

## **PERSPECTIVES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTURISM IN ROMANIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper presents the problem regarding sustainable development and ecotourism in protected natural areas, especially in Romania, but also internationally.*

*In the first part of the work are presented the specific features and principles of ecotourism. The durable development concept is now a presence in all economical, social domains, inclusive in the tourism field. Any form of tourism should respect the durable development principles: from ecotourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism, business tourism, congresses or automotive tourism. Starting from the premise that the ecotourism activity develops, with priority in the natural areas, in the next part of the paper we have made a brief history of ecotourism internationally and in Romania and classified the main protected areas in Romania. The last part of the paper is a case study which shows a parallel between two renowned national parks, Yellowstone National Park in U.S.A. and Retezat National Park in Romania.*

*The purpose of this article is also to promote ecotourism as the main form of tourism that capitalizes on the specifics of protected natural areas in Romania, for example in the Retezat National Park.*

**Keywords:** *ecotourism, sustainable development, natural protected areas.*

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

### **Introduction**

Globally, the concern for the environment is continuously growing, both at the level of national and international governmental bodies and among non-governmental organisations of environmental protection and tourism tour operators. Many of those who are involved one way or another in tourist activities, are aware of the effects created by the tourist development, by the impact of these activities over the population and the environment. In the last 40 years, it was aimed that the expansion of tourism should be placed in equilibrium, in accordance with the standards that guarantee keeping of the ecological equilibrium and avoids the overload of the resources, the pollution and any other negative impacts over the environment.

The tourism - environment relationship is of great importance, protecting and preserving the environment, being the paramount for the progress and development of tourism. This connection is complex and manifests itself in two directions: the natural environment through its components is the basic resource of tourism, and on the other hand, the tourism activity has both positive and negative influence on the environment, transforming its components.

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The importance of this mutual relationship is also reflected in the positive conservation actions or in the actions related to the rehabilitation of the environment, but let's not neglect the destructive actions of some tourist activities, such as: the excessive use of the environment's elements (water, air, soil, etc.) for recreational or leisure purposes, doubled by an irrational, often brutal, intervention of man on the environment and its natural resources. To this end, sustainable development is and will be in harmony with the environment, the population and culture of the place, so that its development will be made in their advantage and not to their disadvantage.

Responsibility towards the environment has become a coordinate of any tourism development project and should become a basic element in the development concept of Romanian tourism. Assessing the ecological impact of tourism development, is very important because tourists tend to be attracted exactly to the most complex and ecologically fragile environments, such as coastal areas, small islands, mountain areas or historical and cultural sites.

In other words, the environment and its quality represent the fundamental condition for carrying out tourism activities. Setting up and capitalizing on nature and cultural values by practising tourism randomly and without thinking may lead in time to adverse effects over all the components of the environment.

In this context, ecotourism is considered, by many specialists, the most important form of tourism because its practice ensures the protection of the environment and fragile natural areas.

Tourists, SME and corporate enterprises, destinations, public administrations, and residents need to contribute to the realisation of sustainable tourism objectives.

### **Literature review**

The first attempts to define sustainable development appeared in the 1980s (WCED, 1986; Gauthier, 1993), and subsequently its application to the field of tourism (Whelan, 1991; Wood, 2002; Băltărețu, 2011).

The intrinsic aspects of ecotourism such as clarification of the concept, environment conducive to its development, principles and forms, specific business, economic and environmental effects, the place of ecotourism in public policies and institutions, are discussed in the international literature (Fennell, 1999; Weaver, 2001; Cater, 2015)

The urgency of strong sustainability education especially for the tourism scholars is called by Cotterell et al. (2019) who additionally emphasized that in order to create future industry workers capable of being sustainability leaders, skill development in areas such as reflective thinking (Howlett et al. 2016), systemic thinking, compassion and empathy, and ethical practices (Wals and Blewitt 2010) need to be developed (Nil, 2020).

Several institutional initiatives at global level are focusing on ecotourism. The World Tourism Organisation has worked on the methodology for the identification and application of sustainable tourism indicators. In 1997, it published a practical guide (What Tourism Managers Need to Know) to their development and use.

Along with other international organizations, the European Commission also has concerns about ecotourism (European Commission and IDA Tourism, 2003), which emphasizes its development at the regional level, more precisely the ecotourism diversity of our continent, the development of sustainable tourism destinations.

