

THE ECOTOURISM'S DEVELOPMENT IN THE ROMANIAN CARPATHIANS' PROTECTED AREAS: FACTS, FIGURES AND NEEDS

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Abstract: Landscape heritage of the Romanian Carpathians is emphasized through protection activities, but in the same time it represents an important pool of resources suitable to the numerous forms of tourism. Conservation is in line with sustainable tourism and its alternatives, ecotourism. The present study aimed on analyzes several features of the Carpathian protected heritage and how activities function through environmentally friendly tourism. Results showed a great diversity of understanding and implementation of ecotourism in the Carpathian Mountains, with numerous actions of organization, but also with a series of measures that are absolutely necessary for the proper functioning of this tourism alternative. The study provides several models to estimate some characteristics of ecotourism resources, which provide returns for consumer satisfaction as well as improve the management of protected areas.

Key words: Ecotourism, Development, Romanian Carpathians, Traditions, Protected areas.

Introduction

The ecotourism was developed on the tourism market in '80s "within the womb of environmental movement", (Honey, 1999) and in almost thirty years is the fastest growing segment of the global tourism industry (Gibson & Dodds, 2003; West & Carrier, 2004), becoming increasingly more important in the tourism industry, (Chafe, 2005). Although, it is defined and promoted in a great diversity depending of the conditions and views of each country, the basis remain as being "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people", (TIES, 1999; Taylor & Dyer, 2003, Valentine, 1992, Cater, 1995), a type of tourism where the environment, local community and visitor all benefit. Like tourism, ecotourism produces extensive benefits. Its goals are to help the environment by preservation of natural resources, help the local communities to maintain their cultural features and subsequently their economies. Even in practice, the term 'ecotourism' is often used by tour operators as a marketing tool to promote any form of tourism that is related to nature, (Wight, 1994), the money from ecotourism could be reinvested in environmental protection and growth the access of local people both in jobs creation and to civilization.

In many countries, ecotourism means a travel mainly to natural destinations, especially in remote areas which are under environmental protection at the international, national, regional or private level, (Honey, 2008), in others, cultural-human resources are included. In all cases, being a responsible travel it minimizes impacts to the area by different actions/activities starting with the recycling materials, development of renewable sources of energy, safe disposal of waste, keeping traditional architectural design, building awareness for environment and the special management of tourists and leisure activities etc.

In Romania, the ecotourism was/is part of rural and agri-tourism since 1994 and since 2000 is an emergent activity related to the protected areas. In this perspective the study aims to analyze several features of protected areas like eco-destinations, the ecotourism activities profiles in order to assess the support for public or travel companies' programs.

The hypothesis of the paper starts from the idea that once the establishment of protected areas in the Carpathian Mountains, forms of tourism and tourist destinations have diversified. In these circumstances, is the ecotourism properly developed as examples of good practice from world-wide?

The study aims to answer to the following questions:

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1. What is the ecotourism background legislation in the Carpathian Mountains?
2. Which characteristics of tourist packages might be improved?
3. What actions have been developed for the implementation of ecotourism?
4. What measures are needed to harmonize protection with ecotourism exploitation?

Methods and data

The study starts at the completion of related references on how to address the theoretical aspects of ecotourism that has multiple definitions and application forms, followed by an overview about Carpathian protected areas establishing the main legal issues that underpin the management of protected areas seen as most suitable entities for the practice of ecotourism in Romania.

For examination of the way of harmonizing them with economic activities, in this case ecotourism, Carpathians destinations were analyzed according to their potential seen by the degree of naturalness, diversity of flora, fauna and their exclusivity given by endemic species spreading.

