

PROPOSALS REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE PROTECTED AREAS OF ALBA COUNTY

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Abstract: *The tourism industry has accepted the concept of sustainable development and adopted the notion of sustainable tourism. In the World Tourism Organisation's publication „The Tourism of 2010” specifies that: the sustainable tourism develops the idea of need satisfaction of the present tourists if the tourism industry and, in the same time, of protecting the environment and of the opportunities for the future. It is allowed for fulfilling of all economical, social, esthetical needs of tourism “actors”, maintaining cultural, ecological identity, biological diversity and all life-sustaining systems.*

The responsibility for the environment has become a coordinate for every tourism development project and has to become a basic element in the Romanian tourism development concept. Assessing the ecological impact of the tourism development is important because tourists tend to be drawn by the most complex and fragile environments from the ecological perspective, like sea sides, small islands, mountain areas or historic and cultural centers.

In regards to these considerations, this research intends to identify the opportunities for development of durable touristic activity in the natural protected areas in the Alba County. This paper starts with the literature review who tried to identify the studies and research regarding the theme approached; it follows a statistical data study regarding the tourism activity in Alba County, and a review of all the protected areas in this region, finally I tried to identify the main opportunities and directions of action in order to develop the durable tourism activity within the natural protected areas in Alba County.

Key words: sustainable development, sustainable tourism, tourism in natural protected areas.

JEL codes: L83, Q 26, Q56, Q 57.

Introduction

Since 1972, the year in which the first report of the Club of Rome was published – "The Limits of Growth" – and when the first UN Conference on Environmental Issues was held in Stockholm, more than 60 interpretations of the concept of development have been identified, in the new vision of the interdependencies between the problems of the environment, general welfare and the process of economic growth (Popescu et al., 1996). One of these interpretations led to the creation of the term eco-development, which emphasizes the need to look for concrete development strategies capable of leading to the rational and ecologically sound use of a given system, in order to meet the fundamental needs of the local population (Timbergen, 1978).

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Out of the over 60 interpretations of the concept of development, specialists have stopped at the one that seems to define, for the moment, the best, the solution of humanity's problems: *sustainable development*. The report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (CMED), also known as the „Brundtland Report” after the initiator of this report entitled „Our Common Future”, appeared in 1987, defines sustainable development as that *development that meets the needs of current generations without prejudice to the interests of future generations*.

On the subject of sustainable development, many events have taken place, among which the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development stands out, which brought together, in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, 145 presidents, prime ministers or vice-presidents, being considered as the largest summit of the twentieth century, which denotes the special importance of such a global issue.

Since its appearance in 1987, the concept of sustainable development has penetrated into all areas of economic and social life: from sustainable agriculture to sustainable transport and sustainable tourism.

In the economic, social and ecological fields, tourism can make an essential contribution, in many countries or territories, being a much more sustainable development solution than activities such as intensive agriculture, mining or other activities in the primary and secondary sectors, especially in compliance with the World Code of Tourism Ethics adopted by the General Assembly of the WTO in Santiago, Chile in 1999. The same can be said in the case of Alba County, namely that sustainable tourism represents the only or almost the only opportunity for economic and social development of some areas, formerly mono-industrial, such as: Zlatna, Roşia Montană, Baia de Arieş or Cugir.

Through the joint activity between IUCN – The International Union of Nature Conservation, WWF – the World Federation for Nature Protection, PNABE – the European Federation of National and Natural Parks, since 1991, the concept of *sustainable tourism* has been defined as follows: „development of all forms of tourism, tourism management and marketing that respect the natural, social and economic integrity of the environment, ensuring the exploitation of natural and cultural resources and for future generations” (Nistoreanu, et al., 2003). It follows from this definition that any form of tourism must comply with the principles of sustainable development, starting from ecotourism, green tourism and rural tourism, to business or motor tourism. Another definition of sustainable tourism may be as follows: “Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present) in a way that promotes conservation, has a low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local peoples” (World Conservation Union, 1996).

The year 2002 was a special year for the sustainable development of tourism, not only because this year the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held, but also because the UN declared this year the "International Year of Ecotourism", and the main event that marked this event was the World Summit of Ecotourism organized by the WTO on 19-22 May in Quebec, in Canada (UNWTO, 2002).

