Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Economics and Administrative Sciences
ISSN: 2284-5984 | e-ISSN: 2501-0425
Covered in: ERIH PLUS, CEEOL, Index Copernicus, CrossRef, CrossCheck, J-Gate, Google Scholar, Ideas RePeC, Econpapers, Socionet, KVK, WorldCat.

2022, Volume 7, Issue 2, pages: 01-12 | https://doi.org/10.18662/lumeneas/7.2/37

Education Strategies for the Development of Ecotourism in Maramures

Otilia CRĂCIUN (RADU)[1],

[1] PhD, Faculty of Economic Sciences "Valahia" University of Târgoviște, România, otilia_radu@yahoo.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0057-507X

Abstract: After the Covid-19 pandemic, a lot has changed. People have become more responsible for the environment, but the hunger to visit, see places, to know traditions has increased. Ecotourism, the only type of sustainable tourism, is still growing and its development requires a major investment in educating the staff involved, tourists, schoolchildren and teachers for all disciplines, of at all levels of education. It is known that the first educators of a child are the parents, so the first people we must attract to the learning process are the parents, then children, teachers, colleagues at work.
Romania has areas that lend themselves to ecotourism such as the Apuseni Mountains, Maramureş, Bucovina, the Danube Delta, but the level of knowledge of the principles of ecotourism by those who can offer these services and by tourists based on observations made between June 2020 and June 2022, is quite low.
In this article we present using the observation method, the results obtained during the years, studying the behavior of tourists and employees from Maramureş, taking into account the principles of ecotourism and establishing a strategy to attract the population (employees and tourists) to ecotourism, a strategy based on education.

Keywords: *ecotourism; tourism; management; strategies; education.*

How to cite: Crăciun (Radu), O. (2022). Education Strategies for the Development of Ecotourism in Maramureş. *Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty: Economics and Administrative Sciences, 7*(2), 01-12. https://doi.org/10.18662/lumeneas/7.2/37

©2022 Published by LUMEN Publishing. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Introduction

Ecotourism has its roots in the biosphere conservation movement, becoming an important source of income for natural areas that needed protection. Research in the 1980s showed that the economic benefits of wilderness ecotourism far outweighed hunting, which was banned in 1990. In the early 1990s, rainforests and coral reefs became the subject of countless scientific studies and documentary films. This interest has led to the emergence of small local businesses focused primarily on guiding researchers and reporters into wilderness areas.

Gradually, these businesses became prosperous in countries like Ecuador and Costa Rica, and a real industry began to develop to meet the needs of small groups of tourists, mainly naturalists and wildlife lovers. In the early 2000s, nature-based ecotourism entrepreneurs began to thrive around the world with growing interest in the environment and outdoor travel. The appearance of more and more efficient travel and camping equipment has favored this phenomenon. Some companies realized that they could take the initiative to conserve the environment by sponsoring local conservation groups or fundraising.

Today, ecotourism is considered internationally as a sustainable form of tourism, which contributes to the conservation of natural areas and the economic development of local communities. Ecotourists are encouraged to respect the environment and limit their impact on the ecosystems they visit. Ecotourism also promotes education and awareness of the importance of conserving biodiversity and protecting the environment.

Ecotourism in Romania is a growing industry based on the diversity of geographical forms, geomorphology, biodiversity and the preservation of traditions and culture. When we talk about biodiversity, we take into account the 3 biosphere reserves in Retezat, Pietrosul Rodnei and the Danube Delta, 11 National Parks, 6 Natural Parks and over 900 protected areas (National Agency for Natural Protected Areas, 2022a), where endangered species such as: the cornflower, the yellow tulip from the Iron Gates, the wolf, the brown bear, the little eagle, the little cormorant, the curly pelican (National Agency for Natural Protected Areas, 2022b), etc. The beauty of nature, the special landscapes, the caves, the waterfalls are completed by the human heritage, which makes the cities like Sighişoara, Oradea (Craciun Radu), 2020) ecotourism destinations by preserving the cultural heritage, and the traditions - music, dance, artisans, folklore - heritage of the past, complete the image of Romania as a country where ecotourism can continue to evolve leading to sustainable and sustainable tourism.