The naturalness is calculated as percent of forest covering of each area (Manea, 2003; Apostol, 2004). The degree of flora and fauna diversity and number of endemic species, are estimated according to the following formulas:

$$1) \text{Gfd} = \frac{\text{Gfd NP}}{\text{GfdRo}} = 1 \quad (\text{Gfd-Degree of flora diversity, Ro=Romania, PN-National or natural park})$$

$$2) \text{GFd} = \frac{\text{GFdNP}}{\text{GFdRo}} = 1 \quad (\text{GFd-Degree of fauna diversity, Ro=Romania, PN-national or natural park})$$

The presence of endemic species included in the "red list" of Romania is not calculated since there is not yet unitary commitment upon the issues, examples are in crude numbers.

The third step is to assess seasonality of ecotourism products in order to help build visitors' programs. Based on planned activities and travel services companies that have leased, the study assesses the ability to integrate ecotourism on a large scale and provides examples of necessary measures for ecotourism packages on the tourism market.

Processed data in the study come from the Ministry of Territorial Development and Tourism, Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and bibliography.

Carpathian protected areas

Romania's natural and human heritage represent a resource pool for a series of activities with the precondition of keeping its content as goods (material or spiritual) which belong to the community and are managed by state bodies. One such activity is ecotourism targeted as an alternative of the sustainable tourism. The most suitable for ecotourism are protected areas, given their components' diversity but also because especially harmonization of policy implementation of nature conservation or landscape resulting from the symbiosis of nature and society with the ecotourism activities. Carpathians, like other Romanian areas, benefit of many resources which can be used in the management of legal compliance such as:

Areas of national interest, including National parks, natural parks, scientific reserves, wildlife, monumental nature (Government Emergency Ordinance no. 57/2007) which allow soft activities as ecotourism;

International interest areas (biosphere reserves, wetlands of international importance, natural sites of universal natural heritage, geo-parks) suitable for implementation of sustainable activities (e.g. ecotourism, agri-tourism etc.);

Communitarian interest areas (Natura 2000 network: Special Areas of Conservation, Special Bird Protection Areas, sites of Community Importance) which enrich the pool for ecotourism.

In Romania, the protected natural areas of national interest, reported the country's surface is 7%. Carpathian Mountains have the most numerous protected areas of Romania. Of the 14 natural parks, nine are in mountain area and of the 13 national parks, 12 are located in mountains. Total protected area in the Carpathian is 861,888 ha which signify 13% from the Carpathian surface (Table 1, 2).

The legislative basis of setting up of protected areas in Romania dates back since 1935. Only after sixty years the conditions necessary for preservation of large areas have created. Thus, the natural areas of national interest are declared by the Law no. 5 / 2000 on National Planning, Section III, protected areas; the Government Decision 2151/2004 regarding the creation of the protected natural area for new areas, the Government Decision no. 1581/2005 regarding the creation of the protected natural area for new areas, and Government Decision no. 1143/2007 concerning the establishment of new protected areas.

According to the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development Order no. 1533/2008, the management of protected natural areas may be awarded custody or may have their own management structures.

Table 1. Romanian Carpathian National Parks

National park	Area (ha)	Counties	Headquarter	Year
Rodna Mountains NP	46,399	BN, MM	Rodna	2000
Călimani NP	24,041	SV, MS, BN, HR	Vatra Dornei	2000
Bicazului-Hășmaș Gorge NP	6,829	HR, NT	Izvorul Mureșului	2000
Piatra Craiului NP	14,773	AG, BV	Zărnești	2000
Buila Vânturarița NP	4,186	VL	Horezu	2004
Jiului Gorge NP	11,127	HD, GJ	Tg Jiu	2007
Retezat NP	38,138	HD	Nucșoara	1935/2000
Domogled-Cerna Valley NP	61,211	CS, GJ, MH	Băile Herculane	2000
Semenic- Carașului Gorge NP	36,168	CS	Reșița	2000
Nerei-Beușnița Gorge NP	36,758	CS	Oravița	2000
Ceahlău NP	7,742	NT	Piatra Neamț	2000
Cozia NP	17,100	VL	Calimănești	2000

