natural Park, is a major attraction for ecotourism and wildlife watching. The emblematic fauna of the Carpathians and thus of Dâmbovița County includes the black goat (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), frequently found on high ridges, the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), important for forest ecosystems, and the Carpathian red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), present in forests. The county of Dâmbovița has a significant natural potential, which has not yet been capitalized. In this sense the development of tourism infrastructure in Dâmbovița County is essential for attracting tourists and for the economic growth of Dâmbovița County.

Keywords: *natural potential, tourist potential, Dâmbovița County, monuments and natural heritage reserves*

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Introduction

The tourism potential of a region includes all the specific elements of the natural or man-made environment, exploited through tourist facilities, which attract both local and international tourists. Tourists are consumers of tourism products when travelling to different areas that attract them through their natural and/or man-made potential (Dinu, 2005).

The World Tourism Organization defines *tourism potential* as "the set of natural, cultural and socio-economic components that offer opportunities for tourism and give a certain functionality to the territory, having an essential role in the development of tourism activities" (Cândea, Simon, and Bogan, 2012). These components of tourism potential become tourist attractions, which have the ability to attract both national and international tourists (Turcu and Weisz, 2008).

According to the authors Turcu and Weisz, the elements of the natural setting are represented by relief and geology, climate, hydrography, vegetation, fauna and protected areas (Turcu and Weisz, 2008).

The anthropogenic framework includes the cultural-historical potential, the technical-economic potential and the social and demographic potential.

The degree of attractiveness of a region is determined by a series of elements such as: *the landscape value of the relief units; the variety of genetic types and landforms; the therapeutic, relaxing qualities of certain climatic factors, which are emphasized by the types of bioclimate; the quality, distribution and density of the components of the hydrosphere* (Cândea, Simon, and Bogan, 2012).

In the county of Dâmbovița, we find a variety of natural and anthropogenic resources. Specialists in the field have delimited the resources in tourist areas, being created six such tourist sub-areas, as follows:

1. Mountainous area, with a great variety of landscapes, caves, gorges, represented by Bucegi and Leaota Mountains;
2. Dâmbovița Valley, an area with many historical relics from the period of the Romanian people's forging, but also from the primitive period;
3. Ialomița Valley, an area recognized for its picturesque landscapes;
4. Târgoviște, the county seat and peri-urban areas with many attractive museums and monuments;
5. Potlogi - Răcari, in particular with the Brâncoveanu Palace Complex in Potlogi, considered by many experts to be the most precious monument of Brâncoveanu architecture;
6. The southern part of the county with historical and architectural monuments of special value.

The natural tourism potential of Dâmbovița County is emphasized by the landscapes and protected areas in the Carpathian space, such as Bucegi Natural Park, 12 nature reserves and 25 natural monuments, all covering 20134 hectares. The region is crossed by 15 rivers and has 11 mountains (with peaks over 1500 m) and 10 man-made lakes (with a total area of over 60 hectares) (Dumitrescu, Baltălungă, and Iancu, 2012).

Methodology

In this paper we have analysed the natural tourism potential of Dâmbovița County based on descriptive and explanatory analysis (Bhattacharjee 2012). In this paper we have used secondary data analysis as a research method. In this regard, we analysed the works written by other authors who analysed the natural tourism potential of Dâmbovița County, as well as strategic documents produced by various institutions in Romania and abroad. The method used to analyse the topic was the qualitative method, the emphasis being placed on the importance and description of the specific elements of the natural tourism potential of Dâmbovița County (Bhattacharjee 2012).

At the basis of the article is the analysis of social documents, which is a method by which the information found in documents such as: newspapers, documents made and published by press centres, documents related to certain institutions, certain websites of various centres and institutes, etc. are analysed (Mayring 2014).

Results and discussions

The county of Dâmbovița is located in the South - Muntenia development region, in the south-central part of Romania, 80 km from Bucharest. In the northern part of Dâmbovița County is Brașov County; in the southern part are Teleorman, Giurgiu and Ilfov counties; in the eastern part is Prahova County and in the western part is Argeș County. In terms of geographical coordinates, the county of Dâmbovița is located at the intersection of the parallel of 45° north latitude and the meridian of 25.30° east longitude and is situated in the southern part of the Southern Carpathians, at the point where the Muntenia Subcarpathians meet the Romanian Plain (Cozmanca, 1994).