An increasing number of those involved, in one form or another, in tourism activities are aware of the effects caused by tourism development, of the impact of these activities on the population and the environment. Tourism has played an important role in sustainable development in some countries through the development of alternative tourism models, including ecotourism, community-based tourism, pro-poor tourism, slow tourism, green tourism, and

heritage tourism, among others that aim to enhance livelihoods, increase local economic growth, and provide for environmental protection (Richardson, 2021).

In recent decades, the aim has been to achieve the expansion of tourism in a balanced way, in accordance with standards that guarantee the preservation of the ecological balance and avoid overburdening of resources, pollution and any other negative impacts on the environment.

Protected areas, demarcated as areas where the main purpose is the conservation and protection of nature and cultural values, are important for all economic and social activities, including tourism. There are currently more than 1,388 titles in the world designating protected areas (Costencu, 2005). Thus, there are protected areas that have different names, but which have the same purpose (nature protection and conservation), such as: strict nature reserve in Bhutan; nature management reserve in the Bahamas; nature reserve in Canada; national nature reserve in the Czech Republic; marine nature reserve in Indonesia; area for nature conservation in Japan and strict nature reserve in Sri Lanka, and all representing the same thing - a Strictly Protected Reserve - category I according to IUCN.

Romanian and foreign tourists show a growing interest in visiting protected natural areas. This trend is argued by the scientific value, by the originality, by the unique character of the attractions sheltered by these perimeters, to which is added the need of tourists to spend a large part of the holiday in the conditions of an unaltered, unpolluted nature. More recently – as a result of the Covid 19 pandemic, tourists prefer to spend their holidays in relatively isolated areas in rural areas or even protected areas, in smaller groups or even in a small number.

Sustainable tourism appeals to many of the same tourists who enjoy “nature tourism”, “adventure travel”, or “ecotourism” - i.e., tourism that focuses on appreciation of wild areas, wildlife, and local cultures. The UNWTO estimates that nature tourism generates 7% of all international travel expenditure. If all nature-related travel is included (not just specialty nature tourism tours), the fraction of total tourists who are interested in nature tourism may be as high as 40-60%. The World Resources Institute found that while tourism overall has been growing at an annual rate of 4%, nature travel is increasing at an annual rate of between 10% and 30%.

The World Tourism Organization surveyed tourists from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and France to better understand their motivations for travel. The results indicated a clear preference for wildlife viewing in a wilderness environment. Other priorities included: viewing rare species, visiting indigenous people, archeology, and bird-watching.

Literature review

Over the course of over 100 years of existence of protected areas, specialists from all over the world have published numerous studies, textbooks, guides, many of them under the logo of the World Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). However, the Romanian literature is still very little developed, although the importance of protected areas is constantly increasing, and the number of those directly or indirectly involved in the management of protected areas should increase significantly in the future.

Making a brief foray into the literature, it can be estimated that there are about 1,377 publications indexed in the Web of Science Core Collection alone that address the relationship between protected areas and sustainable tourism.

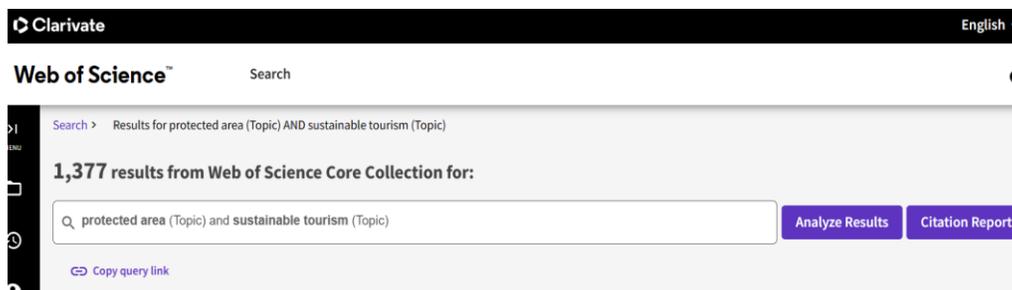


Fig. no 1 Number of publications indexed in the Web of Science Core Collection

Source: Source: own generation

Most of these are published in the following fields: Environmental Sciences (29.7%), Environmental Studies (25.2%), Hospitality Leisure Sport Tourism (24.5%) and Green Sustainable Science Technology (18.7%).