Since the mid 90's the sustainable development of tourism has become a priority for the institutions of the European Union. Thus, the European Commission proposed "the promotion of sustainable development of tourism activities in Europe through the implementation of Agenda 21", a proposal that has received strong support from the institutions of the European Parliament, European Council, European Economic and Social Committee and Committee of the Regions.

Several other measures and exchanges of best practice exist, including some that focus on Europe, such as the *European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas*. The Council of Europe European Landscape Convention offers clarification on the approach to ensure the preservation of the regional diversity of Europe as one of the cornerstones for sustainable European tourism. In co-operation with the European Environmental Agency, institutional, environmental, socio-cultural and economic performance European Indicators for Sustainable Tourism Development in Destinations are also being developed in the framework of the VISIT (Voluntary Initiatives for Sustainability In Tourism) project that the European Commission supports under the Life financial instrument for the environment.

To respect bio - diversity and cultural heritage the European Commission encourages and promotes the assessment of the tourism carrying capacity of ecosystems, habitats and sites, the exchange of best practice among public and private tourism interest and the development of international guidelines for sustainable tourism. Initiatives for Sustainability In Tourism) project that the European Commission supports under the Life financial instrument for the environment.

At national level, the professor who supports, both conceptually and as the main form of economic and social development of protected natural areas ecotourism, is Professor Puiu Nistoreanu (Nistoreanu et al., 2003; Nistoreanu and Ghereș, 2010).

Among the Romanian authors with concerns in the field of ecotourism, more precisely in the sense of identifying and characterizing the forms of manifestation of sustainable development in the tourism sector, there is also Glăvan V. (Glăvan, 2003), Mazilu M. (Mazilu, 2004, 2010). Tourism in the context of sustainable regional development is approached by other Romanian specialists (Sava, 2010).

Other authors emphasize the involvement of stakeholders in tourist activity, especially at the level of sustainable tourism management in urban centers, such as local authorities (Stănciulescu, 2003).

The impacts of tourist activities on the environment have begun to be measured more specifically in the more recent studies (Wang et al., 2019).

### **Ecotourism: definition, specific features and principles**

As a distinct form of tourism, ecotourism first manifested itself on the North American continent in the mid-1980s as a result of the demand for destinations where wild and fragile nature was little known. Ecotourism has begun to manifest itself more and more in the last decades of the twentieth century, and even more so during the twenty-first century, thus becoming a way of sustainable tourism development globally.

According to the International Ecotourism Society, the term ecotourism is defined as "a responsible journey in natural areas that preserve the environment, support the well-being of locals and involve interpretation and education" (The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), 2015.). The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the European Federation of National and Natural Parks (PNNEF) and the World Federation for Nature Conservation (WNF) argue that through protection policies, ecotourism becomes an important tool in protecting and conserving cultural assets. and natural.

One of the most plastic definitions of this term is given by the Talamaca Society for Ecotourism and Conservation of Costa Rica: "ecotourism means more than books and albums about wildlife, binoculars, more than folk art that is displayed on the walls of hotels and restaurants, but in fact it means a constant struggle for the protection of landscapes, with the support of the cultural tradition of the peoples" "(Bran, F. et al, 2000).

Ecotourism is therefore an ecologically sustainable type of tourism, with a main focus on exploring and cultivating an education on natural areas that promotes knowledge, appreciation and conservation of the natural and cultural environment.

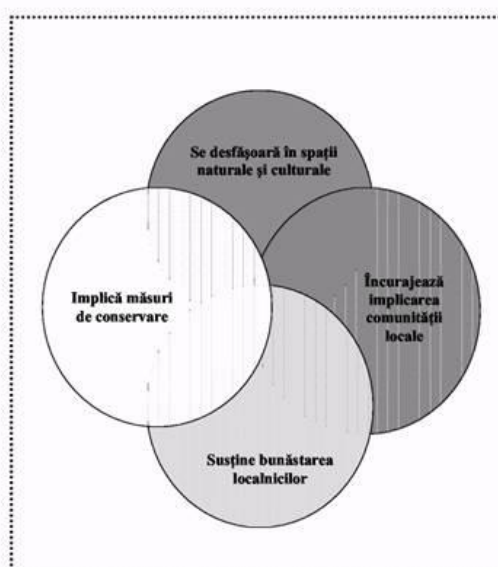
Ecotourism is a branch of tourism that seeks to protect both natural and cultural areas and strives to have as little impact as possible and (often) on a smaller scale. It helps to educate the traveller, provides funds for conservation, brings direct benefits to the economic development and political empowerment of local communities and promotes respect for different cultures and human rights.

