

THE PROMOTION OF SOME GEOGRAPHICAL PLACES AS TOURIST AND LEISURE DESTINATIONS BY SPORTS EVENTS. CASE STUDY: HALF MARATHON BICHIGIU (BISTRIȚA-NĂSĂUD COUNTY, ROMANIA)

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ABSTRACT. Recent years have diversified and enhanced sports and outdoors leisure activities, which has led much of the population, irrespective of age and profession. One of these sports activities is the race that is found well represented in mountain marathons. Any mountain marathon requires a certain geographical area of deployment, whose natural and cultural-historical charge may be an attractive target for participants, and the competition itself can establish that place as a destination for tourism and leisure. In the case of the Halfmarathon Bichigiu sporting event held in the village Bichigiu from Bistrița-Năsăud (Romania), that can become a future tourist destination and leisure powered by its echoes. This paper analyzes this event, the technical details of the route and adherence to various categories of participants, inventorying and assessing the same time, the attractive potential of this place, in order to develop and exploit tourism planning strategies.

Key words: *trail running, mountain marathon, outdoor activities, active leisure, mountain runner, Năsăud Border Regiment, cultural tourism*

REZUMAT. *Promovarea unor locuri geografice ca destinații turistice și agrementale prin intermediul unor evenimente sportive. Studiu de caz: semimaratonul Bichigiu (județul Bistrița-Năsăud, România).* În ultimii ani s-au diversificat și intensificat activitățile sportive și agrementale în aer liber, fapt care a antrenat o mare parte din populație, indiferent de vârstă și profesie. Una dintre aceste activități sportive este alergarea care se regăsește foarte bine reprezentată în maratoanele montane. Orice maraton montan presupune un

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anumit spațiu geografic de desfășurare, a cărui încărcătură naturală și cultural-istorică se poate constitui ca obiectiv atractiv pentru participanți, iar competiția în sine poate consacra locul respectiv ca destinație pentru turism și agrement. Este și cazul evenimentului sportiv Semimaratonul Bichigiu, desfășurat în localitatea Bichigiu din județul Bistrița-Năsăud (România), care poate deveni o viitoare destinație turistică și agrementală propulsată de ecurile acestui eveniment. Lucrarea de față analizează organizarea acestui eveniment, elementele tehnice ale traseului și aderența la diferitele categorii de participanți, inventariind și evaluând, în același timp, potențialul atractiv al acestui loc, în scopul elaborării unor strategii de amenajare și valorificare turistică.

Cuvinte cheie: *maraton montan, activități în aer liber, agrement activ, alergător montan, Regimentul Năsăudean de Graniță, turism cultural*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, intensified sporty outdoor activities for leisure and for maintaining physical fitness. The causes for this fact are multiple and illustrates the rapid transformations that records human society. Of those cases may be listed:

- internet access and dissemination of information;
- progress recorded in outdoor equipment;
- increasing standard of living and leisure time;
- formation of behaviours and mentalities oriented to active leisure, improving and maintaining physical fitness;
- maintaining health;
- the need for personal development, socialization and belonging to different groups concerned with sports.

In this context, there are also marathons, mass competitions bringing together hundreds of participants and involves a special logistics (team of organizers and volunteers, track points hydration, ambulance and mountain rescue, etc.). Among these competitions can be mentioned: Faget Marathon (Cluj), Apuseni Marathon, Piatra Craiului Marathon, Brașov Marathon, Retezat Marathon, Bucegi Marathon 7500, Via Maria Theresia Marathon (Călimani) etc.

All these competitions used to conduct a certain geographical area (mountainous and hilly areas, rivers, lakes, towns, villages, protected areas) that have a certain natural or cultural-historical charge. This collection of attractive facets is part of sporting events, and locations they own can be promoted in this way as leisure and tourist destinations because, in addition, to competitions participating athletes and supporters, friends or relatives.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

- In order to achieve this study were the following methodological steps:
- making of direct observations on the Bichigiu Half Marathon and on the geographical environment in which it took place;
 - consulting the literature on the study area and on the cultural-historical fetures of Bichigiu village (Geografia României, 1987; Bîca, 2010; Șotropa, 1925; Păcurariu, 1994; Roșca, 2008; Ilovan, 2009; Daroși, 2013);
 - prelucrarea datelor statistice oferite de organizatorii evenimentului sportiv (OM Association).
 - processing statistical data provided by the event organizers (OM Association).