The county of Dâmbovița is laid out in the shape of a relatively right-angled triangle and has a north-south layout, over a distance of 115 km, with the maximum altitude in the north, at the Omu Peak in the Bucegi Mountains,

2505 m, and the minimum in the south, in the Titu Plain, where the altitudes are around 120-125 m (Cozmanca, 1994).

The relief of the county is laid out in three stages from north to south, with mountains (Bucegi and Leaota representing 9%), hills (41%) and plains (50% of the county's area).

In terms of waters, Dâmbovița County is crossed by the Dâmbovița and Ialomița rivers and their tributaries.

Among the smallest counties in Romania, Dâmbovița County has an area of approximately 4054 km² (which represents 1.7% of the country's territory, ranking 37th). According to the 2021 census, the population of the county was 479,404 inhabitants, of which 129,948 live in urban areas and 349,456 in rural areas. In relation to the population of Romania, Dâmbovița County represents 2.51% (Population and Housing Census 2021).

From an administrative perspective, Dâmbovița County is composed of 2 cities (Târgoviște, Moreni), 5 towns (Fieni, Pucioasa, Găești, Titu, Răcari), 82 communes and 353 villages. Târgoviște is the county seat, and most economic, cultural and social events and activities take place here. For almost three centuries, from 1396 to 1714, Târgoviște was the capital of Wallachia, known as Valahia (Dumitrescu, Baltălungă, and Iancu 2012).

As regards the natural tourism potential of Dâmbovița County, there are important tourist resources on its territory. The natural tourism potential is determined by the presence of landscapes and protected areas that we find in the Carpathian area, such as Bucegi Natural Park, nature reserves and natural monuments.

Tourism potential of the geology.

The mountainous area of Dâmbovița County has a long evolution. The originality of the Bucegi Mountains is due to their specific relief, geological evolution and the changes that have occurred over time (Cozmanca, 1994).

Tourism potential of the relief.

As we mentioned at the beginning of this article, the relief plays an important role in the tourist activity and the attractiveness of a region for tourists.

In the county of Dâmbovița, 50% of the relief is plain, 40% hills and 9% mountains. The difference in level between the three relief units is about 2400 m. The highest altitudes are represented by: Omu Peak in Bucegi Mountains (2505 m) and Leaota Peak (mountains of the same name, 2404 m). The lowest altitude in Dâmbovița County is in Poiana in the Romanian Plain (128.9 m) (Cozmanca, 1994).

Natural physical factors, as well as the geological structure, have determined the creation of varied relief forms in Dâmbovița County. One of the most famous types of relief in this county is the residual relief, formed by columns and towers, emblematic in this respect are the natural tourist attractions Babele and the Sphinx, which have bizarre shapes (Cozmanca, 1994).

The specific relief of Dâmbovița County can be analysed from the perspective of attractiveness. Therefore, the analysed elements are the following: physiognomy of the landforms, dimensions, variety of composition, genesis, degree of individualization and spectacular form. The attractiveness of landforms is represented by the following elements: peaks and ridges, gorges, karst, glacial, volcanic, Black Sea coastal and wind-created landforms (Ielenicz and Comănescu, 2006).

Peaks and summits are specific to mountain massifs, and their attractiveness is given by their altitude, the physiognomy of the shapes, the type of relief, and the way they are formed. In terms of the tourist attractiveness of these landforms, the choice of a mountain route is also based on the shapes and types of relief and the panoramic views they offer. The peaks in Dâmbovița County are Coștila Peak and Bucura Dumbravă Peak. They all offer breathtaking views, are mountain attractions for visitors and are on the list of hiking and mountaineering lovers (Cândea, Simon, and Bogan 2012).

Gorges are spectacular landforms created by complex geological processes of rock erosion and dissolution. They form narrow valleys, steep slopes, rocky ledges and boulder accumulations. Gorges are most commonly found in nature parks and protected areas. In Dâmbovița County, these formations are found mainly in limestones, shaped by the flowing waters that cross the Bucegi Mountains. They are important tourist attractions due to their impressive landscapes and their geological and ecological value. In terms of gorges, in Dâmbovița County we identify the following ones located in the Bucegi Mountains: **Cheile Tătarului**, these gorges are formed by the Ialomița River and offer spectacular landscapes and opportunities for hiking and exploration; **Cheile Orzei**, they have impressive landscapes and attractive tourist trails; **Cheile Zănoagei**, known for their natural beauty and hiking trails (Cândea, Simon, and Bogan 2012).