Fig. no 2 Number of publications by domain

Source: Source: own generation

Many are the specialists or organizations that have analyzed the concept of sustainable tourism, the characteristics and motivations of this form of tourism (WTO, 1995; Trumbic, 1999; UNESCO, 2010; Nistoreanu P. et al, 2011; Pomfret G. & Bramwell B., 2014), connections with other types of economic and social activities but also development opportunities (Agnati, 1999; UNEP & ICLEI, 2003; Gontariu I. et al, 2010; Nistoreanu P. et al, 2010, 2011; Osti, Brida and Faccioli, 2011; Bramwell B., 2015; Bramwell B. & Lane B., 2014; Budeanu A., 2013; Hall C.M., 2011; Hall, D. and Richards, G., 2003; Weaver D. & Fennel D., 2005) or community stakeholders' perspectives and business approaches to sustainability in tourism (Campbell, 2002; Castellani & Salla, 2010; Gibson K., 2012; Budeanu A. et al, 2015; Balslev Clausen H. &

Gyimothy S., 2016; Hatipoglu et al., 2016; Higham et al., 2016; Hultman J. & Sawe, F., 2016; Law et al., 2016; McLennan et al., 2016).

Sharpley R. highlighted the differences between the concepts of sustainable development and sustainable tourism and the fact that sustainable tourism must reflect the principles of sustainable development. Some authors have identified the problems and gaps facing sustainable tourism today (Bramwell & Lane, 2013, 2012; Buckley R., 2012; Hall, 2011; Moscardo G. & Murphy L., 2016; Mihalic, 2016), and others the role it plays in the development of economic and social life (Richardson, 2021).

There are even scientific publications dedicated to this form of tourism or which also include research in the field, respectively Journal of Sustainable Tourism, Journal of Ecotourism, Journal of Environmental Management, Sustainable Tourism Futures, Journal of Sustainability and Green Business, Biological Conservation, Ecological Economics sau Journal of Cleaner Production.

There are also Romanian researchers, established in the field of tourism, who have approached the sustainable tourism from the conceptual point of view or of its forms of manifestation, of the role it plays at the level of the local economy (Stănciulescu et al., 1998, 2000; Rojanschi V. & Bran F., 2002; Nistoreanu P. et al., 2003; Stănciulescu G. & Micu C., 2009; Nistoreanu P., Dorobanțu R.M. & Țuclea E.C., 2011; Mazilu M., 2012, Băltărețu A.M., 2011; Dorobanțu M.R. & Nistoreanu P., 2012). Băc D.P. identified and clarified what are the most important forms that sustainable tourism takes, namely ecotourism, voluntary tourism and slow tourism, as well as how it can be translated from theory to practice, the advantages and challenges it faces. Less approached in the specialized literature is the attitude of the resident population towards the sustainable tourism activity (Carmishael, 2000; Choi and Sirakaya, 2005; Chancellor and Cole, 2009; Oroian M., 2014; Yu, C.-P., Chancellor, H. C., & Cole, S. T. (2011; Pavlic I. & Portolan A., 2016).

In the last decade/period 2015-2021 there is an exponential increase in the number of works published annually, from 55 in 2015 to 177 in 2021, which addresses as a research topic sustainable tourism within the natural areas of the Earth (see fig. no. 3).