According to UNWTO (UNWTO, 2005), the notion of sustainable tourism considers three important aspects:

- quality - sustainable tourism requires a valuable experience for visitors, while improving the quality of life of the host community, its cultural identity, poverty reduction, and environmental protection;
- continuity - sustainable tourism ensures the optimal exploitation, the continuity of the natural resources on which it is based and the preservation of the culture of the host community, with satisfactory experiences for visitors;
- balance - sustainable tourism ensures a balance between the needs of the tourism industry, environmentalists and the local community, with economic and social benefits, distributed correctly, to all actors involved.

A pattern of sustainable destination development requires the preservation of the regional diversity of European tourism as a competitiveness asset; ensuring quality and considering community well-being in tourist destinations; conserving or restoring European coastal zones and mountain areas, protected areas and cultural heritage sites as the basis for destinations to be attractive; protecting the environment and natural resources; and promoting sustainable inter - and intra-destination mobility (European Commission and IDA Tourism, 2003).

In 1990, TIES first developed the principles of ecotourism, today knowing much more about the tourism industry through scientific research. We also have more information on environmental degradation and the impact on local crops and animal species.



**Figure no. 1. The principles of ecotourism**

Source: Nistoreanu P. (coord.), *Ecotourism and rural tourism*, Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, 2003.

The principles that should guide the ecotourism activity include the following:

1. Involves a journey to a natural destination.
2. Minimizing the impact, tourism being one of the biggest sources of pollution.
3. Build an environmental awareness education.
4. Provides direct financial benefits for conservation.
5. Provides financial and emancipation benefits for locals.
6. Respect the local culture.
7. Supports human rights and democratic movements.

The result is, therefore, the emphasis on educating tourists, but also on economic agents that help to develop this form of tourism. Education can save not only the environment, but also the local culture, human rights, a variety of animals and plants, this education is indispensable for green tourism and should remain so.

From my point of view, education is the only one that can not only lead to the even more generous development of ecotourism, but also to the saving of cultures, the environment, different animals and plants so that future generations can also be educated and take them further.

### **Brief history of ecotourism internationally and in Romania**

In recent years, the increase interest in responsible travel has outpaced that of traditional sun / sand tourism by an increasing margin.

### **International ecotourism**

The real history behind ecotourism is rooted in Africa, when people could go on an "eco-adventure", ie trips based on the hunting of local wildlife. For a fee, one could go on an interactive hunting safari if tourists were allowed, hunting elephants for ivory (and sports), in addition to a wide range of other species such as leopards and lions. It became clear in the 1970s that if these animal species had not been protected and poaching had not been completely banned, some animals would certainly have disappeared. This achievement and the subsequent change in the way safaris and hunting trips were made in East Africa was a huge milestone in the history of ecotourism. Understanding this concept and banning poaching and ivory hunting has been a huge step for environmentalists and activists. By trying to protect these animals and the environment from the unnecessary pressure that tourists brought to the area, a large number of ideals and principles within ecotourism were born.

Ecotourism began to take shape in the 1980s, being the oldest and most frequently used term for this activity. Other associated terms are sustainable tourism, green tourism, nature tourism, responsible tourism, ethical tourism and many more.

Regardless of the term adopted, the central concepts that these philosophies share together are that the tourism industry as a whole should adopt greener practices, protect the natural and cultural heritage of a destination and support local communities.

The modern movement began to take root in the environmental activism of the 1970s. Some sources suggest that the term ecotourism was originally invented by Mexican architect turned ecologist Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin. He used the word to describe the journey to undisturbed areas to enjoy their natural beauty and culture.

In 1981, Ceballos-Lascuráin became the founding president of the Mexican Association for Nature Conservation, the most influential Mexican NGO in the conservation arena. In 1984 he founded the first Mexican ecotourism agency, ECOTOURS.

In general terms, even if the global ecotourism situation still needs improvement, the International Year of Ecotourism 2017 has allowed, in most countries and in all fields, to improve the level of sustainability in ecotourism and in the tourism sector in general.