Source: Processed after Ministry of Environment and Forests data (2000-2008)

Table 2. Romanian Carpathian Natural Parks

Natural park	Area(ha)	Counties	Headquarter	Year
Maramureș Mountains NP	148,850	MM	Vișeu de Sus, Baia Mare	2004
Vânători-Neamț NP	30,818	NT	Vânători	2000
Bucegi Natural Park	32,663	PH, BV, DB	Moroieni	2000
Putna Vrancea NP	38,204	VN	Tulnici	2005
Grădiștea Muncelului-Cioclovina NP	38,184	HD	Deva	2000
Porțile de Fier NP	115,665	MH, CS	Orșova	2000
Superior Mures Gorge	9.156	MS, HR	Gheorghieni	2007
Apuseni Natural Park	75,784	BH, CJ, AB	Beiuș	2000
Dinosaurus Țara Hațegului Geopark ¹	102,392	HD	General Berthelot	2007

Source: Processed after Ministry of Environment and Forests data (2000-2008)

For ensuring a strong protection in Romania was created Nature 2000 European Ecological Network, which offers many useful tools in the direction of landscape and biodiversity conservation. Nature 2000 is a structure that both ensure conservation and development of Romania's biodiversity, and their use in sustainable tourism activities and in agriculture. Romania has 273 Sites of Community Importance and 108 sites of Special Protection Bird declared by Ministerial Order no. 1964/2007 establishing a system of protected natural area sites of Community importance, as part of the European ecological network Nature 2000. The total area of Nature 2000 in Romania represents 17.84% of the country. SCI (Sites of Community Importance) with 13.21% of the country and SPAs (Special Protection Areas) are 11, 89% of the country, (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 2007).

Moreover, through the Mountain Law, no 347/2004, improved by Urgent Ordinance (OUG), no 21/2008 Carpathians benefit by a specific regulation managed by The National Agency for Mountain Zone, subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests

and Rural Development whose politics, aims and objectives are almost consistent with the ecotourism domain.

Ecotourism-facts, figures and needs

As IUCN classification and definition, a national park (II category) allows several activities being focused on protected area managed, in particular to protect ecosystems and to provide recreational features. In fact, it is designated to protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations, to exclude exploitation or occupation which is contrary to their designated area and to provide opportunities basis for scientific, educational, recreational and visitors activities, all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible, (IUCN).

Natural parks are found in the IUCN category V, which protect area, manage landscapes in particular land / marine and recreation. In fact, a natural park is

an area that protects the landscape created over time through interaction between people and nature with a significant aesthetic, ecological and / or cultural value and often with high biological diversity, (IUCN).

The economic management of two types of protected areas included tourism organization mode, preservation of local traditions and culture, promoting education and environmental awareness, supporting the local cultural heritage and local community and its economy. All Carpathian big protected areas apply the zoning management which ensures fair both conservation and economic use of natural and national heritages having the following structure:

-conservation zone		research
-wildlife area / management area without interference	⇒	activities are allowed
- Intensive use area		
- Intensive usage enclaves or corridors		visitors with
- Enclaves and development corridors	⇒	several limits
- Buffler areas		
- Transition zone / Sustainable Development (Management adjacent area)	⇒	sustainable development
-Cultural zones		
-Ecological zones		

According to zoning and the proper scope of protected areas it is wide accepted that the ecotourism, by its economic use, has theoretically no contradictions between the economic interests of the population who could benefit from the economic potential of natural ecosystems and conservation interests.

Conservation itself generates costs, and ecotourism can generate income through profit-sharing arrangements and achieve goals with effective protection. Ecotourism is an alternative to the use of protected areas, being an alternative to classical exploitation through agriculture, forestry etc. Practicing this form of travel ensures proper recovery of the tourism resources, while maintaining their ecological integrity, (Bran et al., 2000).

