

THE ECOTOURISM IN THE DOMOGLED CERNA VALLEY NATIONAL PARK-A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE

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There is much confusion about ecotourism. For many people it seems to be agro-tourism, rural tourism etc. The study tries to point again what does it meant and how sustainable and useful can be for this area. The ecotourism has a strong, diverse potential, including over 7% of the Romania surface of protected areas adding other private sites which offer suitable economic targets for local communities. The way of identifying their potential as an eco-destination is based on many integrated methods which can help local authorities together with researchers to establish a good economic development policy.

Key Words: sustainable development, ecotourist resources, ecodestination, local communities, biodiversity

The Role and Importance of this National Park in the Regional Development Strategy

The National Park as a concept was established during the X-th IUCN General Assembly, to New Delhi, in 1969. With this occasion, a national park was defined as „large area, where one or more ecosystems aren't damaged by human activity, where plants and animals species, geomorphologic aspects and habitats have a great scientific, educational, recreational interest, or which contains a very beautiful natural landscape, being under environmental low prevention, limitation for any kind of activity or to rise the awareness of people for nature and where tourists can pay visits in special conditions: for scientific research, education, cultural and recreation aims”.

Domogled – Cerna Valley Național Park lies along the Cerna Valley and it is developed over a deep spectacular fault that generates some geothermal and mineral springs appearing, well known in the whole world both by their higher temperature (42 – 67°C), and therapeutically effects.

Together with the Cerna Valley itself, a very interesting resource is the Domogled Mountain, protected as a natural reserve since 1932 for its numerous, rare species of flowers and butter-flies (1500) and the endemic pine (*Pinus banatica*, var. *Nigra*).

This park covers an area of 60100 ha, from three districts: Caras-Severin, Mehedinti, Gorj and includes the most beautiful and valuable units from Cerna, Mehedinți, Godeanu Vâlcan (only Șarba peak) Mountains (fig. 1).

This brief study is part of a large project aimed to help local authorities to improve the park management and to set up a true ecotourism here. More over, from the point of view of the Romania economy dynamic, this park is placed between two miner regions, one reach in coal, The Gaetic Plateau and Subcarpathians and the other in Banat Mountains, reach in coal and iron ores which register a strong economic development. People who live in these three districts around or in the Domogled

– Cerna Valley National Park will have only one economic chance, tourism or better ecotourism.

Tourist resources can offer some possibilities of development, and its position in three districts can be a great opportunity for refreshment of local

community's revenue, using this aggregate created by the existence of many protected area: Iron Gate Natural Park, Beusnitei Gorge National Park, Retezat National Park, Mehedinți Plateau Geopark and Semenic.