Soluble rocks such as limestone, dolomite, gypsum and salt dissolve as a result of acidic water and **form karst landforms**. As a result of this chemical process, distinct landscapes are formed, both above and below ground. Mountains and plateaus are among the most attractive karst landforms. In the county of Dâmbovița, *Ialomița Cave* (located in the Bucegi Mountains, one of the most visited caves in Romania, known for its spectacular stalactites and stalagmites)

and the *Răței Cave* (a smaller karst cave) are among the best known karst landforms.

Glacial landforms are created by the action of glaciers and the processes of erosion and deposition. Large masses of moving ice led to the formation of glacial cirques, valleys and glacial sills, which become attractive to tourists. In Dâmbovița County, this type of landform is found in the *Horoabei Valley*, a glacial valley in the Bucegi Mountains, where glacial cirques and moraines can be found, and Bolboci Lake, an artificial lake whose surroundings are typical of glacial landforms (Cândea, Simon, and Bogan 2012). In the Bucegi Mountains, there are also significant traces of the Quaternary glaciation, which shaped the present landscape through a series of distinct glacial landforms, such as:

- **Glacial valleys:** *Gaura Valley*, characterized by a typical U-shape, formed by the action of glaciers.
- **Lateral and terminal moraines:** rock and sediment deposits transported and left by glaciers.
- **Glacial lakes:** *Lake Țigănești*, which is formed in glacial depressions, temporarily, depending on the melting of the snow.

Aeolian landforms were formed by the action of wind on the Earth's surface. Wind, as a geomorphologic agent, has the ability to erode, transport and deposit sedimentary materials, resulting in a variety of characteristic landforms. These landforms are predominant in arid and semi-arid regions, but can also occur in other environments where wind plays an important role in shaping the landscape. In the county of Dâmbovița, wind landforms are rare and are not significant in terms of tourism or geography (Ielenicz and Comănescu, 2006).

The Babele and the Sphinx are spectacular rock formations that were not formed directly by glaciers. These structures are mainly the result of wind and pluvial (water) erosion processes, which have acted on conglomerate and sandstone layers over millions of years. Although glaciation has played a role in the overall landforms, the specific shapes of the Babele and the Sphinx are mainly due to differential erosion and weathering (Ielenicz and Comănescu, 2006).

The specific relief of Dâmbovița County can also be analysed from the **perspective of restriction**. This perspective focuses on natural or anthropogenic events that have an impact on tourist objectives. For example, following landslides, dense and compact vegetation formations appear, which hinders the access and exploration of some tourist attractions and the practice of some tourist activities (Ielenicz and Comănescu, 2006).

In the county of Dâmbovița, the impossibility of visiting certain tourist attractions or practicing some mountain trails is due to the following types of morphogenetic processes: erosion, landslides and tectonic activity. A relevant example is the morphogenetic processes that occurred in the Bucegi Mountains, which made some tourist attractions unvisitable.

Climate and tourism potential.

The second important component of natural tourism potential is **climate**. It influences and determines the practice of tourism activities specific to a region or country. Romania's specific climate is moderate temperate continental and is influenced by the country's position on the globe, i.e. in the area where the parallel of 45° north latitude and the meridian of 25° east longitude meet. The succession of the four seasons and the changes in climate both inside and outside the Carpathian arch determine the differences in climate in our country (Cândea, Simon, and Bogan, 2012).

One of the important climate parameters is **temperature**, which influences certain forms of tourism and sports (Cândea, Simon, and Bogan, 2012).

In 2023, the mean annual maximum temperature recorded in Târgoviște was 18.9°C and the mean annual minimum temperature was 6.6°C, resulting in a mean annual temperature of 12.4°C. In the town of Titu, according to the data from 2022, the maximum mean annual mean temperature was 19.6°C, and the minimum mean annual mean temperature was 6.3°C, thus resulting in a mean temperature of 12.4°C (Anuarul Statistic al Județului Dâmbovița, 2024).

