

VIDRARU TOURIST REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Vidraru tourist region in the context of sustainable development

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Région touristique Vidraru dans le contexte du développement durable.

La vallée de la rivière Arges dans le secteur montagneux présente un potentiel touristique élevé particulièrement dans la région du lac d'accumulation Vidraru. Ce potentiel est mis en évidence par l'intermédiaire du cadre naturel et également par celui des objectifs anthropiques à grande valeur culturelle et économique. Même si l'aménagement du lac d'accumulation a représenté une opportunité de développement des activités touristiques de la région, on identifie en présent de nombreux problèmes concernant la gestion touristique et également la pression sur l'environnement. De cette manière, il importe de faire une analyse sur le développement de la région touristique Vidraru de la perspective durable, afin d'identifier ainsi les solutions le plus viables.

Mots clés: développement durable, la région touristique Vidraru, analyse, environnement.

Regiunea turistică Vidraru în contextul dezvoltării durabile.

Valea Argeşului în sectorul montan prezintă un potenţial turistic ridicat în special în regiunea lacului de acumulare Vidraru. Acest potenţial este evidenţiat atât prin intermediul cadrului natural cât şi prin intermediul obiectivelor antropice cu mare valoare culturală şi economică. Deşi amenajarea lacului de acumulare Vidraru a constituit o oportunitate de dezvoltare a activităţilor turistice din regiune, în prezent sunt identificate numeroase probleme atât din punct de vedere al managementului turistic cât şi din punct de vedere al presiunii asupra mediului. Astfel, este necesară o analiză a dezvoltării regiunii turistice Vidraru din perspectiva durabilă, încercându-se în acest fel identificarea unor soluţii cât mai viabile

Cuvinte cheie: dezvoltare durabilă, regiunea turistică Vidraru, analiză, mediu

1. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

In recent decades, the need to get acquainted with a new type of relationship between man and the environment has entailed the necessity to create and define a concept to establish, at least theoretically, the limits between the two components.

It is about the concept of sustainable development that has emerged together with the 1972 meeting of the international community within the *Stockholm Conference on Human Environment*. This concept is defined for the first time by means of the drafting of the Brundland report in 1987, which defines the sustainable development as being “the development which meets the needs of this generation, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

This concept is carried out on a multidimensional plan [1], trying to bring together three major dimensions: the environmental, the economic and the social one. These dimensions are in close interconnection and can be applied in all economic sectors, this being valid for tourism activities, too.

Regarding the sustainable development – tourism relationship, the literature outlines another concept, namely the *sustainable tourism* [2], which is embedded in the concept of sustainable development. These two concepts are in a continuous interconnection.

Although the area covered by this study – the tourist region of the Vidraru Reservoir – has a great tourism potential, it also has numerous issues relating to the management of tourist activities. This is why an analysis of this area in terms of tourism development in accordance with sustainable development principles is absolutely necessary.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in order to write this article is based on collecting and processing data, conducting regular field surveys and using a specialized bibliography. Data processing was possible especially by using ArcGIS 9.3 software; the basic support in graphical editing of the study is represented by the 1:25.000 topographic map of the region. Resorting to geo-spatial.org database was an important way to achieve a spatial analysis of this study.

3. THE REGION'S TOURISM POTENTIAL

Vidraru tourist region is located in the central-southern side of Romania, in the Făgăraș Massif of the Southern Carpathians (Figure 1).