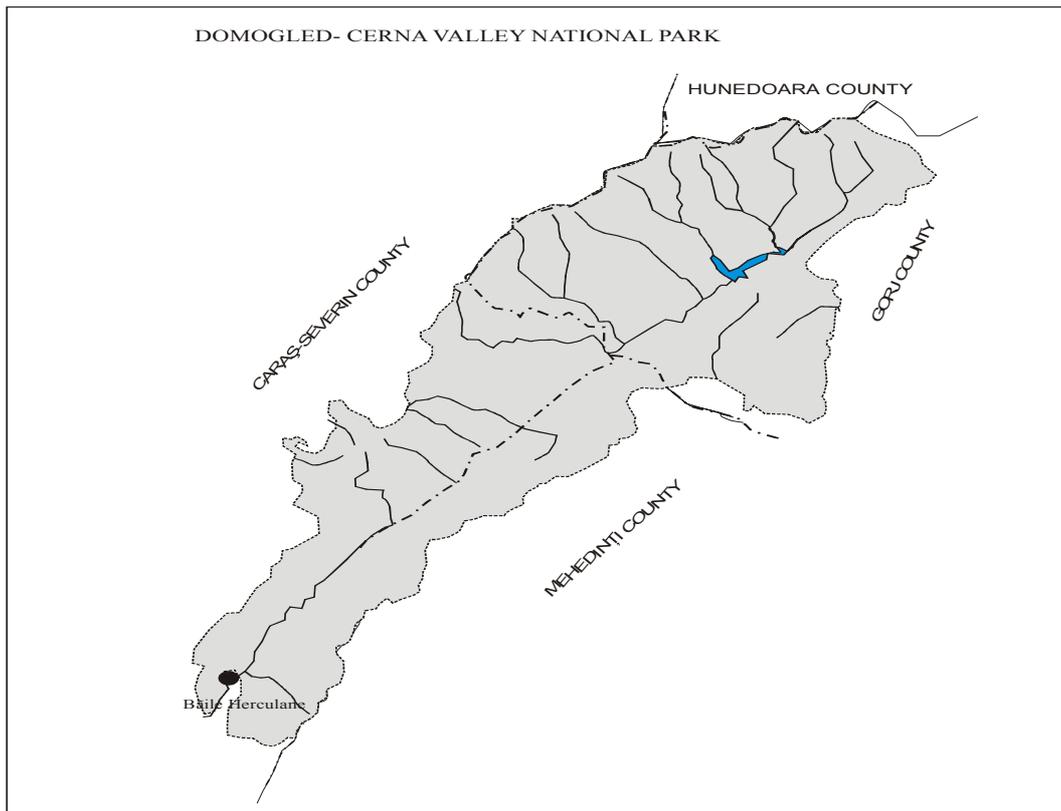


Fig. 1. Domogled-Cerna Valley National Park

Sustainability of the Ecotouristic Resources

Ecotouristic Potential

The ecotouristic potential comprises four categories of resources: geomorphologic, hydrologic potential, flora and fauna's values and unique human elements. As the geomorphologic potential can be considered all mountains (Cerna, Mehedinți, Godeanu Vâlcan (only Șarba peak) Mountains) made by limestone with a spectacular relief of gorges: Țăsnei, Cerna and caves (Closani, Adam etc.) and Cerna Valley itself, with a landscape

similar to a gorge but having the straightest line from all Romania's rivers given by fault. Hydrologic resources raise the value of the park. It includes mineral-geothermal springs which abound on the Cerna left side, lakes made by man (Priseaca), small but beautiful rivers scattered by falls.

Flora and fauna express the diversity of this park. They are available two weeks to 12 month.

Human values are different from traditions, language, food, folk costumes to the architecture of

houses. But the most requested are dacian mills, available all year round for tourists and breeding sheep.

All these resources are suitable for visiting 6 to 12 months in a year, excepting some biologic

species (butter-flies and flowers). The most vulnerable are flora and fauna elements and the strongest are mountains and springs (Table 1.). The level of their interest for tourists starts with gorges, geothermal springs and flora and ends with mountains, lakes and fauna (questionnaire method).

Table 1. Sustainability of Ecotouristic Resources

Natural resource	When to visit	vulnerability	Hierarchy of tourist motivation
Geomorphologic potential			
Mountains	12 months	less	2 (IV)
Gorges	12 months	moderate	1 (I)
Caves	9 months	moderate	3 (VI)
Hydrologic Potential			
Mineral-geothermal springs	6 months 12	moderate 1	1 (III)
Lakes	9 months	less	3 (V)
Rivers/Falls	9 months	moderate	2 (V)
Biologic Potential			
Flora	2 weeks-12 months	High	1 (II)
Fauna	8-10 months	High	2 (VII)

Diagnostic Analyze

It is based on the SWOT analyze because of natural resources impossibility of evaluation, having different values and dimensions.

Strong aspects emphasize a diverse relief and landscape, with many sites of scientific interest and very attractive gorges (Tasnei, Corcoaiei, Turcinesei, Sturului), caves (over 400 mainly in Ciucevele Cernei), falls (Vânturătoarea in Cerna Mountain, Roșețu, the highest in Romania 120 m in 7-8 stairs), limestone walls (Herculane fault), limestone ranges (Ciucevele Cernei), erosion witness (Churces from Bulz), landscape view points. Others can be considerate the climate, very rich in negative ions together with mineral and geothermal springs which can cure many illnesses (bones, eyes, nervous, skin, pulmonary).The biological diversity, undisturbed and very pure, is a target for

conservation (Vipera amodytes, wolves as animals and many plants: *Asarum europaeum*, *Asperula odorata*, *Syringa vulgaris*, *Cotinus coggyria*, *Corylus colurna*, *Carpinus orientalis*), and Alep pine, known as Banat Black pine name), Fig. 2.