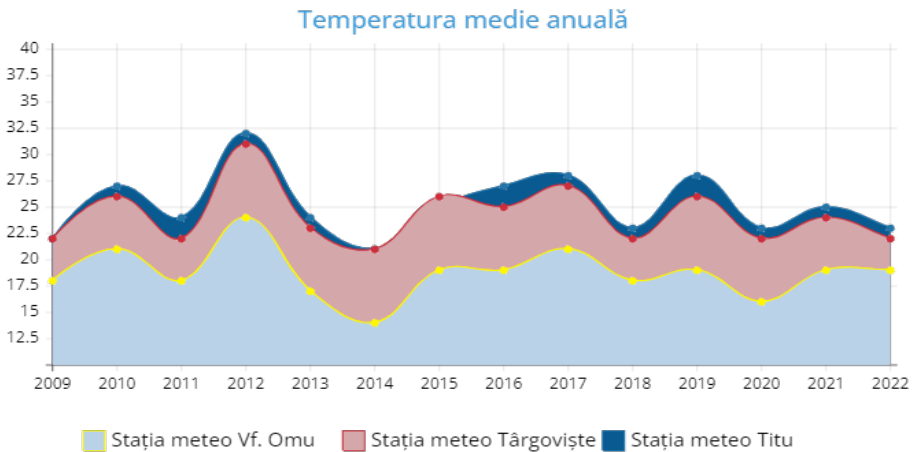


Fig. 1. Average annual temperature in Dâmbovița County
Source: Statistical Yearbook of Dâmbovița County (2024)

Besides temperature, **precipitation** is another important parameter influencing climatic conditions. Thus, there are situations where precipitation has a negative influence on certain types of tourist activities, but winter sports are dependent on precipitation and the accumulation of snow in the form of the snow cover needed for activities such as skiing (Cândea, Simon, and Bogan, 2012).

As for the precipitation recorded at the Târgoviște meteorological station (station no. 153750), in 2023, it amounted to 531.91 mm, with a total of 133 days with rain, 12 days with snowfall and 35 days with thunderstorms. In the town of Titu, in the year 2022, at weather station 154190 the annual precipitation recorded was 494.74 mm, with a total of 97 days with rain, 12 days with snow and 31 days with thunderstorms (Anuarul Statistic al Județului Dâmbovița 2024).

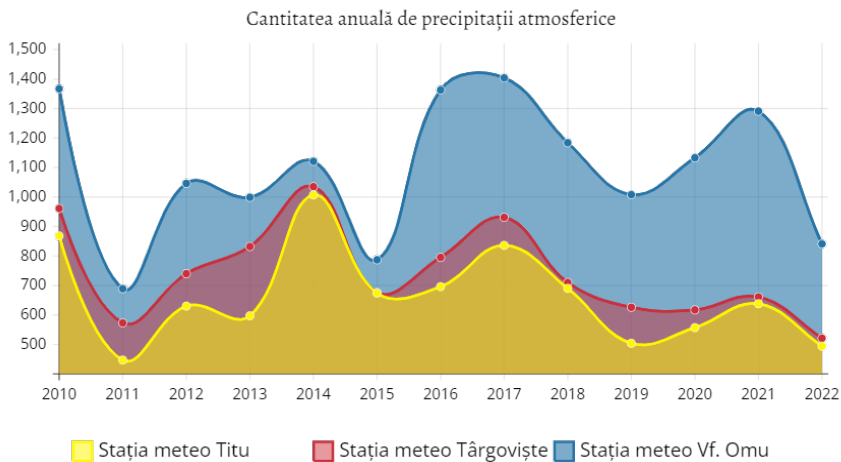


Fig. 2. Annual precipitation in Dâmbovița County
Source: Statistical Yearbook of Dâmbovița County (2024)

Wind is an important climatic factor influencing tourism. Similar to precipitation, wind has a positive role (e.g. wind is desirable for some water sports with boats), but it can also have a negative role when it makes certain tourist activities more difficult (Cândea, Simon, and Bogan, 2012).

As for the average wind speed, in the city of Târgoviște, for the year 2023, it was 8.2 km/h, and in the town of Titu, in 2022, the wind speed was 6.1 km/h.