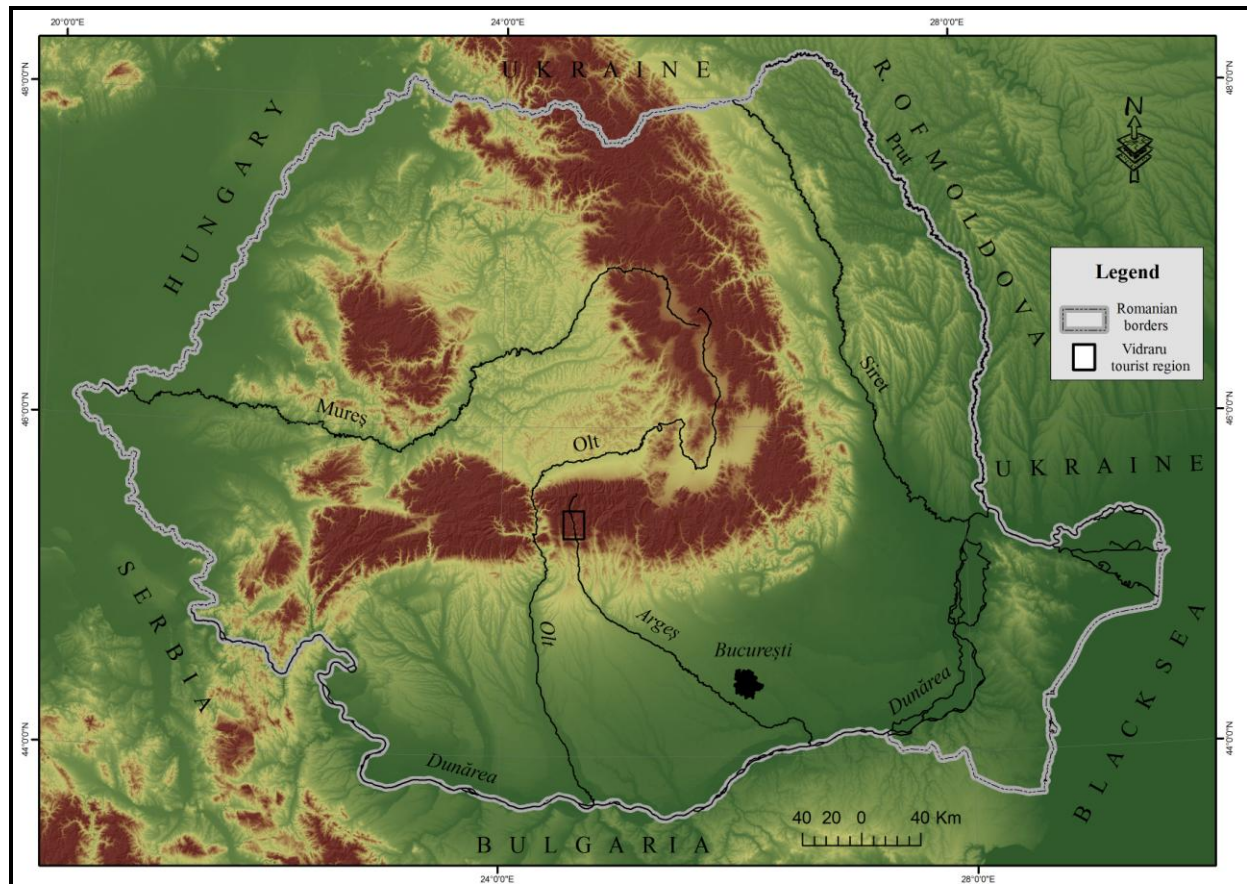


Figure 1. Localizing Vidraru tourist region in Romania
(data processing geo-spatial.org)

The area covered by this study lies between the Arges Gorges in the Vidraru Dam area and the upper side of the lake, upstream the Cumpăna resort.

The localization of this tourist region in the southern side of the Făgăraș Mountains, in the eastern side of the Loviștea Depression, determines the existence of a high tourist potential due to natural components and anthropogenic tourist attractions.

The localization of the Vidraru tourist region in the Loviștea Depression presents, besides the natural opportunities, a cultural and historical advantage, since this depression is, from ancient times, a place for hunting, even the word *loviște* reveals this fact [3]. However this depression, historically called the Country of Loviștea, has functioned over time as an intramontane depression linking the old provinces, i.e. Wallachia and Transylvania. Thus, west of the Vidraru Lake, there are two main roads, the most important one being the Great Way of Loviștea. Coming down from north, from Căineni and crossing the depression through Boișoara, Tițești, Perișani, it reaches the Topolog Valley, east of the

Cozia Mountains. The fact that this road was used by Romans is mentioned in various works, existing before the arrival of the Romans.

Another historical importance of the road is due to the fact that this place was identified as the location of the battle of Posada, somewhere near the Șaua Clocoticiului. However, there is ample evidence of the importance of this road, being the most important and the most used road of Lovișteea and one of the most important trans-Carpathian roads [3].

Currently, Vidraru tourist region has an important tourism potential, this being due to natural conditions and existing anthropogenic tourist attractions in the area. The existence of the mountain area, the Arges Gorges, the outstanding natural landscapes and the presence of the Vidraru Lake form some of the natural elements that represent an area of tourist attraction for many visitors.