One of the most appreciated areas where ecotourism tells its story is the Danube Delta, recognized as an ecotourism destination, but rather little known especially by Romanian tourists, who still perceive it as an expensive destination for them (Mileila et al., 2020), but recognized in the world through the triple international status it has:

- since 1990 it is a MAB UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, in the UNESCO Program "Man and the Biosphere";
- since 1991 it is a RAMSAR Site - Wetland area of international importance, especially for waterfowl, within the Ramsar Convention;
- since 2001 it is a UNESCO World Natural and Cultural Heritage Site within the UNESCO Convention for the Protection of Universal Cultural and Natural Heritage.

Another destination in Romania that has the characteristics of ecotourism is Bucovina (Craciun (Radu) et al., 2020), which, in addition to the natural heritage, has a rich cultural heritage represented primarily by the painted churches in the UNESCO heritage, such as the Arbore Monastery, the Moldoviţa Monastery, Monastery Sucevița, the Humor Monastery and the Monastery Voroneţ - the most famous for its specific and special blue. The Apuseni Mountains national parc is the largest reserve, the least populated, with wonderful landscapes, and which has a wealth of amazing caves, among which we mention: the Scărişoara Glacier Cave (Visit Alba Iulia, 2014), where the glacier still exists, which changes its shape depending on the season, but which is shrinking day by day due to climate change; The Cave of the Bears (n.d.) where very well-preserved skeletons of bears from the past can be found; The Poarta lui Ionele cave, next to which flows one of the area's waterfalls. In all these areas there is the possibility of accommodation and dining in spaces classified by the Ministry of Tourism and Entrepreneurship (n.d.) and the possibility of organizing visits to various natural or man-made objectives, through tourism agencies.

The same happens in Maramureş where there are natural parks, fantastic landscapes, rich flora and fauna, with natural sights such as Cascada Cailor, Blue Lake, Vârful Pietrosul Rodnei and opportunities for rest, walks and visits. Among the anthropogenic tourist attractions, we can mention: the Vesel Cemetery from Săpânţa, the Săpânţa Peri monastery, the Pain Memorial from Sighetul Marmaţiei, the Sighet Village Museum, Mocăniţa from Valea Vaserului (Radu, 2018).

All this leads to an initial conclusion that in Romania there is great potential for the development of ecotourism, the only form of sustainable tourism, but still at the level of the entire country, as seen from the articles mentioned above, the principles of ecotourism development are not yet known,

which they must be supported by policies at the national level (Ministry of Tourism and Entrepreneurship, 2022).

Problem statement

In this article we present the idea that regardless of the beauties of nature, antropic objectives, accessibility, traditions, culture, the human factor and especially its education according to the principles of ecotourism are the basis of the development of a region, an ecotourism destination. Lately, more and more researchers are asking whether it is good to develop ecotourism or to what extent and how it can be developed to be really sustainable. In the study of the dangers of focusing for the development of ecotourism, without taking into account the potential of the area and where only human needs matter, it is revealed that it is better to avoid trying to develop those areas through ecotourism, because often is an unachievable objective, or is good to be built starting from a clear vision on the development of the location, finding sources of financing, construction of the area, maintenance, management, marketing and the realization of ecotourism (Thompson, 2022). These stages of creating the ecotourism area must involve the local community and the decision-makers, initially and further after its completion and opening as an ecotourism destination, the tourists are also involved, so that they also participate in the realization of the tourist act. Sometimes the human factor involved, either he, the local community, the decision-makers, the tourists involved in ecotourism lead to negative social transformations on the local community (differences between the rich and the poor) and in order to remedy the negative impact on the local people, political decision-makers must develop programs of tourism entrepreneurship, mentoring, awareness and realization of hospitality management from the lowest level, skills training in ecotourism and self-confidence building activities to stimulate the growth of motivation among the local community (Kunjuraman et al., 2022). Traditions starting from houses, clothes, shoes, food, traditional medicine, music, stories, dance must be kept unaltered, because they give the charm of the area and bring the cultural element close to the tourists and one must try to provide authenticity for a positive impact. It is very true that the world is at a level where artificial intelligence becomes the support of human activities at every step, but tourists come to visit for enrichment with experiences, for rest, for walking, for relaxation, for meeting new people, for cultural exchanges, for traditions, for a dance of rains, etc

That is why environmental education and the use of ecological technologies, is increasingly becoming an important aspect for stakeholders

in the ecotourism industry to successfully achieve and promote biodiversity conservation initiatives (Samal & Dash, 2023).