STUDY AREA

The village Bichigiu is situated in the valley Bichigiu (tributary of the river Salauta, Somesul Mare), between the Țibleș Mountains and Suplai Hills (fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Geographical localization of Bichigiu village in Bistrița-Năsăud County

Geomorphological axis of this area is Bichigiu Valley, which comes under intrusive magmatic massive Țibleș (Magura Neagra) and is bordered by hilly peaks with altitudes between 700-900 m, which descends from the mountains to the Țibleș, Sălăuța and Somesul Mare valleys. Thus, in the vicinity of the village lies to north Obicna Fiezel (Șurila peak, 853 m) and to south Obcina Hârbului (889 m). Vegetable formations that takes these hills are made of *Fagus sylvatica* forests and meadows.

In terms of cultural and historical aspects, the village Bichigiu attested to the early sixteenth century, when is mentioned a monastery in the area (1523), become part of Năsăud Regiment Border in mid seventeenth century (1762), and the prominent historical figure is Tanase Todoran (1659-1763), a 104 years old man who rebels against Habsburg authorities and is killed at Salva village in 1763.

At the instigation of Tanase Todoran, the border guards of two battalions refused to be sworn in May 10, 1763, near Salva village, in the presence of Bishop Petru Pavel Aron and General Bukow. Their refusal was related to the fact that in this way they had to abandon the Orthodox denomination to join the Uniate Church. As a result, Todoran Tanase and others involved in the movement were executed: Tanase Todoran by breaking wheel and the other two were hanging: Vasile Dumitru of Mocod, Grigore Manu of Zagra, and Vasile Oichi from Telciu. Other peasants were punished by blows of rods (Șotropa, 1925; Păcurariu, 1994; Roșca, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Mass sporting event called the Bichigiu Half Marathon was organized by the OM Association from Bistrița city (fig.2), was charitable and had three sections: half marathon, relay and children race (fig. 3). At the half marathon signed up 116 people, aged between 16 and 67 years (fig.4), the relay was attended by 136 athletes, aged between 25-57 years (fig.5), and children race brought together participants aged 10 to 14 years.



Fig. 2. The poster of the sporting event
(source: Semimaratonul Bichigiu facebook)

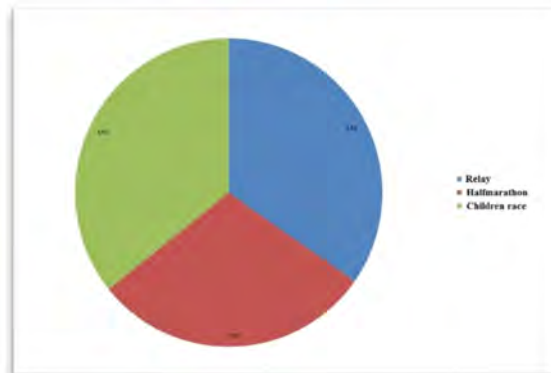


Fig. 3. Distribution of sports participants
(source: OM Association Bistrița)

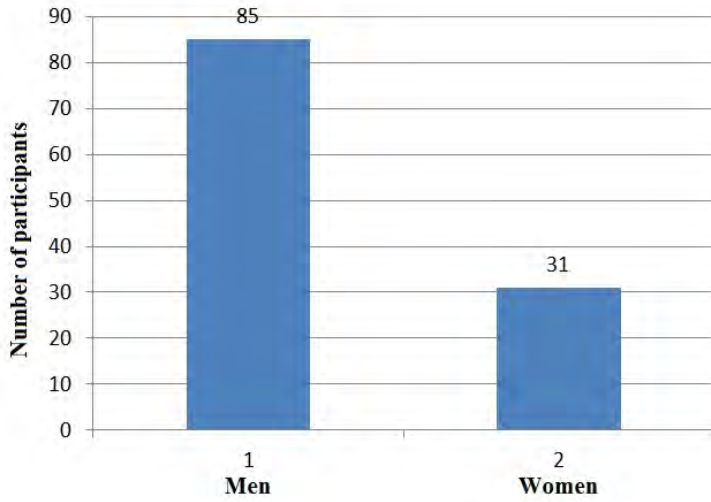


Fig. 4. The genres structure of participants to half marathon contest
(Source: OM Association Bistrița)

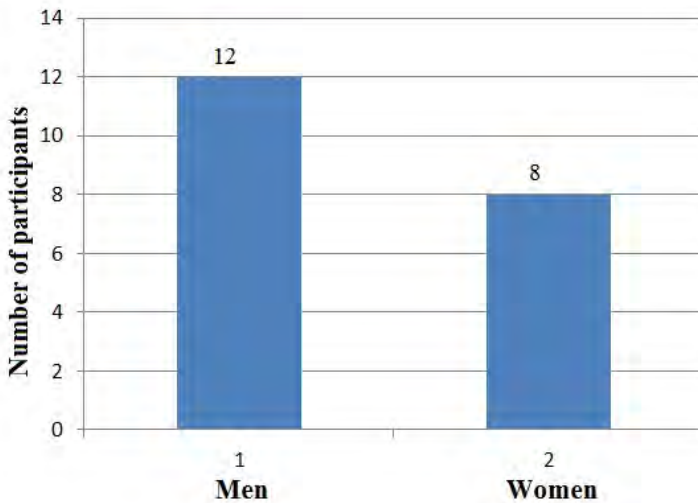


Fig. 5. The henre structure of participants to relay contest
(Source: OM Association Bistrița)