On the territory of Dâmbovița County, one finds two types of climate. In the Romanian Plain (which covers about 50% of the county) and in the Subcarpathian area (covering about 30%) there is a continental-type climate. In the area of medium and high mountains (which account for 20% of the county), we identify a moderate continental climate. In terms of temperature,

in Dâmbovița County, summers are usually warm, winters are not very cold, moderate precipitation and rare blizzards (Cozmanca, 1994). On average, the air temperature is about 10°C in the lowland areas and 6°C in the hilly and mountainous areas. In the high massifs, the average recorded temperatures range between -2 and -3°C (Cozmanca, 1994).

Over time, in the county of Dâmbovița the maximum recorded temperature had a value of +40.4°C in the locality of Găești (on August 20, 1946), and the minimum recorded temperature had a value of -33.8°C on February 11, 1929 on Omu Peak (Cozmanca, 1994).

Tourism potential of the waters.

Water is a natural component, whose importance is vital both for living beings and for economic and tourist activities. On the one hand, from a tourism point of view, water plays an important role in various tourist activities (e.g. food production or hygiene care), on the other hand, water can be a tourist attraction, with the ability to attract tourists to different places.

The tourism potential of water resources includes all groundwater and mineral waters, rivers, natural and artificial lakes, seas, deltas and estuaries, which contribute to the attractiveness of a tourist destination. These resources allow tourism to take place both on weekends and for longer periods (e.g. a week), providing opportunities for activities such as fishing, spa treatments, water sports and heliomarin tours (Turcu and Weisz, 2008).

The hydrographic network of Dâmbovița County is linked to the rivers Argeș, Ialomița and Dâmbovița and their tributaries, and the density of this network is relatively high (Cozmanca, 1994). In addition to these rivers, in Dâmbovița County there are anthropogenic lakes (Bolboci, Scropoasa, Pucioasa and Văcărești) and lakes that are used for fishing activities (the latter are located in the localities of Nucet, Comișani, Băleni, Butimanu, Crevedia (ibid.).

Tourism potential of the biogeographical components.

Flora and fauna play a crucial role in diversifying the natural tourism potential of a region. Vegetation, consisting of forests, meadows, woodlands, arboreta and others, serves as a tourist attraction through nature parks, dendrological parks and nature reserves. In addition to being an attraction in itself, vegetation enhances the attractiveness of the other components of tourism potential. Vegetation is also essential for recreational and leisure tourism activities (Turcu and Weisz, 2008).

Fauna has a threefold importance: **(a) hunting and fishing** through the variety of existing species; **(b) aesthetic**, which contributes to increasing the attractiveness of a tourist area; **(c) scientific**, in this sense nature reserves and parks that are home to endangered species play an extremely important role. They constitute a motivation for the practice of fishing, hunting, sport, scientific and knowledge tourism (Turcu and Weisz, 2008).

Given the geographical layout of the Dâmbovița County, on the three morphological steps, which follow from north to south, mountain, hills and plain, the fauna and vegetation show a characteristic staging. The difference in level from north to south is about 2 400 m, which results in a very diversified vegetation and fauna.

The vegetation includes rich oak forests, with species such as Turkey oak and pedunculate oak, deciduous forests and spruce forests. Alpine and subalpine areas are dominated by mountain meadows with red fescue, juniper, and mountain ash thickets. The fauna is predominantly forest, with species such as red deer, wild boar, bear, lynx, but also squirrel, deer, and in the south of the county, rabbit and gopher. The lynx is protected by law as a symbolic cat of the Carpathian Mountains. In the alpine regions, the fauna is dominated by the chamois.

Nature Reserves are essential for the protection and conservation of natural habitats and species of floristic, faunistic, forest, hydrological, geological, speological, paleontological and pedological interest (ANAP 2024). In Dâmbovița County there are 12 such reserves, covering a total area of 1596 hectares (Anuarul Statistic al județului Dâmbovița, 2024).