### **Ecotourism in Romania**

In Romania, ecotourism programs have a relatively recent history. The first such tourist packages were created around 2000, when a series of initiatives appeared in the area of some national or natural parks (Retezat, Piatra Craiului, Vânători Neamț, Apuseni) or certain nature conservation projects that also have an ecotourism component (Iacobas, 2003).

„At the moment, ecotourism programs in Romania are concentrated in the following areas:

- Danube Delta and Dobrogea (bird watching, boating);
- Piatra Craiului National Park and surroundings (programs based mainly on the observation of large carnivores: wolf, bear, lynx, but also of specific plant species, equestrian tourism, etc.);
- Carpathian Mountains (many protected natural areas, some with the status of national or natural park) with programs focused on: equestrian tourism, cycling, themed hiking, etc.)
- Apuseni Mountains (Apuseni Natural Park, speleological, geological and mixed reservations: speotourism, themed hikes, cultural programs, etc.)
- Transylvania (discovery of Saxon and Szekler culture, themed hiking, etc.)
- Maramureș (cultural programs, nature discovery: fauna and flora, traditional occupations, architecture, etc.)
- Bucovina (cultural and monastic tourism, combined with nature observation: flora and fauna, themed hiking, etc.)” (INCDT, 2013).

Such ecotourism programs are offered for sale in Romania by local tour operators, who collaborate with those abroad. Some of the most important tour operators that promote such programs are: Perfect Tour, Delta Travel, Paralela 45, Carpathian Nature Tours, etc.

At the same time, in addition to these intermediaries of the tourist market, activities for the realization and commercialization of some tourist programs based on nature are also carried out by other entities such as park administrations, various NGOs, etc. Thus, the Retezat National Park Administration, in partnership with the Retezat Tourism Association, offers the following categories of tourist programs: guided tours on mountain trails, tours on bike trails inside / near the park, visits to major attractions in the area.

### **The main protected areas in Romania**

Protected natural areas designate those areas rich in natural landscapes, which have a special fauna and flora, but are protected against degradation. This is difficult to achieve because their uniqueness makes them desired by tourists. In the absence of well-established rules and adequate infrastructure, irreversible degradation of the environment and the natural landscape occurs.

Romania has many such areas, being a country with diverse capital and rich in unique and special natural elements. Romania's relief is outlined by four distinct elements: complementarity, proportionality, symmetrical arrangement and variety, due to the large number of relief forms such as mountains, plains, hills, etc., the approximately equal distribution of the main relief units and relief grouping. Unfortunately, however, these elements do not have adequate care, there are no strict rules, education and infrastructure, and due to environmental degradation, we will remain, over time, without them.

Table no. 1

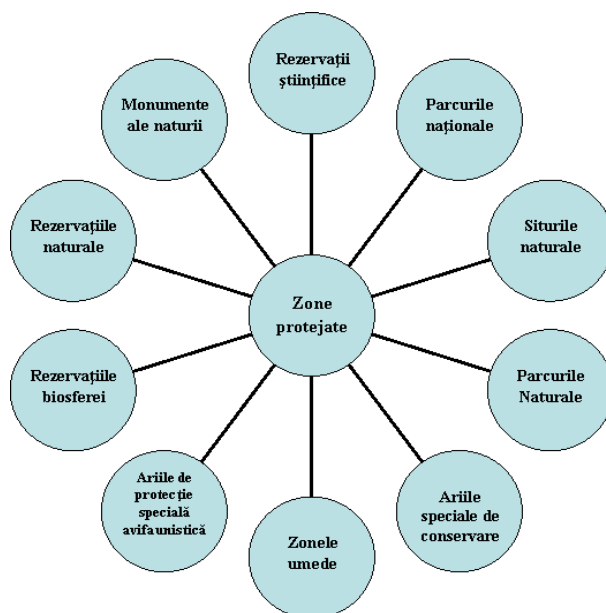
#### **Situation of protected areas in Romania**

The surface of Romania	23.839.100 ha
<i>Surface of protected natural areas</i>	<i>1.234.608 ha</i>
<i>The share of protected areas in the total area</i>	<i>5.18%</i>

From which: The Danube Delta occupies the surface of the country	2.43%
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Source: M.A.P.M., 2001

According to the National Agency for Protected Natural Areas, protected natural areas of national interest - categories designated on the basis of IUCN criteria (Situations by categories according to the INSPIRE project) are divided as follows:



**Figure no. 2 IUCN classification of protected areas.**

Source: www.creeaza.com

In Romania, as in other states, we try to protect the national natural heritage by arranging protected natural areas, which include the most important components of the natural heritage: natural parks, natural monuments, nature reserves, etc.