Vidraru Dam , Transfăgărășan, the statue of Prometheus, Poienari Citadel rank among the anthropogenic tourist attractions. One of the most important anthropogenic tourist attractions is the Vidraru Dam, its construction determining the emergence of the reservoir of the same name and the starting point in developing tourism in the region. The dam construction began in 1960 and was completed in 1966. At that time (in 1967), the Vidraru Dam was, by height, the fifth arch dam in Europe and the ninth in the world [4].

The dam is a double-arched concrete construction with a length of 307 meters, and a base width of 25 meters and a crown width of 6 meters (Figure 1). Its height is 166 m, being the highest dam in Romania and one of the highest in Europe. Vidraru Lake covers an area of 870 ha and has a total volume of about 465 million m³, the lake volume representing 78% of the annual inventory of the Arges river water. Also, the lake is situated at a height of 830 m, with a maximum depth of 155 m at the dam, and an average one of approx. 55m. Along with the construction of the Vidraru Dam, the Transfăgărășan Road (1971-1974) was built, and a series of bridges, viaducts, roofs, and the longest tunnel in the country with a length of 900 m.



Figure 1 The Vidraru Dam and Lake
(Zamora V., 2010)

In terms of tourism activities, these are relatively diverse; the most important activities are hiking, pleasure boat activities, water sports, bungee jumping, etc. These activities are more intense especially during the summer, the climate factor determining tourist activities in the area. Thus, we can say that during the winter season tourists number is small compared to the number existing during summer season. This is in conjunction with the lack of tourist activities/infrastructure specific to cold season, such as ski slope facilities.

In order to satisfy the annual flow of tourists, and especially to increase the opportunities for tourism development, it can be said that the Vidraru region has a relatively poor accommodation infrastructure. The accommodation implies a small number of chalets and guesthouses, the most important ones being the following: Cumpăna and Valea cu Pesti, Casa Argeșană and the Vidraru Floating Hotel (Figure 2).

Currently, there is an increasing trend of private housing units, especially on the eastern side of the lake due to road infrastructure opportunities (Transfăgărășan). It should be pointed out that the Vidraru tourist region led to the development of tourism

infrastructure (chalets, guesthouses and campgrounds) south of Lake Vidraru in the Arefu, Corbeni and Căpățâneni villages, but these areas are not covered by this study.