It is closed with the other protected areas, making a large area for tourism and has the advantage of having some specific, modern and traditional facilities in Baile Herculane spa. On the other hand a PHARE program for roads (Băile Herculane-Câmpul lui Neag) is running now. The park has many possibilities to obtain energy from renewable resources (Valea lui Iovan dam) or to use folk resources (Plaiul Cloșanilor).

But it has many weaknesses such as: breeding animals in great number, uncontrolled movement of tourists, deforestation (Cerna – Village), a heavy traffic in the middle of the park, stopping the

migration of salmon by dams, poor publicity and less specific information or signalization. The major threats are related to the main routes which can allow a heavy traffic in the park, fluxes of tourists should be very big in weekend because of opening routes from the Petrosani basin to the south west region, the competition with the Retezat National Park as a future biosphere reserve, and the “enduro” car-contest closed to Țarcu Mountain which can bring damages through pollution in many habitats.

Using Some Opportunities in Protected Area Management

Generally, a national park is established to answers both to the economy (tourism) and protection, fundamental functions having a special radial structure: integral protection zone where only scientific activities are permitted, buffer zone big as area, around the scientific reserves is organized for tourism activities, but under specific regulation, and the third, outer zone as a transfer area between settlements and the park, suitable both for tourism and different human activities. The last can ensure checking out and in for tourists, control the entrance number of people in the park, and offers food and restaurant services. It is scattered equal in area to prevent damages and to respect the capacity of support.

The integral protection zone has in the Domogled – Cerna Valley Național Park 14 reserves. Some of them are: Domogled, including Domogled Peak (1104 m. high) and *Pinus nigra* var. Banatica reserve and caves; Arjana – Belareca Reserve (1511 m. high); Iardasita Forest Reserves (*Fagus sylvatica*) the largest unit beech forest from Romania, Coronini Bedina with the most interesting local Cave named Adam. It can be added other

caves from Mehedinti Mountain-Closani Cave, Martel Cave, Tesna Gorge Reserve Piatra Cloșani (1420 m high) etc. Godeanu Mountain ranges make a reserve themselves, together with many gorges (Sturului, Turcinesei, Sturului Walls). The problem of protection is under risk in Corcoaiei Gorge, situated in a village, closed to the main road.

Buffer zone contains Baile Herculane spa and other areas around reserves. Tourist infrastructure development areas, building zone should have a great importance in the strategy of the park organization and administration because regulation allows building of hotels, ecologies and restaurants just to use efficiently any corner of the park. They will play a key role to monitor the number of entrances and sustains environment through ecological facilities (clean energy, clean water, garbage recycling etc.).

Several Sustainable Proposals

They are proposed using the method of observation and questionnaire. These proposals are similar to other countries just to keep the same environmental standards and make the same education for protection and preservation to tourists.

These are focus on:

- Ecologies based on solar, wind, geothermal and river energy, as in Dumbrava Motel works already;
- Organizing of two entrance points: one to South and one to North, well signalized and designed;
- Booking reservation before coming with less 2 weeks till one year, using internet or other reservation network from Romania and Europe etc.;

- maximum number of tourists in a group will be no more than 25 persons and a good schedule for each route;
- guide assistance for each 12 tourists visiting the park,
- training staff once for three years;
- interchange information during conference, symposium, fairs, workshop implying Romanians and other countries to learn best practice for tourism;
- involving local communities in tourist business (transport, guiding, food processing, souvenirs, photo art etc.);
- partnership an environmental programs for tourist, firms, local people, schools, NGO's.