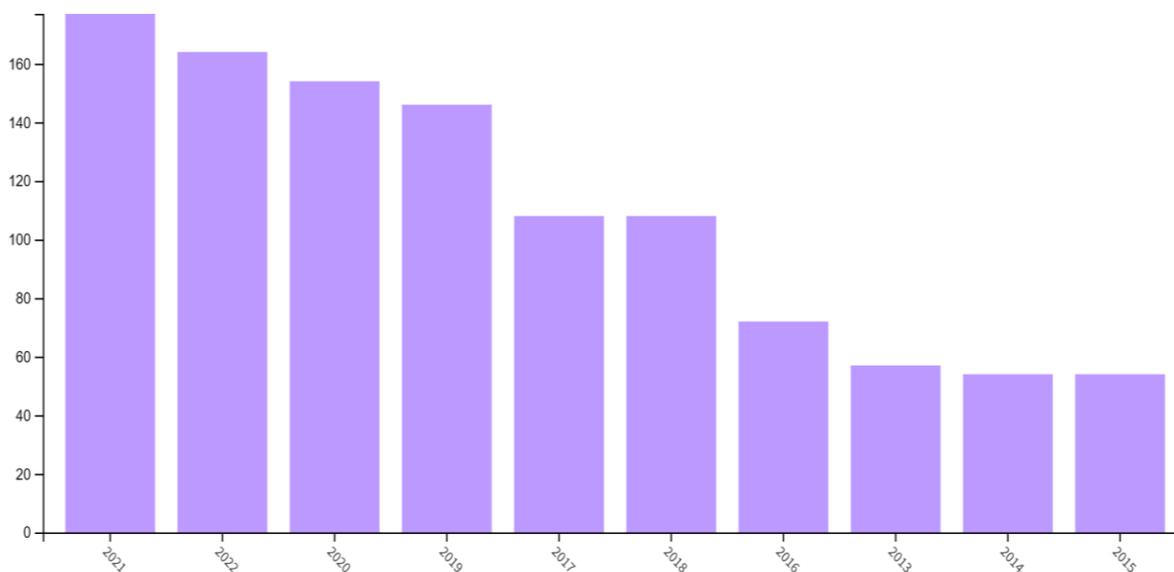


Fig.no.3 The evolution of the annual number of specialized works in the period 2015-2021

Source: own generation

Research methodology

In order to be able to recognize the scientific interest in the field of sustainable tourism research and to be able to ascertain its evolution, a bibliometric analysis was elaborated on the published works in the field mentioned above. Specifically, we conducted a bibliometric analysis for the published scientific papers on the research of sustainable tourism within protected natural areas using data taken from the Web of Science database and exploring the relationships between the most commonly used terms in terms of sustainable tourism research through the use of relational techniques.

The analysis was carried out with the help of information obtained from the query of the existing database in the Web of Science Core Collection (WOSCC), which includes more than 21,894 journals, books and conference proceedings and it covers over 82 million records, more than 126,000 books and over 226,000 conferences covered

Through all its scientific resources, WOS provides users with a database that can form the basis for designing quantitative analyses on the progress of research in the most diverse fields, including sustainable tourism research.

The database query available in the WOS platform was performed on May 5th, 2022 and had the following protocol:

1.Database selected: Web of Science Core Collection.

2.Advanced search on the group of words: “sustainable tourism” and ”protected area” in Topic.

3.Timespan: All years.

Following the bibliometric study regarding the topic approached in this work, it emerged that this form of tourism activity, namely sustainable tourism at the level of protected natural areas, is a concern of many foreign researchers, but also Romanians.

In term of science mapping, this study investigates the structure of networks as well as different research constituents in terms of research topics, clustering identified for the research topics, the importance of the key issues identified and how they relate in different contexts (clusters).

Therefore, the main topics researched on the topic of sustainable tourism in protected areas are:

- Sustainable tourism development – cultural heritage, territory, feature;
- Species – marine, coast, water, climate change, habitat;
- Interview and Governance – actor, local person, parks, programme, livelihood, cost, NGO, funding, mechanism, partnership, poverty alleviation;
- Attitude – questionnaire, behavior, satisfaction, national parks, natural area, accessibility, ecotourism, trip, visitation, recreational activity;
- Threat – land use, study area, evaluation, map, province.

2000 does not exclude human activities, but promotes cooperation between man and nature. Nature conservation is regarded as an integral part of spatial planning policy and can be compatible with agriculture, forestry and other economic activities such as tourism. Natura 2000 sites are valuable precisely because of the traditional way in which they are managed (mowing meadows, small-scale agriculture, development of villages using sustainable natural resources).