At half-marathon and relay athletes came from several counties, such as: Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Sălaj, Mureș, Brașov, and children came from villages Bistrița-Năsăud County (Prundu Bârgăului, Tureac, Bichigiu, Telciu, Nușeni).

The Half Marathon route presented the following technical characteristics:

- Start and Finiș: Zăpode Cabin, 520 m altitude;
- Length of the route: 21 km;
- Maximum altitude: 889 m on Măgura Hârbului;
- Minimum altitude: 520 m at Zăpode Cabin and Ideciu Valley;
- Level difference: 369 m;
- The geomorphology of the route: sloping ground, the flat surfaces of the ridge, descend, climbing crossing slopes, forest land, meadow land, dirt roads, ravines (fig. 5, 6);

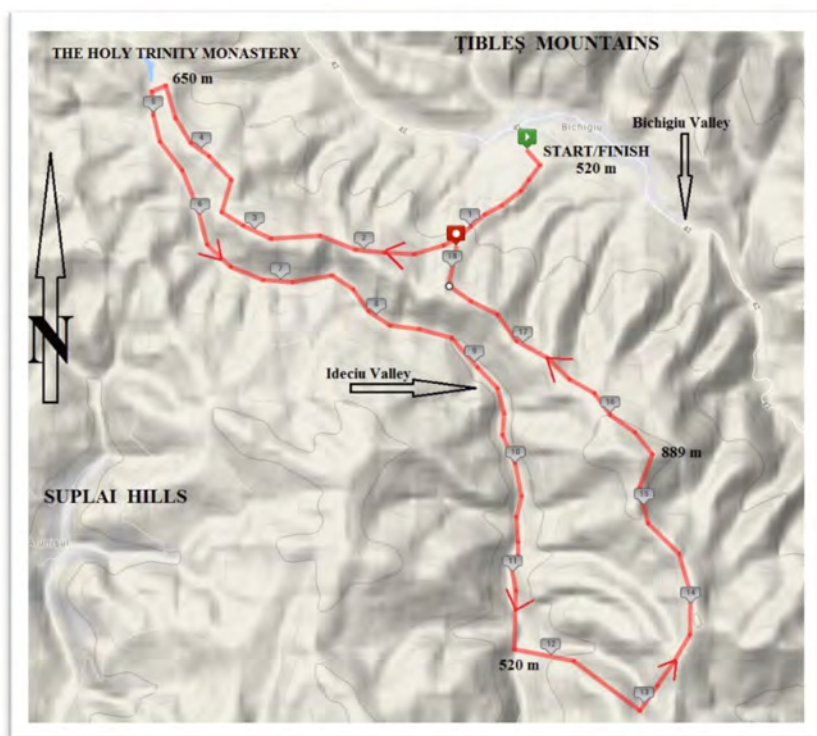


Fig. 6. Conducting half-marathon route map terrain
(Source: map myhike.com-with changes)

- The description of the route: the route went up from Zăpode Cabin (520 m), entered the forest, reached the summit, headed westward atop Monastery, arrived at Holy Trinity Monastery in Bichigiu-Idecu Pass (650 m), descend to Idecu Valley, rose to Dealul Mărului, achieved Măgura Hârbului (889 m), and directed towards the NW, which has been the junction with the common section of the route, going down to the finish (fig.7).

Relay route was 10 km in length, distributed in 4 participants, and children race was 2 km long and ran through the streets of the village Bichigiu.