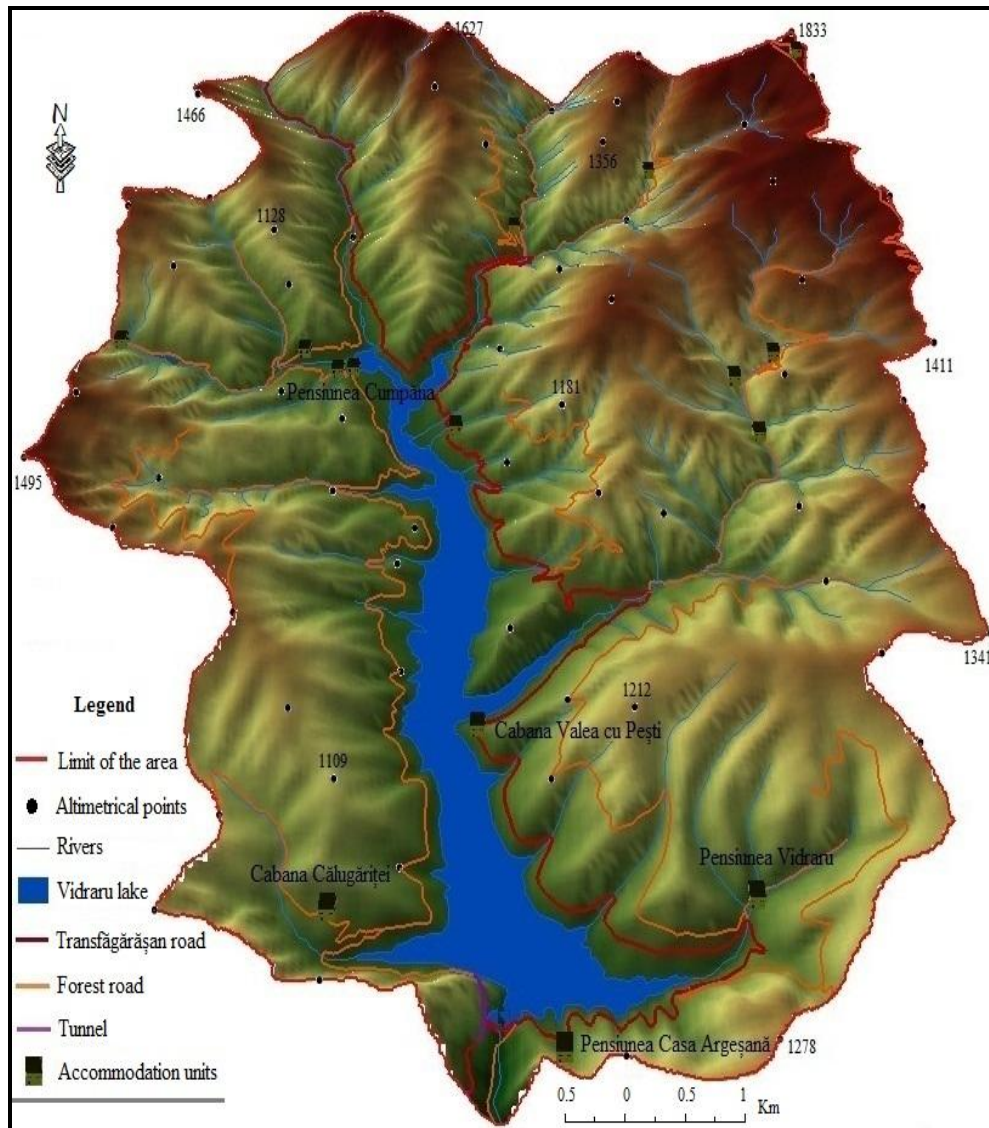


Figure 2. Spatial distribution of accommodation units in the Vidraru tourist region
(data processing 1:25.000 topographic map of the area)

4. THE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INDUCED BY TOURISM ACTIVITIES

After analyzing the impact of Vidraru tourist development on the environmental components, the state of the environmental quality in the analyzed region can be broadly distinguished. The environmental quality in the analyzed area results from both the environmental impact generated by the hydro facilities in the area [5] and the local activities. The local tourism activities are distinguished in particular, having the greatest

importance in assessing environmental quality [6]. It shall be noted that these are supplemented by logging activities. Industrial activities are missing, though.

Tourism inadequately practiced represents an important source of pollution on the environmental components (i.e. water, air, soil) because of the human waste generated by the units of accommodation (cottages, guesthouses). Along with the development of rural tourism in the area, tourist constructions have greatly expanded, generating negative effects on the environment due to the lack of septic tanks in many cases. In this situation, the water is polluted with human waste.

It is important to note that tourism activities do not have the same intensity all the time in terms of environmental pressure, but they present weekly and seasonal variations. More specifically, weekend tourism is the most intense and has the biggest problems because of the quantities of waste left behind, this being due to a poor tourism management and to a poor education of tourists in many situations.

Tourism also presents a peak season during the summer, along with the opening of the Transfăgărășan Road. Thus, the flow of tourists significantly increases. During this period, road traffic is more intense; from this point of view, problems can occur due to a relative increase in noise or chemical pollution. We can also speak about an aesthetic pollution, resulting from both the inadequate colour scale of housing units (cottages, guesthouses) that does not match the local landscape and the degradation of some hydro facilities. An example in this case is the Vidraru Dam that has an advanced stage of degradation in terms of appearance.

Thus, it can be said that the state of the environmental quality in the Vidraru Reservoir region is strongly influenced both by the achievement of hydro facilities with negative implications on the environment, and the tourism that is inappropriately practiced. The concept of ecotourism is currently far from being implemented. Thus, in order to solve problems caused by tourism activities in the area and to develop this tourist region, several solutions for tourism development in the area were based on sustainable development principles. These issues are analyzed in the following chapter.

5. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE VIDRARU TOURIST REGION

The concept of sustainable development based on sustainable exploitation and utilization of resources is valid and can be successfully applied in the tourist region of the Vidraru Reservoir, since the tourist region has important shortcomings in terms of sustainability.