Human is usually in a hurry to do one thing and then realize that it must be done differently. That's how it was in Romania, the ideas were taken and without seeing clear what the steps are for implementation at the national level, although there are strategies and an Association of Ecotourism in Romania, it was realized because the economic factor is paramount.

Research Question

Until now, ecotourism in Romania has not been very successful, although it has all the necessary ingredients for its realization and the principles of ecotourism can be respected, which include:

- takes place in natural areas, sometimes even in protected areas,
- to protect nature and local culture, by minimizing the negative impact,
- to offer unique experiences for satisfy the needs of tourists,
- to make a responsible marketing is carried out that leads to sustainable development,
- to add value is created for the local community.

In the first part of the article, I described the existing natural and anthropogenic possibilities in Romania, but as shown in the action plan of the National Strategy for the Development of Ecotourism 2023-2029, developed by the Ministry of Tourism and Entrepreneurship (2022), there is still much to be solved until now, to have this developed tourism axis.

The research question is what are the educational strategies to make ecotourism a creative industry, to offer unique experiences in Romania with minimal negative impact on the environment and with economic growth at the local level. In order to develop these strategies, over a period of several years, 2018-2022, was studied the evolution of visitors from Maramureş, at Mocaniţa in the Vaser Valley, which is a tourist objective, with a minor environmental impact and was observed the flow of the tourists which visiting the area.

Research Methods

The research methods were: research by observing on the spot, by observing the website for purchasing train tickets, by researching some online materials about the development and impact of ecotourism on some areas and how to develop them.

The on-site observation sheet includes for the period June - July - August - September in the years: 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 the following:

- the number of trains/days,

- evaluation of temporarily employed personnel,
- the improvements brought to the location to increase the comfort of the tourist,
- improving the program at Paltinu station,
- price evolution.

Regarding the observation of the website (Mocaniţa Maramureş, n.d.), in the months of January, February, March, April, November, December, the train runs on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and in the months of May, June, July, August, September, October, every day, with the exception of holidays Easter and Christmas, which have a special program.

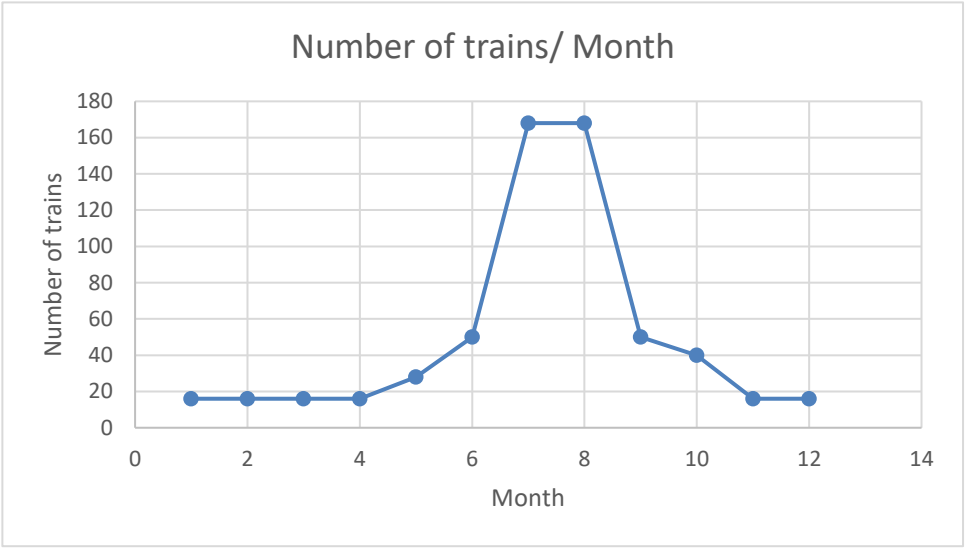
Findings and discussions

In the literature research, there is already the question of innovation in the business model, which involves changing the way of doing business, instead of doing something to obtain profit, which goes beyond the process and product and which ensures the sustainable development of both the local society, as well as environmental protection (Karlusch et al., 2018). Starting from the fact that currently a society can ensure a sustainable profit, only if it ensures economic growth, social development and the least possible impact on the environment, which leads us in the hospitality industry to the ecotourism model, which is a benefits complex. Thus, more and more emphasis are placed on interdisciplinary development in business models, which lead to new attitudes based on environmental norms and to the creation of knowledge in different fields, to new skills and new attitudes.