Table 1. Protected areas in Dâmbovița County

Protected area categories	Number	Area (ha) - Dâmbovița County
Bucegi Natural Park	1	16141
Nature reserves	12	1596
Monuments of nature	25	2397

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Dâmbovița County (2024)

Dâmbovița County, with its diversity of mountain, hill and lowland landscapes, offers a varied habitat for a wide range of biotic species, which creates a significant tourism potential linked to the biogeographical components. The mountainous area of the county, including Bucegi Natural Park, is a major attraction for ecotourism and wildlife watching. Trails such as Cheile Zănoagei and Scropoasa Lake are appreciated for their unique biodiversity and specific

microclimates, favoring rare species of plants and animals such as *Anchusa barellieri* (Barrelier's bugloss), *Pinus cembra* (stone pine) and *Astragalus depressus* (milkvetch).

The emblematic fauna of the Carpathians and thus of Dâmbovița County includes the chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), frequently found on high ridges, the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), important for forest ecosystems, and the Carpathian red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), present in forests.

Nature reserves, such as Neagra Wisent Reserve, offer opportunities to see the wisent in a protected and controlled environment. Neagra Wisent Reserve is home to one of the largest populations of wisents (European bison) in Romania, attracting visitors interested in species conservation.

Nature reserves and natural monuments in Dâmbovița County

The natural monuments of Dâmbovița County are mainly located in the northern part of the county, in Bucegi Mountains, which are recognized and called "the cradle of Romanian tourism" (Dâmbovița Tourist Guide, 2011). These mountains have been integrated into Bucegi Natural Park in order to support the conservation of the natural environment, biodiversity and geodiversity.

Law No. 5 of 2000, officially known as the Law on the Approval of the National Spatial Plan - Section III - Protected Areas, regulates the protection and management of protected natural areas. It covers national parks, nature parks, nature reserves, nature monuments, protected areas of national interest, nature sites and other similar areas (Law 5/2000).

The main objectives of Law 5/2000 are: the identification and classification of protected areas, establishing the types and criteria for their identification and classification; the protection of biodiversity, plant and animal species, natural habitats, landscapes and remarkable geological formations; the management of protected areas, defining the responsibilities of central and local authorities in the administration and protection of these areas, as well as the role of research and education institutions in the promotion and conservation of natural heritage (Law 5/2000).

According to Law 5/2000, the Nature Reserves and Monuments in Dâmbovița County are the following:

1. ***Cocora Cave Nature Reserve*** consists of the ***Cocora Cave*** (including the Bear Gorges), located in the commune of Moroeni, with an area of 307 ha. Cocora Cave, located in Bucegi Mountains in Dâmbovița County, is a relatively unknown and little explored karst cave, but it impresses by its natural beauty and the diversity of its speleological formations. It is

famous for its spectacular stalactites and stalagmites, as well as other limestone formations such as columns and draperies. The cave is home to various species of bats and other cave-dwelling organisms adapted to the specific underground conditions.

The **Bear Gorges** are one kilometre long and are located in the northern part of the Padina basin. These gorges were formed by the erosion of the Ialomița river water on limestone and other sedimentary rocks in the area. The gorges are a popular destination for hiking and mountain exploration. Trails in the area vary in difficulty, from easy walks to hikes of high difficulty. The steep, rocky walls of the gorges offer excellent opportunities for mountaineering and rock climbing, attracting extreme sports enthusiasts.

2. **Tătarului Gorges Nature Reserve** is located in the commune of Moroeni, covering an area of 144.30 ha. This nature reserve includes the Tătaru karst system (sinkholes), the Bears Cave and the Small Cave, as well as the Tătarului Gorges (a natural monument). The nature reserve also contains abundant fossil fauna and rare floristic elements.
3. **Horoabei Valley**, in Moroeni commune, covering an area of 5.7 ha. It is one of the most beautiful karst valleys in the Bucegi Mountains, also known as Horoabei Canyon. It is a steep valley, which was formed as a result of the collapse of a cave ceiling, marked by thresholds and waterfalls. The landscape is characterized by steep rock walls, waterfalls, springs and sinkholes, providing a particularly spectacular natural setting. One of the main attractions of the Horoabei Valley is its canyon, which offers an adventurous route through the cliffs, over waterfalls and through narrow passages.
4. **Orzea-Zănoaga**, commune of Moroeni, covering an area of 841.2 ha. Orzea Gorges, formed by the Ialomița River, are one of the most picturesque karst formations in the region, ideal for hiking and exploring. Characterized by steep rock walls and various karst formations, the gorges offer a diverse landscape, including imposing cliffs, waterfalls and clear streams. At the exit of the gorge is the dam of the Scropoasa reservoir, located on the Ialomita Valley at an altitude of 1197 meters. Lake Scropoasa was created in 1929 and has clear turquoise waters. The lake has a length of 2.5 km and a depth of 15 meters and is used for hydroelectric power and water supply to the local settlements. Near Scropoasa Lake is the 7 Izvoare Waterfall, one of the most famous and appreciated waterfalls in Romania. It is famous not only for its natural beauty, but also for the extraordinary purity of its water, considered to be one of the cleanest in the world. Legend has it that the water comes directly from a sacred Dacian spring, untouched by pollution and with therapeutic properties.