The management of protected areas for ecotourism activities should be a harmony between techniques for visitors' management and resource administration. In this respect, there are many methods of note: recreational opportunity spectrum (ROS), Visitor Activity Management Process (VAMP), Visitor Impact Management (VIM), Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) and techniques: limiting the number of visitors, the dispersion tourists, tourist

concentration, limiting seasonal and zoning, education before or during park visiting, information prior or during activities, transfer of tourists services etc., (Smaranda, 2008).

Recreational opportunity spectrum (ROS) refers to the quality given by nature; social quality and conditions given by management, (Smaranda, 2008).

For building a tourist packages is very important to study ROS through the attractiveness of protected areas which depends on many factors. One of them is given by the degree of naturalness, forestation. National parks have a high degree of naturalness, its value ranging from 49% (Retezat NP) and 94.9% (Ceahlau NP). The degree of naturalness of national parks is between 57% (Maramures NP) and 86% (Putna Vrancea NP). Moreover, these parks have large areas of alpine pastures that enhance natural diversity. The forest coverage attracts tourist and allows a specific number of visitors, according to species fragility and their carrying capacity, (Table 3).

In the same category are included the degree of flora and fauna diversity and the number of endemic species, calculated according to up formulas. Admiration of fauna and flora is an ecotourism activity which allows tourists to watch (landscape's therapy), take photos or study. Statistically, the degree of flora diversity is 0.35 in Rodna, 0.37 in Piatra Craiului, and over 50 in Portile de Fier Natural Park Fauna diversity given by mammals' number is 0.45 in Ceahlau and 0.55 in Retezat. For bird-watching, the diversity is almost half species of the Romania's total; e.g.: Retezat 0.50; 0.35 in Bucegi or 0.30 in Piatra Craiului (Indicators were calculated according to data collected from the three selected protected areas' management plans).

The degree of endemic species diversity is expressed by the total number of species included in literature and legislation. Thus, Bucegi Natural Park hosts 27 endemic "hard taxons", which means 36% from Romania's total, (www.bucegipark.ro). Piatra Craiului National Park hosts 181 of rare species written in "the red list"(www.pcr.ai.ro). In the same time the following species, protected by law, are great attractions for ecotourism in almost all protected areas: *Taxus baccata*, *Gentiana lutea*, *Larix deciduas*, *Rhododendron kotshyl-Simk*, *Daphne blagayana* fray, *Salix myrtelloydes*, *Leontopodium alpinum*, *Angelica archangelica*, *Trollius europaeus*, *Dianthus callizonus*, *Rupricapra rupricapra*, *Tetraos urogalus*, *Linx linx*, *Gyps fulvus*, *Aquila chrysaetosus chrysaetosus* etc. With a such potential, a mountainous protected areas represents new attractive destination exploited through ecotourism.

Thus, the tourist packages can be improved on the one hand by customization of attractions for each protected area, known the above chosen indicators for biogeographic zones which Romania overlaps, and

Figure 1. Gantt diagram of some resources availability in Calimani National Park

	I	F	M	A	M	I	I	A	S	O	N	D
Traditional events/ natural resource		Parade on Bargaului Mts	Seep measure	Heroes day	Heroes day	Whit Fair Mountain Peony Festival	Fair cherries	Fair Baths	Monor days	Buck sheep		
<i>Daphne blagayana</i>												
<i>Leontopodium alpinum</i>												
<i>Rhododendron mytifolium</i>												
<i>Taxus baccata</i>												
<i>Salmo trutta fario</i>												
<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>												
<i>Cervus elaphus</i>												
<i>Ursus arctos</i>												
<i>Lynx lynx</i>												
<i>Tetra Urogallus</i>												
<i>Tihu Waterfall</i>												
<i>Iezerul Lake</i>												
<i>Pietrosul Range</i>												
<i>12 Apostles</i>												

No available
 Available
 Available with special measures

on the other a clear offer for each season, due to diversification of seasonal climate changes and biological resources throughout the year.