5.1. The number of the train

In six months of the year - January, February, March, April, November and December, the train runs 4 times a week - Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, that means there are 16 trains per month and it can happen that in a day the train cannot circulate because there are not enough tourists or the weather conditions prohibit circulation and this fact been verified in the period 2018-2022. The other six months see an increase in the number of trains, reaching 10 trains/day in July and August on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, and 2 or 3 trains/day on other days. By averaging, it can be seen that the activity is seasonal, which gives nature time to restore itself.

Fig. 1. Evolution of the number of trains/months in 2022



Source: Authors' own conception

During the pandemic, the number of trains in the first 4 months was much lower, or rather the number of visits reach to zero, after the end of the period of restrictions, the number of passengers increased, but the distance restrictions were still respected, so for a number of trains as in 2021, the number of passengers was half. Many tourists preferred this trip because after a period of staying at home, going out into nature was a necessity. Even after the pandemic, people prefer to stay outdoors, in nature, enjoy the landscapes, admire the plants and walk. In principle, throughout the studied period, except for the year 2020, which was atypical, the evolution of passenger trains in the Vaser Valley was as shown in fig. 1. The years 2021 and 2022 are the continuation of the pandemic year, even if the number of trains was the same as in 2019 and 2018, the number of passengers was lower, because some distance is kept. Although the number of trains in July and August per day reached 10, the number of steam trains, which polluted the atmosphere, but which attracted tourists was always limited to 4, and the tourists staying time of in the Paltinu area is also limited to 1 hour and a half or 1 hour and 45 minutes, depending on the number of trains running that day. Practically in this way, even with a large number of tourists, their impact on the area is small from an ecological point of view, but beneficial for the local community by obtaining profit from this activity and from accommodation, meals and souvenirs.

5.2. Evaluation of temporarily employed personnel

In the off-season, such as the late autumn months, winter and spring, they work with permanent staff, permanent employees. During the summer, however, they hire staff for the specified period and in all these years those employed for a specified period, are students at the high school in Vişeul de Sus, who are 17 - 19 years old, who speak English and German, they have the ease of moving and good communication skills. After the pandemic, everything changed. Before the pandemic, there was a temporary employee in each wagon, who offered support to tourists and information, but after the pandemic, one or two employees went from wagon to wagon, before the departure of the locomotive, they gave information and got off. Something has been lost in this pandemic.

5.3. The improvements brought to the location to increase the comfort of the tourist

The Paltinu location, the end of the line of the tourist train, has been enriched in recent years with a covered kiosk where meals can be served, with tables and benches in the meadow on the banks of the Vaser river, all built of wood, in such a way as to be in accordance with nature. The bins for the selective collection of waste and the toilets are modernized. Other key points are the newly opened small souvenir shop and the old museum of the area. The main occupation of tourists here is admiring the landscape, photographing it and the steam locomotives, visiting the museum, having lunch and playing for the children because there being enough free space.