Regarding the development of sustainable tourism activity at national level, the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism) through the National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism has developed the National Strategy for the development of ecotourism in Romania, which provides for the creation of the conditions for the development of ecotourism at the level of protected areas and in the areas in their vicinity, as well as the realization of an ecotourism product that is competitive at national and international level. "Achieving sustainable tourism requires an open long-term approach, which is difficult to achieve in a modern world in a constantly changing modern world."

In our country, in addition to the protected natural areas of national interest, there are also protected natural areas designated at international level, namely: biosphere reserves - Danube Delta, Retezat, Pietrosul Mare (Rodnei Mountains); Ramsar sites (wetlands of international importance) - Danube Delta, Balta Mică a Brăilei, Lunca Mureșului, Dumbrăvița Fishing Complex, Techirghiol Lake; natural sites of universal heritage - Danube Delta; geoparks - Țara Hațegului Dinosaurs Geopark, Mehedinti Plateau Geopark.

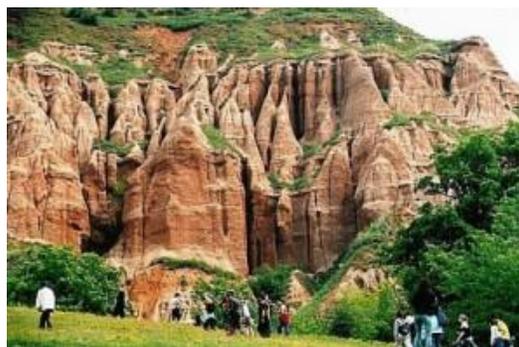
Thanks to the joint efforts of specialists and specialized organizations – the Association of Ecotourism in Romania, there are today at national level, several eco-destinations organized and declared as such on the basis of a certification system in ecotourism, such as: Băile Tușnad and the surroundings, Transylvanian Hills, Danube Delta, Eco-Maramureș, Mărginimea Sibiului, Pădurea Craiului, Țara Dornelor, Țara Hațegului – Retezat, Ținutul Zimbrului, Zărnești – Piatra Craiului. Each of them ensures the conservation of nature and the sustainable development of local communities through tourism, capitalizes on the specific elements of the natural environment in the respective areas through tourism products certified as ecotourism.

Currently, in Alba County there are 230 protected natural areas of national or county interest, occupying an area of 102,009.05 ha. Taking into account all the categories of protected natural areas defined by GEO 154/2008, at the level of Alba County there are: a natural park - Apuseni Natural Park (76.064 ha, of which 21,239 ha on the territory of Alba County), 83 natural reservations of national interest, 10 natural reservations of county interest, 120 natural monuments of county interest, 3 areas of special avifaunistic protection and 13 sites of community importance. From the list of the 83 reserves that have been declared as nature reserves of national interest by Law no. 5/2000, the most representative found in Alba County are the following: *Detunata Goală* and *Detunata Flocoasă* (natural reservations of geological and botanical type located on the administrative territory of Bucium commune), *Râpa Roșie* (geological and botanical reservation corresponding to IUCN category IV, with an area of 10 ha, located on the administrative territory of Sebes), *Pinteni din Coasta Jinei*, *Oul Arșiței*, *Masa Jidovului* (geological reservations and natural monuments located on the Sebes Valley), *Vânătorile Ponorului Cave*, *Ghețarul Scărișoara Cave*, *Ghețarul de la Vârtoș cave*, *Râmețului Keys* (with an area of 40 ha), *Huda lui Păpără Cave*, *Vidolm Forest* (or Laricetul from Vidolm with an area of 44,2 ha), *The daffodil glade from Negrileasa*, *Iezerul Șureanul* (20 ha), *Calcarele from Ampoia*, *Întregalde Keys*, *Vălișoarei Keys*, *Limestones with orbitoline from Piatra Corbului*, *Snail Hill*, *Iezerul Ighiel Lake* (20 ha), *Gârdișoarei Keys*, *Ordâncușei Keys*, *Albacului Keys*, *Cibului Keys*, *Ampoia Keys*, *Vârciorog Waterfall*, *Pișoia Waterfall*, *Piatra Cetii* (75 ha),

Luncile Prigoanei, Piatra Varului, Piatra Boului, Cheile Gălzii, Cheile Tecșeștilor, Coiba Mică, Coiba Mare, Pojarul Poliței, Izbuluc Poliței, Peștera de sub Zgurăști, Poarta lui Ionele Cave, Izbuluc Mățișești (declared a monument of nature), Siloșului Keys, Mănăstirii Keys, Corbului Keys, Șesul Craiului-Scărița-Belioara (protected area of a geological and botanical type, 47,7 ha).