The main problems of the region, which triggered the creation of a sustainable development plan to reflect reality, are related to poor infrastructure (in terms of tourism and roads), lack of septic tanks, and effective management of promoting tourism. For the sustainable development of the region, the following major facilities have been proposed: modernization of natural roads, slope consolidation, septic tanks for all existing housing units, creating a ski slope with a cableway transport along with building a resort and campgrounds, setting up belvedere points and thematic routes for hiking and cycling, and tourist information points in certain strategic areas (Figure 3).

All these components have been proposed for development taking into account the existing natural conditions (degree of roughness of the terrain, the existence of outstanding natural landscapes, etc). The geomorphological conditions of the terrain are determined mainly by means of the 1:25.000 topographic map of the area. The environment was another important aspect taken into account as for the sustainable development of the area so that the development of these anthropogenic elements does not put major pressure on it.

The modernization of roads is a priority for the development of any tourist mountain region [7]. As concerns the Vidraru Reservoir, the choice of roads to be asphalted is based on existing forest roads and the existence of tourist attractions such as the tourist lodges or guesthouses. Thus, the most important road proposed to be modernized is on the left side of the lake; the main tourist area of interest is Cumpăna Resort. Another important aspect is related to the exploitation of the western landscape of the lake. Another road that needs urgent modernization is situated along Valea cu Pești. In this case, similar considerations are taken into account (outstanding natural landscapes, availability of accommodation).

Strengthening the slopes is a necessity especially in the southern part of the lake; here the values of geographical declivity exceed 40° . The existence of slopes with elevated declivity in Frunții and Ghițu Mountains triggers the destabilization of rocks. Vulnerability elements are recurrent in the case of the Transfăgărășan Road.

Septic tanks represent an important issue, since they are missing; the human waste often gets into water or soil, the pollution effects having an impact on the environment. Creation of septic tanks for each unit of accommodation is a core component of sustainable development of the region.

Harnessing ski slopes and providing cableway transport for ensuring support to the respective slope represent key elements in attracting financial resources and, consequently, the tourist development of the area. Harnessing ski slopes took into account the geomorphological conditions (the respective geographical declivity determined by the

topographic map of the region), as well as the short distance in relation to the Cumpăna tourist area.

Although achieving this fact requires significant pressure on the environment especially because of the deforestation, there may be alternatives from a sustainable perspective: deforestation made to achieve a ski slope can be offset by reforestation in other areas within the Vidraru Reservoir area.

The emergence of a ski area in the Vidraru tourist region implies a significant increase of the flow of tourists, so building a resort to satisfy the growing number of tourists is absolutely necessary.

As concerns the development of the Vidraru tourist region, setting up thematic routes for hiking and cycling is also necessary. These routes are found in the areas that have a pre-existing accessibility (natural roads, mountain trails). Three cycling routes have been proposed: two of them in the Cumpăna area and one in the south of the area, in the Vidraru Dam area, the route of this type of sport being closed.

The sustainability of the Vidraru tourist area also includes campgrounds and belvedere points set up next to access routes in order to capitalize outstanding natural landscapes.

All these components of the proposed sustainability must be managed through a proper tourism management. Thus, setting up tourist information points to promote this area is a real necessity. The location of these points of information should take account of areas with a high flow of tourists. In the area covered by this study, we shall identify at least two strategic points: Vidraru Dam and Cumpăna Resort.