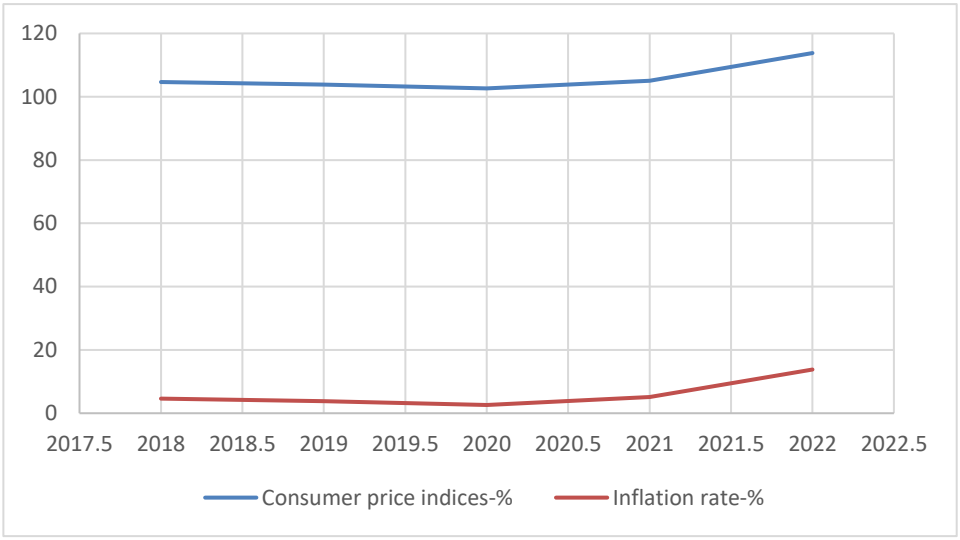
5.4. Improving the program at Paltinu station

Preserving traditions is a priority in Maramureş, and at Paltinu station, starting from 2022, visitors are greeted by musicians with cetera, zongura and doba, when they arrive at the station, after which an artistic program takes place, and passengers can join in the chorus with the dancers. The novelty is the welcome of the train, which also brings those who arrived a little earlier, after two and a half hours of riding on a moped in the Vaserului Valley, full of beautiful landscapes in one place, in such a way that they do not go to wild areas and it protects nature, limiting it to the area of the train station.

5.5. Price evolution

When we talk about prices, we talk first of all about the annual index of consumer prices, which is determined as a percentage ratio between the average price index of the current year and a reference index of 100 in October 1990 and the inflation rate, and as we see in fig. 2 both have a constant growth in recent years and it increased more in 2022 (National Institute of Statistics, n.d.).

Fig. 2. Evolution of consumer price indices and inflation rate between 2018-2022



Source: Authors' own conception

The price also increases for the train ticket and the meal services offered on the trip with the mocanița (train).

Fig. 3. The price policy in 2018 (Ministry of Tourism, 2022)

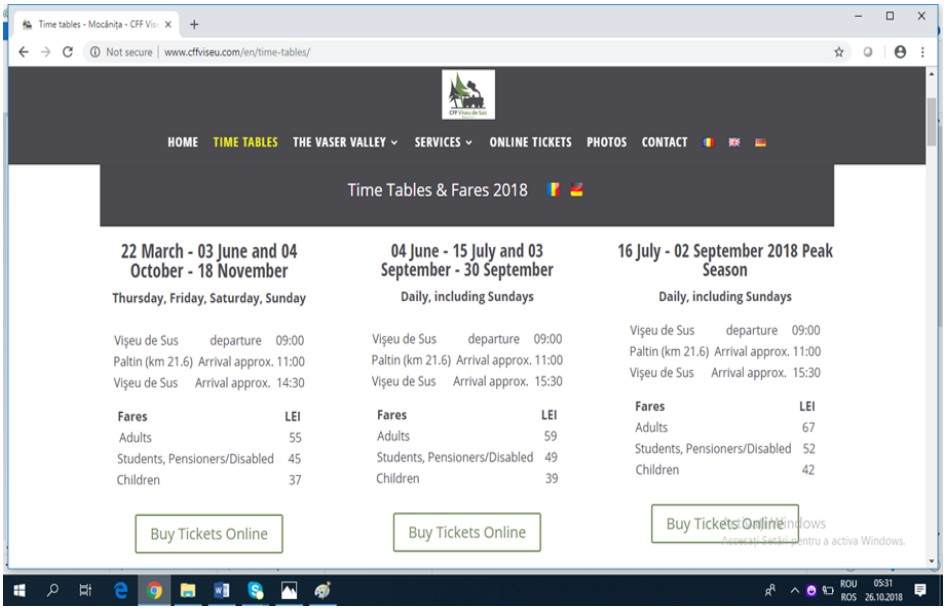
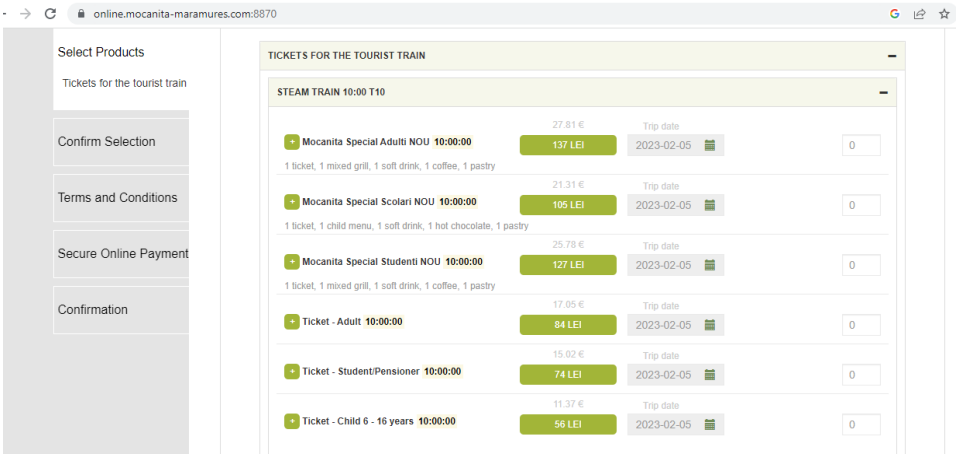