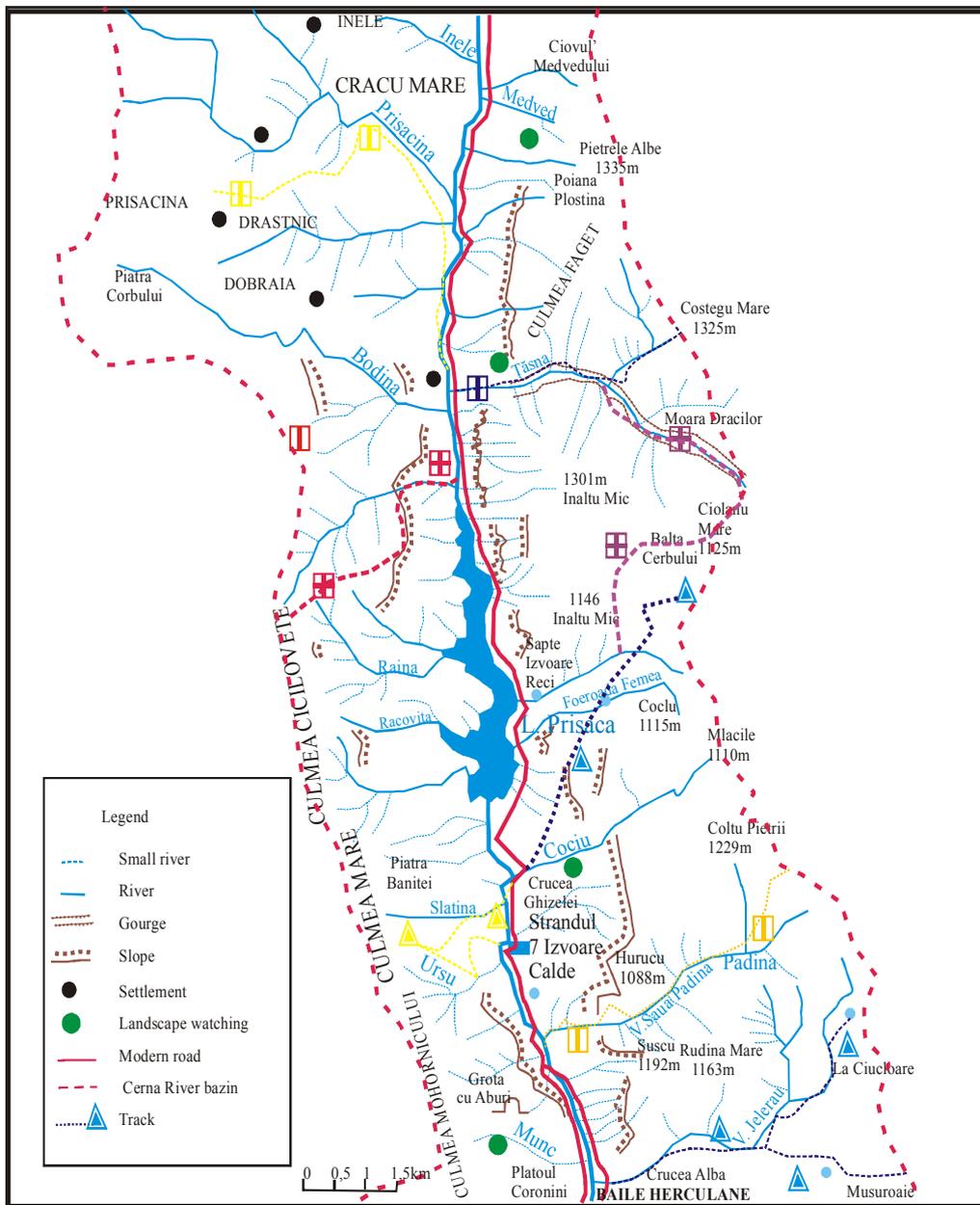


Fig. 2. Ecotouristic Trails in Domogled Cerna Valley National Park

Conclusions

Romania has a great potential for ecotourism and depends on how and when it will start a real alternative of a sustainable development in tourism. It has in the same time the advantage of low pollution state for many areas, a great diversity of

natural resources, but it's still unready for ecotourism and the moving on is very slow. In the Domogled Cerna Valley from 2000 nowadays they formed only an administration scheme and choose the staff and by individual initiative some private owner has a business more or less ecological.

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