Fig. 7. The geomorphologic profile of half marathon route
(Source: map myhike.com-with changes)

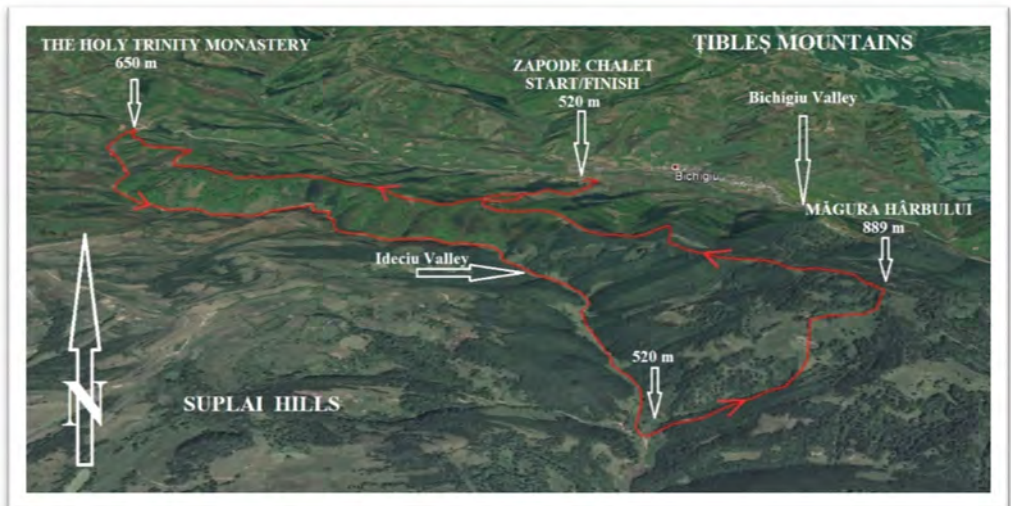


Fig. 8. The 3 D representation of half marathon route
(Source: google earth.com-with changes)

Tourist dimension of this area is supported by the following attractive targets, which were associated with the sporting event:

a) nature objectives:

- high hill landscape (700-800 m), intrusive magmatic massif Țibleș (1840 m);
- the forests and the meadows;
- forest fruits (strawberries), herbs and edible mushrooms;

b) anthropic objectives:

- the historic past: Bichigiu was a member settlement of Năsăud Border Regiment (1763-1851), the martyr Tănase Todoran who rebelled against Habsburg authorities in 1763, the monastery documented in 1523;
- The Holy Trinity Monastery, Bichigiu orthodox church;
- traditional architecture of the farms;
- traditional activities: crop, making hay, shepherding;
- tourist cabin Zăpode (accommodation, restaurants, fishing lake, rustic feasts);

At the end of the event was conducted a survey on a random sample of 100 athletes, which included the following questions:

- will enjoyed organizing the event?
- It was relevant marathon route / relay?
- did you liked the area?
- did you return to Bichigiu?
- what should be done as Bichigiu become a tourist destination?

The result of this survey was favorable to organizers, but also to the place itself, all respondents giving positive answers and suggestions related to the development of the village as a tourist destination and leisure, such as: the arrangement of the access road to the tourist cabin Zăpode and parking, marking the route of the half marathon for hiking and mountain biking, identify other hiking trails in the area, the diversification of tourist services provided by the tourist cabin Zăpode (center rental, guiding), training local people in accommodation activities, providing traditional food and tourist guiding etc., involvement of local and county authorities to promoting the etc.

As a confirmation, in July 2018, was organized at the Zăpode tourist cabin The Two Wheels Camp, which brought together 20 participants who carried out activities of mountain biking and cycling on the route of Half Marathon (fig.8).



Fig. 9. The poster of The Two Wheels Camp Bichigiu event
(source: <https://tabara pe 2 roti bichigiu facebook.com>)

In terms of interaction with the natural and socio-economic elements, it was observed that the impact of sport on the environment was reduced, half marathon and relay routes overlapping on forest roads for the most part and less on the meadows, so there it wasn't triggered the erosion of land, destruction of vegetation or disturbing of economic activities.

CONCLUSIONS

The sporting event called Bichigiu Half-Marathon gathered a large number of athletes in several counties and had the following purposes:

- the charity purpose: money from donations being directed towards building a house for a disadvantaged family in the Bungard village (Bistrița-Năsăud);
- the sports purpose: promoting Bichigiu on the map of mass sports events in Romania;
- tourism purpose: promoting Bichigiu area as a tourist destination for leisure and adventure (hiking, cycling, berries, herbs and mushrooms prelevation, cultural events, monastic and religious tourism).

In the next period, it is necessary a strategy to develop and promote Bichigiu village, which must include:

- encouraging the private initiative in the field of tourism infrastructure and services;
- marking the half-marathon route for practicing hiking and cycle tourism (markers, panels);
- elaborating a promotional brochure that will contain the main objectives of this attractive area.

The actors involved in developing and implementing this strategy would be: Năsăud County Council, Telciu City Hall, non-governmental associations, travel agents.

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***Semimaratonul Bichigiu facebook, accessed at 06.06.2018 and 11.06.2018.

***Tabăra pe 2 roți de la Bichigiu facebook, accessed at 06.08.2018.