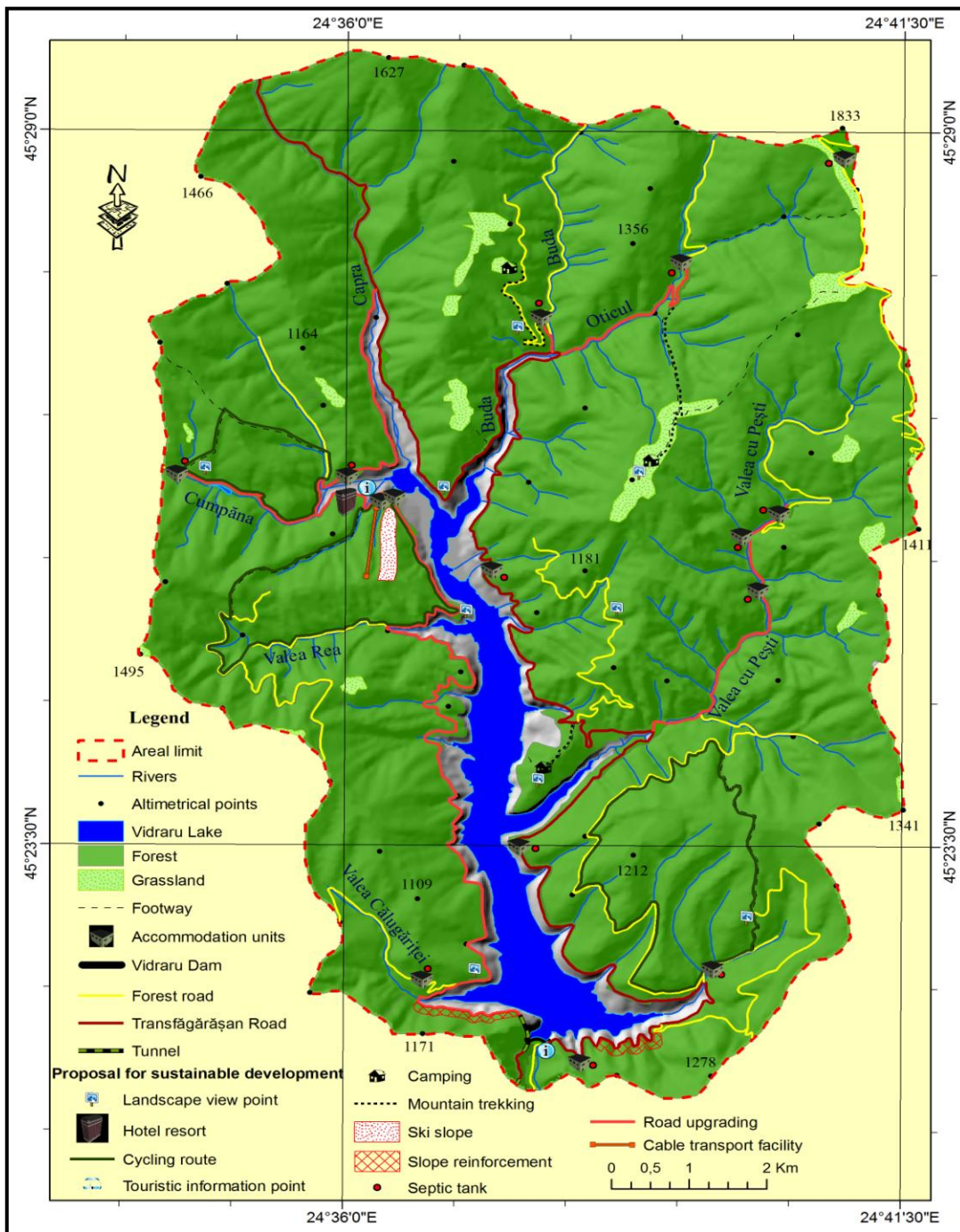


Figure. 3. Vidraru tourist region in the context of sustainable development (data processing 1:25.000 topographic map of the area)

It is important to remember that in this region there are many active torrents; that is why the torrent harnessing is an important thing to consider. Although this study does not graphically highlight torrents, they are in large numbers all over the area; the greatest vulnerability is located in the upper side due to the regressive erosion, and in the lower side due to potential cones of human waste that may occur. Most active torrents are situated in

the Valea cu Pești and its tributaries; this river is located on the left side of the Vidraru Dam. The elements that might be affected by torrents are the roads, the lodges and the infrastructure related to the hydropower component, namely Cernat-Valea cu Pești inlet.

6. CONCLUSIONS

From the sustainability perspective, Vidraru Reservoir region has a high tourism potential; this potential can be adequately capitalized according to the principle of sustainable development.

Currently, tourism activities in the area are poorly managed due to poor tourism management. Lack of effective means to promote tourism in the area, lack of traditional local products (textiles, pottery, etc.), poor infrastructure and degradation of tourist attractions in the area (for example, the Vidraru Dam) are some of the problems generated by poor tourism management.

Overall, the Vidraru tourist region can be sustainably developed mainly by modern activities promoting the region, by encouraging exposure of traditional products as a means of local identity, but also by arranging a proper tourism and road infrastructure, all of which representing opportunities to attract tourists and obtain sources of income.

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