In this respect, tourism, which is affected by seasonality, can get a sustainable way to diminish it and to ensure, in the same time, protection knowing and promoting the seasonal features of resources, covering all year round. Further, even Carpathians have a great diversity of ecotouristic resources, some of them such as vegetation and fauna are very fragile comparing with water or geosites. Knowing regulation, resources vulnerability, any park can create programs regarding ecosystems' accessibility. If a peak, or waterfalls, lakes can, theoretically, be visited in any seasons, for flowers the suitable period for admiration is their blooming period and in case of fauna is excluded those months when animals are in danger to be disturbed in their natural reproductive processes (figure 1).

The landscapes, seen by geomorphological and hydrological heritage, are apparently more resistive and available. Cultural resources, traditions can be included in all packages except those scheduled

events which particularise the offers. An evaluation of the resources availability can enhance and give an image of what is sold or to be seen. Using this information it can be created seasonal packages and periods of visiting with detailed programs, (figure 1).

By this simple way, every park can create its own program of visiting typing leaflets with attractions and activities. Because of climate, species characteristics, park management should promote four periods of visiting with two periods of closing, such are February and November, when administrative measures are to be taken.

Out of the resources visiting programs, the management of these destinations comprises several actions for ecotourism implementation. Some entrances are monitored and well marked in the territory by gates, where rangers can collect the taxes from visitors, by means of transport. As many gates, as many difficulties to ensure with park staff the entrances (eg. Rodna NP with 16 points of entrances). Once the tourists access to trails, they must be accompanied by guides. Usually, tourists do not claim guiding services and many parks have still implied

only rangers for leading groups in destinations. But as a series of paths require accompanying large staff, a detailed knowledge of the attractions, thus there is a need to increase their power of guiding involving local people or volunteers. To the contrary, this lack increases the risk of pressure on trails by mass tourism. Thus, Bucegi Park has about 280 routes, being exposed to uncontrolled tourism more than Jiului Gorge with only one track (Table 3).

Tourist activities in many parks are similarly:

research for scientific protected reserves, walking and hiking. Few promote bird-watching or admiring games reserves. In several parks there were winter sports facilities (Busteni, Retezat, Semenic, Apuseni), mountain bike, canoeing, canyoning, caving, riding. For all these activities Carpathians micro-destinations must improve their advertizing, as instruments of promotion and part of marketing strategies.

Not all parks have a clear policy of marketing. Like other parks from US (e.g), some parks have assigned

Table 3. The characteristics of touristic activities in National Parks from Carpathians

National park	Tour operators	Forest %	Entrances	Trails	Activities
Rodna Mountains		60	16	6	Research, hiking, walking, ecotourism
Călimani Mountains	Bucovina Adventure	67	4	3	Riding, photo, walking, Junior ranger camp
Bicazului-Hășmaș Gorge	Fenyo Travel	93	3	3	Walking, scientific research, monitorised tourism
Piatra Craiului	Atu Travel and Events, Zoxi, Carpathian TOUR, AATEX, Turism ecologic	66.7	6	2	Walking, scientific research, monitorised tourism
Buila Vânturarița		75	4	6	Scientific, traditional activities, environment friendly
Jiului Gorge		85	2	1	Canoeing, walking, hiking
Retezat		49	8	3	Walking, hiking, ski, bird-watching, games reserves, research
Domogled-Cerna Valley		74	3	3	Traditions, Ecotourism, education walking
Semenic-Carașului Gorge	Woyage West, Tymes Globertrotter	85	6	7	Scientific, caving, forest-tourism, hiking,
Nerei-Beușnița Gorge		82	6	5	Traditions research, hiking, walking, ecotourism
Ceahlău			4	5	Traditions research, hiking, walking, ecotourism
Cozia	Proturism Nedeea Valceana, Euro-Tour, Grantour, Extour	94.4	8	3	Traditions, ecotourism, education, walking

Source: Processed after National Institute of Tourism Research and Development (INCDT) Data, (2007) and The Guide of Natural Protected Areas, Ministry of Territorial Development and Tourism, (2007)

the tourism activities to tour operators. Among twelve national parks, five have assigned the tourism to several stakeholders and from nine natural parks five have private firms which operate inside them, (Table 4).