The Reservation „Detunata Goală”



The Reservation „Râpa Roșie”

According to a survey (Unirea Newspaper, 2016) carried out by the Unirea Newspaper in 2016, among the most attractive tourist resources of Alba County, there are also several protected natural areas, namely: the Scărișoara Glacier Cave - declared as the first cave monument of nature in Romania in 1938, Detunata Goală and Detunata Flocoasă - unique geological reservation in the country, due to the peaks in the form of hexagonal basalt columns deployed on an area of 24 hectares, the Râpa Roșie which is a spectacular geological and floristic reservation, Huda lui Păpară Cave is the longest cave in the Trascău Mountains, the most difficult, the most uneven, with the largest hall, with the highest gallery, with the longest underground course and with the largest waterfall in the country, but also with the largest bat colonies in Europe, as well as with the Snail Hill - paleontological reservation.

Of all the protected natural areas of Alba County, only a few are in the custody of certain organizations that through various sources of funding have contributed to the protection and conservation of their biodiversity and implicitly to the development of a sustainable tourism activity (see Table no. 1).

Table no. 1

The main actions regarding the development of tourism in the protected natural areas in Alba County

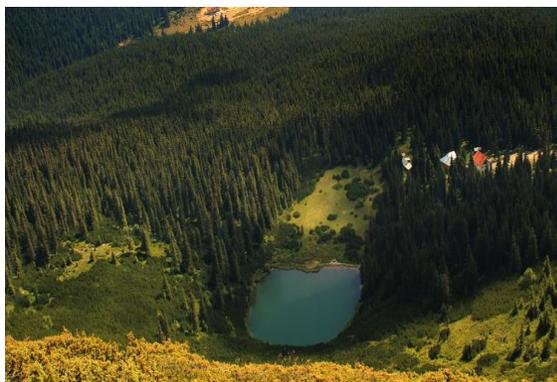
<i>Area/Areas protected(s)</i>	<i>Custodian of the protected area</i>	<i>The project carried out at the level of the area</i>	<i>The aim of the project implemented at the level of the protected area</i>
Natura 2000 site of Community importance ROSCI0085 Beauty and the site of vifaunistic importance ROSPA0043 Frumoasa	Alba County Council	Integrated site management ROSCI0085 Frumoasa and ROSPA0043 Frumoasa	Maintaining the favourable ecological status of the natural habitats and of the species of wild flora and fauna for which the site has been designated, as well as maintaining ecosystem services

The site of community interest ROSCI The fluffy oak forest from Mirăslău	BIOUNIVERS Association	Integrated project on the elaboration of management plans for 3 protected areas in region 7 Center	Creating premises for effective management of the Natura 2000 network
The site of community interest ROSCI The fluffy oak forest from Mirăslău	BIOUNIVERS Association	Biodiversity conservation in two Natura 2000 sites by involving local communities	Conservation of species in protected areas; environmental education; increasing the level of information and awareness of the local population, of the stakeholders as well as of the general public in Alba County, regarding the need to protect biodiversity
ROSCI0119 Muntele Mare, ROSPA0087 Trascău Mountains and ROSCI0253 Trascău	ALBAMONT Ecology and Mountain Tourism Club	Sustainable management of the Great Mountain SCI and the Trascău Natura 2000 sites	Preserving the biodiversity and natural heritage of three Natura 2000 sites by improving their management
Special Protection Area Avifaunistica ROSPA0087 Trascău Mountains and site of community importance ROSCI0253 Trascău	ALBAMONT Ecology and Mountain Tourism Club	Elaboration of the Integrated Management Plan of ROSPA0087 Trascău Mountains and ROSCI0253 Trascău	Conservation of species and habitats of community interest on the sci and spa territory
The limestones from Ampoița, Piatra Bulbuci, Calcarele from Valea Mică, Poiana cu daffodils from Negrileasa, Cheile Cibului, Cheile Feneșului, Cheile Glodului	Association of Tourism and Ecology TRASCĂU CORP Zlatna	Improvement of the management process of protected natural areas.	Increasing the degree of professionalism of the association in the administration of the 7 protected natural areas; the implementation of active measures for the conservation of protected natural areas.