5. **Zănoaga - Lucăcilă**, commune of Moroeni, covering an area of 259.4 ha. Lucăcilă Cave, located in the Zănoaga - Lucăcilă Nature Reserve in Dâmbovița County, is famous for its impressive speleological formations and unique biodiversity. The cave features stalactites, stalagmites, calcite columns, stone draperies and cave pearls in a complex network of underground galleries and halls. A detailed caving map is required for exploration. Inside there are small underground streams and temporary lakes, which contribute to the ecological diversity, harbouring species of bats, insects and other organisms adapted to subterranean conditions.
6. **Plaiul Domnesc Reserve**, commune of Moroeni, covering an area of 0.50 ha. Plaiul Domnesc is a paleontological reserve famous for its fossils and geological strata that reveal the region's past. Valuable for scientific research, the reserve helps reconstruct environments and ecosystems millions of years ago. It contains deposits from different geological periods and the fossils discovered range from microorganisms to large vertebrates. This site offers opportunities for paleontological studies, facilitating the understanding of the evolution of biodiversity and climate change in history.
7. **Răteiu Cave**, commune of Moroeni, 1.50 ha. Răteiu Gorges, located in Leaota Mountains, are known for their impressive rock formations and spectacular natural landscapes carved by the Răteiu River. Ideal for hiking and outdoor exploration, they offer tranquillity and a sense of seclusion. Răteiu Cave, with its extensive galleries and formations of calcite, gypsum and aragonite, is 7,224 meters long, one of the longest in Romania. Access to the cave is by permit and guide only, due to the risks. The surrounding area includes natural attractions such as the Zănoaga and Orza Gorges and various mountain trails. The cave is part of the Bucegi Natural Park, a protected area.
8. **Lăptici peat bog**, Moroeni commune, covering an area of 14.9 ha. Lăptici peat bog is a botanical nature reserve formed with the aim of protecting biodiversity and endangered natural elements. Within the nature reserve there are rare flowers such as *Salix myrtilloides* - a glacial relict of northern origin, *Salix phyllicifolia*, *Valerina simplicifolis*, *Balkan oreophyte Swertia* etc.
9. **Poiana Crucii**, commune of Moroeni, 0.50 ha. This nature reserve is known for its impressive natural scenery and for offering a peaceful retreat in the middle of nature, being an open mountain meadow surrounded by coniferous and deciduous forests. Poiana Crucii is not as well known or frequented as other tourist destinations in Bucegi Mountains, such as Sphinxul, Babele or Ialomița Cave.