Among 24 companies which are operating in the Carpathian parks, only 6 have clear ecotourism packages, with accurate specifications on activities, group size, routes requests. Bucovina Adventure is the most accomplished example, four have only general references (Proturism Nedeea Valceana, Vasertour, Apuseni Experience ASM Bihor, Green Mountain, Holiday) and the others deal with outgoing, even they are registered for ecotourism activities.

The ecotourism can be performed with success as the flow of ecotourists was estimated at 1,651,000 visitors (Ministry of Territorial Development and

Tourism Data, 2007), which signifies that 28.6% of total Romania's arrivals are interested in ecotourism products. At the local level, the tourist demand is still lower than the carrying capacity, except Bucegi with one million of visitors yearly (figure 2).

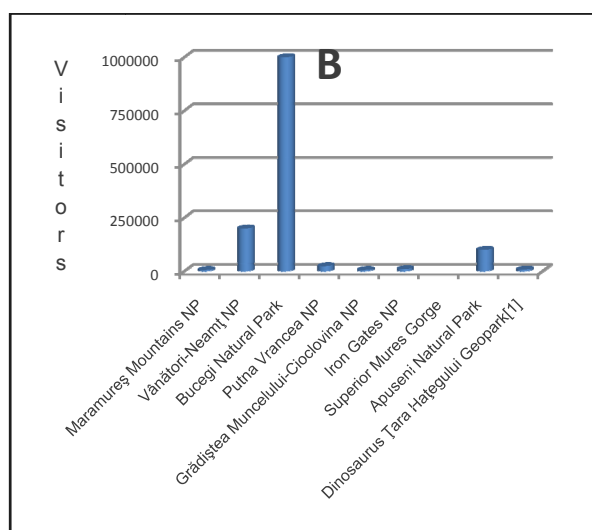
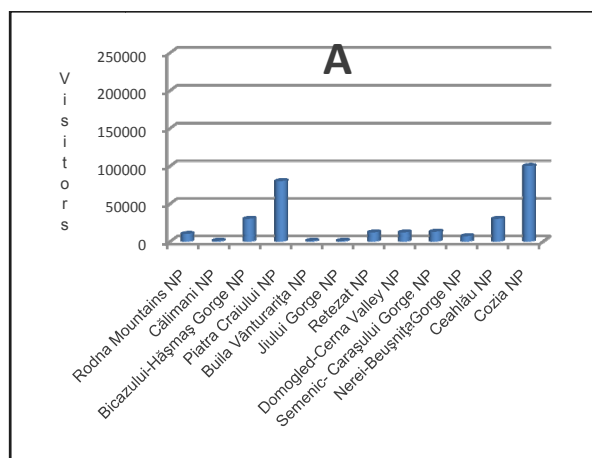
Accommodation is developed inside parks or outside them, totalizing 1650 of units, composed mainly of boarding houses, chalets and hotels. Few tourist establishments fulfill the characteristics of ecolodges (clean/alternative energy sources, recycling materials, self staff training, architectural framing site etc.). From this perspective, there is a huge need to implement the accommodation specificity given by ecolodges' characteristics in contrast with conventional tourist units which are overspread.