On the Romanian territory there is a wide range of national and natural parks, recognized over time as protected areas. These protected areas are included in either the UNESCO World Heritage Site or the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere program. Thus, on the territory of our country we meet 13 national parks, 13 natural parks, the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve and several hundred nature reserves and monuments.

Although the names, purposes and activities of these protected areas are different, the essential idea of their establishment and supervision is based on the same principle: protection. The difference between a national park and a natural one depends on the stated objectives. The national park is a region clearly delimited by law, where certain rules are observed to favor the natural environment. The creation of a national park does not have a tourist purpose, but one to protect biodiversity.

As far as natural parks are concerned, they consist of a delimited territory in which the natural, historical and cultural elements are protected in accordance with a well-established regulation, with a view to conservation and sustainable development.

So, although Romania has countless ecological destinations, there is still a long way to go to use the resources we have at full capacity, but in a way that does not violate the principles of nature protection.

### **Case study - Yellowstone National Park vs. Retezat National Park**

In the case study we chose to draw a parallel between two national parks, namely Yellowstone National Park and Retezat National Park to highlight how each of the park administrations treats the idea of ecotourism and sustainable development.

#### **Yellowstone National Park**

Yellowstone is the first National Park in the world, established on March 1, 1872, being the area with an incredible wildlife, with a large number of hot springs and geysers, but also a natural beauty of the area. Yellowstone National Park covers an area of 8987 square kilometers and has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1978.

It stretches across Wyoming, Montana and Idaho and is the largest ecosystem left almost intact in the temperate northern part of the Earth.

More than half of the Yellowstone National Park is occupied by more than 10,000 hot springs and 300 geysers. They would not have existed in the absence of the hot magma released by the volcano in the region, the geothermal waters reach temperatures exceeding 100 degrees Celsius. Some waters are colored differently depending on the bacteria that have developed, thus creating a unique landscape for tourists.

Yellowstone National Park is a great attraction due to the lush flora and fauna here. Its natural heritage is world famous being an amazing set of wildlife. Its diversity brings many opportunities for relaxation and entertainment and therefore, tourists from all over choose Yellowstone National Park as a holiday destination every year.

Viewing wildlife is definitely the main attraction of Yellowstone Park. There is a wide variety of wildlife that can be seen in the park: deer, bears, foxes, wolves, bison, hundreds of bird species and more. Early morning and evening are the times when animals feed and are the perfect times when they can be admired in all their splendor. However, animals can become unpredictable and dangerous.

Support and direction for environmental management in Yellowstone are clearly embedded in both the mission of the National Park Service and the significance of Yellowstone. Yellowstone's sustainability program extends this commitment to environmental conservation and protection.

Commitment to sustainability is all the more important with climate change and increased negative impacts on natural resources, locally and globally. Federal law requires agencies to protect resources through sustainable operations and adaptation of facilities. The Green Park Plan for the National Park Service provides additional directions for environmental management and has led to a strong commitment and support for Yellowstone's continued leadership.

Yellowstone strives to make sustainability a key element in management and operational decisions. NPS staff works closely with dealers and nonprofits through Yellowstone Environmental Coordinating Committee (YECC) to ensure a comprehensive approach to sustainability. This committee includes:

- Yellowstone Green Team, National Park Service
- Yellowstone National Park Lodges (Xanterra)
- Our Softer Footprint, Yellowstone National Park Lodges (Xanterra)
- Yellowstone Forever
- Medcor
- Yellowstone Park Service Stations (YPSS)

The main tourist attractions are located on the main road that runs through the park. These include: the Old Faithfull geyser, the Grand Canyon, Yellowstone Lake, the West Thumb geyser, etc.





**Figure no 3 Old Faithfull-eruption.**

Source: <https://www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/exploreoldfaithful.htm>



**Figure no 4 The Grand Canyon**

Source: <https://racoltapetru6.wordpress.com/2014/01/11/marele-canyon-sua/>



**Figure no 5 West Thumb Geyser Basin**

Source: <https://volquardsen.photo/en/2017/10/21/west-thumb-geyser-basin/>

With many unique tourist attractions, Yellowstone National Park is one of the most visited parks. In this case, the involvement of the local administration is necessary in order to keep under control at least at a certain level the large flow of tourists.