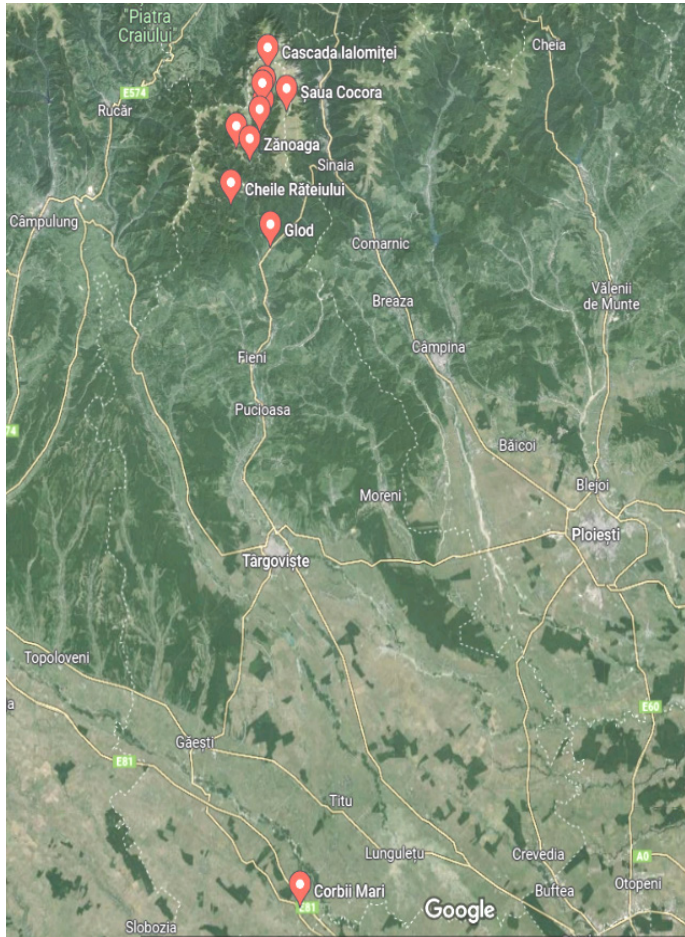


Fig. 3. Location of the 12 nature reserves in Dâmbovița County.
Source: Google Maps, 2024

- 10. *Plaiul Hoților Nature Reserve***, located in Bucegi Mountains, is renowned for its spectacular landscapes and ecological diversity. Its name, derived from local folklore, adds cultural interest, reflecting the region's history as a haven for thieves and bandits. The rugged terrain and dense forests provided ideal shelter for smugglers. Protecting this habitat is essential for maintaining biodiversity and natural value.
- 11. *Corbii Ciungi spring***, located in the commune of Corbii Mari, covering 5 ha. The nature reserve was designated a protected area by Government Decision No. 2151 of November 30, 2004. Located in Dâmbovița County, it covers 15 hectares and protects a natural meadow on the banks of the

Neajlov River. This reserve is notable for its population of *Narcissus stellaris* daffodils and other palustrine grass species, providing an essential habitat for the local flora and fauna and exemplifying biodiversity conservation in Muntenia region.

- 12. *Obârșia Ialomiței Valley*** with Mecetul Turcesc and Ialomița Waterfall. Ialomița Valley, also known as Obârșia Valley, is the most important glacial valley in Bucegi Mountains, with a U-shaped profile and numerous waterfalls, including Ialomița waterfall. Mecetul Turcesc is a limestone spur notable for its white color and distinctive physiognomy. Strunga Col, or Strunga Customs, is a "gateway" to Bucegi Mountains, offering panoramic views of Rucăr-Bran Corridor, Ialomița Valley and Leaota Mountains. Situated at about 1900 meters above sea level, it is a popular crossing point, linking Ialomița Valley to Cerbu Valley and providing access to popular mountain trails, including Omu Peak. The Strunga Col is renowned for its spectacular scenery and opportunities to observe mountain wildlife.

Conclusions

As mentioned in this paper, Dâmbovița County is characterized by an impressive natural potential, which plays an essential role in the development and promotion of tourism activities. The diversity of mountain, hill and plain landscapes offers a variety of natural attractions that attract visitors from Romania and abroad. Bucegi Mountains, with their nature reserves and spectacular karst formations such as Orza Gorges and Cocora Cave, offer opportunities for hiking, caving and ecotourism. Ialomița Valley and its impressive waterfalls add a special charm to the region, inviting exploration and outdoor recreation.

The rich biodiversity, including rare plant and animal species, also underlines the importance of preserving and protecting these natural habitats. Bucegi Nature Park and nature reserves such as Plaiul Domnesc and Corbii Springs in Neajlov Valley are true sanctuaries for the local flora and fauna, attracting both researchers and nature lovers.

The contribution of these natural resources to tourism is significant not only from an economic point of view, by generating income and jobs, but also from an educational and cultural perspective, offering visitors the opportunity to learn about the importance of environmental conservation. In conclusion, the natural potential of Dâmbovița County is a central pillar of tourism activity, with multiple benefits for the community and the environment. The promotion and

sustainable use of these resources are essential for the sustainable development of the region, ensuring both economic prosperity and the protection of the natural heritage for future generations.

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