Table 4. The characteristics of touristic activities in Natural Parks

Natural park	Tour operators	Forest %	Entrances	Trails	Activities
Maramureş Mountains	Vasertour	57	6	3	Mocanita train, churches visiting
Vânători-Neamţ		85.4	5	3	Research, educational tourism
Bucegi	Crisstravel <i>Alpvooyages</i>	60	14	280	Mountain bike, caving, photo, winter sports, walking, hiking
Putna Vrancea	MV Travel, ANTREC <i>Vrancea</i>	86	4	7	Walking, photo
Grădiştea Muncelului-Cioclovina		69	10	5	Caving, walking/sheep way
Porţile de Fier	Xplorer-Resita, Bibitour, <i>BTT Turnu Severin</i>	65.2	2	4	Cruise, bird-watching, fishing, walking, watermills, cultural
Superior Mures Gorge			2	1	Walking
Apuseni	Apuseni Experience ASM Bihor, CIM <i>Transilvania Tour,</i> Discover nature, Green Mountain, Holiday, Outdoor 4 you	62,5	4/10	8	Ski, photo, riding, mountain cycling walking, hiking caving, dog dashing, canyoning, rafting
Dinosaurus Ţara Haţegului Geopark			4	2	Research, ecotourism, traditions, education, geo-tourism

Source: Processed after National Institute of Tourism Research and Development, (INCDT) Data (2007) and The Guide of Natural Protected Areas, Ministry of Territorial Development and Tourism, (2007)

Figure 2. The number of visitors in national parks (A) and natural parks (B)



Source: Processed after Ministry of Territorial Development and Tourism data, 2007

Although ecotourism is seen and organized mostly in protected areas, mass tourism is still a danger and can compromise them. Moreover, ecotourism doesn't function properly in many micro-destinations and there are some conflicts between the aim of conservation and incorrect operation of ecotourism. In this regard it should be noted that some measures are required:

1. A carefully and targeted promotion is necessarily, but focused on heritage particularity of each park given by the endemic species, geosites attractions, traditions etc.;
2. Park visiting by a pass' system should be generalized, in the same time with a rigorous organization of the entrances;
3. Walking inside areas should be achieved only with a guide, who can monitorize all impacts or issues. Guiding activity should also imply local selected and trained communities' representatives;

4. Limited entering in groups up to 25 people to reduce the impact on soil erosion on mountain trails as TIES promotes;
5. Creating programs for the accuracy of the information on seasonal attractions, which help in creating brands for parks;
6. During some seasons it can call through partnerships, to educational institutions to organize places through volunteering practice;
7. Appropriate organization for camping spots or restrained from cutting off the wood for firewood or collection of endemic flora species, multiplication of the picnic fireplaces, providing waste collection left behind camping etc.;
8. To organize education projects for local people not only of business groups about the benefits that can be made through ecotourism. The perception that once installed the system of protection, land is disabled, can maintain a conflict between park management and population. Involving local people should be in information and training to preserve agro-pastoral and forestry traditions that do not alter the existing heritage;
9. A point to be considered is the type of tourist products. Example label through "pan park" (Retezat NP) is a success which must be extended to other protected areas. By harmonizing the agro-tourism and ecotourism can go on providing local products labeled as natural products that may become recognized brands, instead of trade preparations. The effort made by the Association of Ecotourism in Romania since 2006, to certificate some products (pensions and packages / tours) in the certification system "Eco-Romania" must be continued. Through such measures it creates jobs for local people to be included in activities and not exploited as cheap labor.

Conclusions

The results show a great potential for ecotourism development, due to setting up of protected areas that contain organized structures for their administration. Although they are young, the management of protected areas comprises ecotourism activities, but not fully developed in the absence of a unified organization for certification, ensuring correct operation in order to reduce the mass tourism spreading that is enforceable against sustainable tourism. In this respect, it will need to create mechanisms to enable coexistence the use of sustainable economic with protection. Development of structural funds programs is absolutely the only way to qualify the staff from local communities to ensure services for directing streams of tourists,

admiring and development of sports, entertainment, with a constant monitoring process of the tourism phenomenon. Under current conditions, the Carpathian excellent potential is not effectively managed, as benefits to local people are returned mainly to the accommodation owners and not enough amounts of fees are collected for reinvestment in conservation.

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