Without their involvement, the footprint of tourists would have been much larger, and some of these attractions could have been even in danger. Trying to develop ecotourism in this area is vital for the park, and the sustainable solutions found so far are a good way and even an example to follow for other protected areas and beyond.

### **Retezat National Park**

Although it is the first national park of Romania, its history declares a long way to its declaration as a protected area. In 1922, before the Agrarian Reform, on a part of the Retezat massif, administered by the Directorate of Royal Hunters, there was a hunting fund of His Majesty the King's House. This fund was the property of both Count Kendeffy's family and the Romanian State.

„In 1923 most of the alpine hollow is definitively attributed, through the Agrarian Reform, following the expropriation, to some villages / communes, with the right to use for grazing, with certain restrictions, established at the establishment of PNR in 1935. Administrator of these pastures was named the Agricultural Counselor of Hunedoara County, based on the instructions received from the Directorate of Pending Islazuri from the Ministry of Agriculture.” (Stelian, [www.retezat.ro](http://www.retezat.ro)).

In 1931, the management of the park is taken over by the Autonomous House of State Forests (CAPS), only in 1935 being declared a National Park, but only on 100 square km.

However, tourism in the Retezat massif has been practiced since the 1930s, information supported by a map developed in 1936 by the Touring-Club of Romania, where Casa Pietrele is illustrated as a tourist cottage.

Although the media is trying to promote this park as a "continuous virgin forest" or "intact surface", these things are not true in reality, deforestation taking place since 1930.



**Figure no 6 Log warehouse exploited on Lăpușnic and, partially, in the Gemini Reserve.**

Source: Di Gaspero collection, <http://www.retezat.ro/>

After the establishment of the Park Administration, between 1999-2016, things changed. "In the strict protection area (Gemini Scientific Reserve; in red on the PNR map) and in the full protection area (orange on the PNR map), no forestry works and tree cutting are done. Not even dead or storm-felled trees are cut down, the forest growing here naturally without human intervention. In accordance with art. 22 of Law 49/2011, in Retezat - Godeanu - Țarcu various forestry works can be done, including felling, outside the Park and in its buffer zone." ([www.retezat.ro](http://www.retezat.ro), 2016).

Among the reasons for the need to protect the park, the PNR administration mentions that it is one of the few places where nature has suffered less from humans, also here we can find 1190 species of plants and some of them that are rare or even in danger can still be admired in Retezat.

Of course, in addition to the attempts of the Park Administration, it is protected by law, more precisely Law no. 49/2011 for the approval of the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 57/2007 on the regime of protected natural areas, conservation of natural habitats, wild flora and fauna (Legea nr. 49/2011). Failure to comply with these laws and rules imposed by the Park can lead to fines of at least 3.000 ron.

However, tourists can enjoy countless sights both in and near the park area. Retezat National Park has four development areas, presented below.

We therefore have:

Zone I: Hațeg and Vest Jiu areas - is developed to attract a large volume of tourists and offers activities such as cultural excursions, natural resource discovery trails and horseback riding tours.

Zone II: The central area of the park - targets the national and international mountaineering market and offers very well marked trails and very well maintained campsites.

Zone III: The area of Godeanu Mountains and Retezatul Mic - offers experiences of superior quality in the wilderness of the mountains that will include the services of a guide, for a small number of visitors.

Zone IV: The area of the mountain resort Râușor - is intended for a large number of tourists and offers activities such as skiing, mountaineering and mountain biking.



**Figure no 7 Retezat National Park, Lake Bucura**

Source: Dan Dinu, [www.wwf.ro](http://www.wwf.ro)



**Figure no 8 Vârful Gugu, Godeanu Mountains**

Sursa: Șerban Simbotelecan, [www.pressalert.ro](http://www.pressalert.ro)

According to specialized studies (INCDT, 2015), the tourist circulation within the PNR is characterized as follows:

- approximately 15,000 visitors (2014);
- about 20% of visitors are foreigners, the vast majority coming from Hungary and the Czech Republic;
- 50% stay on average 4 nights in the park, and 50% are day visitors;
- 3 out of 4 visitors are young people aged between 18 and 35;
- over 50% of visitors do not use any of the commercial accommodation facilities (they use their own tents), so the economic impact is extremely small;
- the most frequently used entrance to the park was Cârnic - 70% of visitors;
- visitors come especially for: hiking, nature, climbing, picnic.