Source: own generation



„Ghețarul de la Scărișoara” Cave



Glaciar Lake „Iezerul Șureanu”

Compared to the existing potential, at present it cannot be said that at regional or county level, sustainable tourism activity is developed. This can be argued by the relatively small number of tourist products that capitalize on the specific elements of the different protected areas and implicitly, the number of visitors registered within the protected areas, respectively the revenues obtained in these areas from the tourist activity.

Conclusions and proposals regarding the development of tourism in the protected natural areas of Alba County

Concluding, it can be appreciated that if various components of the national natural heritage attracted visitors about a century ago – with the establishment of the Retezat National Park, while the clarification of the concept and the shaping of a distinct form of tourism on the tourist market, namely sustainable tourism in protected areas, is much more recent.

The conclusions of this article are first referring to the importance of sustainable tourism in protected natural areas. It is believed that between the natural areas and sustainable tourism there is a very close connection in the sense that tourism can't develop without taking into account its effects on the environment and, at the same time, the requirements of sustainable development leave their mark on tourism.

The main objective of the economic and social development of Alba County should be to stimulate the competitive and sustainable development of tourism at regional level and, especially at local level, through the superior capitalization of the natural and cultural heritage with special touristic valences, as well as the creation of products specific to sustainable tourism.

According to the research undertaken, the capitalization through tourism of the protected natural areas in Alba County implies the following actions:

- development and modernization of the general infrastructure in the rural area (access ways, parking lots, water supply, electricity, telecommunications network, etc.);
- arranging, in the immediate vicinity or even within the natural areas, the touristic infrastructure - accommodation units, food, leisure - entertainment, tourist information centers - in compliance with the principles of sustainable development and touristic planning of the territory, as well as the specificity of resources;
- carrying out recreational, educational and sports activities (hiking, mountain biking, water sports - kayaking, swimming, paragliding, sports games) that give a plus of attractiveness to the area and invite to spend a longer period of time in the area;

- arranging the entry and exit points of tourists within the protected areas, as well as the itineraries they must follow in order to judiciously organize the touristic circulation, namely the establishment of the optimal number of tourists, the duration of the visit, the frequency of entries, etc.;

- organizing, within each more complex protected area, a tourist reception and tourist promotion center;

- arranging for visiting, in the first phase, the elements of the touristic patrimony that have increased attractiveness, the placement of panels or other visual elements with the purpose of signaling the touristic objectives, facilities and utilities;

- actions to educate and inform the local population and tourists about the sustainable tourism activity specific to these areas;

- the certification of certain natural areas of Alba County as ecotourism destinations and the creation of management organizations at the level of these destinations;

- elaboration and marketing of tourism products specific to protected areas in Alba County for certain segments of touristic clientele such as, for example, "holidays in the middle of nature" for young people and to contribute to the development of less well-established forms of tourism – educational tourism, scientific tourism, adventure tourism, youth tourism, etc.;

- restoration of degraded landscapes and tourist attractions from own sources or attracted;

- integration of Alba County within regional ecotourism destinations.

All these measures, which create optimal conditions for stimulating tourism consumption, must be integrated into a program of monitoring the activity carried out in protected natural areas and carried out very carefully, in order not to distort the environment, the landscape, the authentic and especially the life of animals, plants.

The involvement of the population and the local economy in the sustainable tourism development is particularly important. More specifically, it is about the superior capitalization of the local resources and the elaboration of integrated tourism products that would contribute to the development of sustainable tourist destinations in Alba County. By diversifying the activities offered to tourists in areas such as Sebes Valley, Trascău Depression or certain areas of the Apuseni Mountains and by a better organization and promotion of such tourist destinations, Alba County can become an "oasis" of sustainable Romanian tourism.

It is obvious that the tourism industry should change for its own good how it “manifests” in the environment, in order to maintain the attractiveness and to ensure sustainability of its components (natural and man-made).

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