### **Conclusions and proposals**

Even if our country has a special ecotourism heritage, with great potential for exploitation, ecotourism is a form of tourism faced with many problems, such as: poor cooperation between state entities and tourism operators both locally and regionally or nationally ; modest promotion in the domestic and international market; poor development of ecotourism-specific infrastructure; labor migration; the small number of those with good training in the field; a legal framework that does not sufficiently respond to the needs in the field of local services, etc.

From the comparative analysis of the ecotourism activity specific to the two protected natural areas taken as a case study, we drew the following conclusions:

- both parks are constantly trying to protect the resources at their disposal, especially the species of flora and fauna existing in these territories, some of which are rare or even endangered.
- however, in Yellowstone National Park, the issue of sustainability is already raised in the recycling and economical use of electricity, while in the Retezat National Park the problems are still in the level of deforestation and cleaning of waste left by tourists.

in both natural areas tourists can visit part of the park by car, but in the Retezat National Park most of the tourist attractions are on certain organized routes;

- Certainly, the administration of the Retezat National Park, but also its visitors have a lot to learn from the American counterpart entity
- Although Yellowstone National Park is older and has consistent support for the development of ecotourism, and thus a more sustainable development, we can say that Retezat National Park has at least as many tourist resources, but, unfortunately, there is no comparable support for ecotourism.
- without the help of public administrations, without educating both tourists and the tourism industry, the large number of tourists and continuous deforestation will quickly lead to the degradation of the park, its rich flora and fauna.

We are talking, therefore, not only about the implementation and especially the observance of common sense rules, such as keeping clean, but also about the imposition of rules that prohibit deforestation at national level. Only later can we hope for the introduction of sustainability measures inspired by the measures taken by the Yellowstone Park Administration, such as saving electricity and reducing the human footprint on the park's biosphere.

Given that the Retezat National Park is only at the stage of waste cleaning, it has a long way to go before it can really be considered an ecotourism area, but this goal can only be achieved with the help of all parties involved.

The following could be considered as urgent measures regarding the development of ecotourism within the PNR protected natural area and the superior capitalization of tourism:

- continuing the action of greening the area;

- better informing visitors about the positive and negative effects of ecotourism on park-specific biodiversity;
- the development of the specific access infrastructure (roads, paths, arranged tourist routes) and of the tourist one in the sense that on the surface of the park there are only 36 tourist units with a total capacity of 800 places, 3 tourist information centers, 27 routes approved tourist attractions, of which only 3 are thematic and 10 rangers / guides;
- the attempt to promote certain forms of tourism (educational tourism, youth tourism, etc.) that would contribute to a better conservation of the existing flora and fauna species in the park area;
- the development of thematic / educational routes in the park area and the elaboration, respectively the commercialization of representative tourist packages;
- a better promotion of the Retezat National Park on the domestic and international tourist market as an ecotourism destination.

The present study aimed to present the current stage of development of ecotourism at international level, but especially in Romania and to come up with a set of directions to guide efforts to capitalize on ecotourism of a protected natural area representative of our country, namely Retezat National Park. This protected natural area since 1935, is an area where nature and local culture occupy a central place, but without an effective organization and promotion will not become a famous ecotourism destination nationally and internationally in accordance with the requirements by the national legislation, as well as by the international conventions to which Romania has acceded.

As a future research direction at PNR level, it could be mentioned highlighting the role that ecotourism plays in the economic development of these areas and implicitly in the prosperity of the local population.

At the same time, it should not be overlooked that there are currently many funding alternatives available to protected area administrations, local authorities within or near protected areas, economic agents involved in ecotourism activities and NGOs operating in the field of ecotourism or environmental protection.

The imperative action of all those involved in ecotourism will have to focus on the provided services that are supposed to be of top quality and on maintaining a natural environment – its raw material – in full harmony, knowing that when environment and tourism coexist in harmony, the environment benefits from tourism (and vice versa!). Any destination, be it rural or urban, should adopt sustainable practices in today's fragile environmental state of the world.

Relevant international organizations and bodies should continue, and if possible broaden, their sustainable tourism efforts.

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