Fig. 4. The prices policy in 2023 (Mocaniţa Maramureş, n.d.)



As we can see, tickets for adults increased by 24%, tickets for pensioners by 42%, for students by 33% in 2023 compared to 2018, which is roughly the correlated inflation rate from 2018 to 2022, but with a higher increase for pensioner tickets, from which we deduce that the age of the tourists who want to visit the Vaser Valley with a train is quite advanced. The fact that the tickets for students have increased more than those for adults shows that the second group of visitors are the students, who can participate in the visit accompanied by their parents or come with the school.

Conclusion

Consequently, we say that ecotourism in the Vaser Valley has a continuous development based on investments, through the selective collection of waste, through the creation of new covered and uncovered spaces for dining, by bringing souvenirs within reach of visitors, through the small number of steam locomotives used and by bringing young people into the structure during the holidays, so that they want to stay in Romania. All these actions lead to the protection of the environment, and the preservation of traditions is done through the musicians and dancers who bring the music and dance of Maramureş to the visitors. It is an innovation to welcome tourists come by the train, but a bigger story told on the train about the formation of the valley, about rafts and the first trains with wood, about the plants and animals of the area, or can even go with an ecotourist guide through the forest to show them some plant species, can be a future direction to study.

The innovation and creativity that drive evolution forward lies in education. As we also observe here, the interest of young people to evolve and

provide rich information is low and this is clear due to the lack of interdisciplinary education that would make them offer unique experiences in Paltinu Station, in the Vaser Valley.

Tourists' experiences become unique when some make something with their own hands, a different photograph, a painting, a herbarium with plants that are not on the verge of extinction, but which the tourist can recognize, others can play with the word to tell stories about the past, but the past must first be told and here we need educated people who know a bit of the history of the places, a bit of the local culture, in conclusion we need education for the environment and this education must be created.

Most of the visitors are pensioners and the students we have to start education with them and it would be good if this education starts from the primary classes, because then the parents learn together with the children. Creating a guide for education when you go on a trip and you want to protect the environment, but also have particularly beautiful experiences is now within the reach of teachers, who can use open resources, resources from the online environment and especially rely on the creativity of the little ones.

References

Cave of the Bears. (n.d.). *Galeria oaselor* [Gallery of bones]. Cave of the Bears. https://www.pesteraursilor.ro/services/galeria-oaselor/

Craciun (Radu), O. (2020). Comparative analysis in management of tourism destination. *Revue of Filoritto Academy, 7770*, 1–8. https://www.filodiritto.com/comparative-analysis-management-tourism-destination

Crăciun (Radu), O., Vasciuc (Săndulescu), C. G., & Săndulescu, D. (2020). Ecotourism in Bucovina. *LUMEN Proceedings, International Conference Innovative Business Management & Global Entrepreneurship (IBMAGE 2020), 14,* 734-743. https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc/ibmage2020/54

Karlusch, A., Sachsenhofer, W., & Reinsberger, K. (2018). Educating for the development of sustainable business models: Designing and delivering a course to foster creativity. *Journal of Cleaner Production, 179*, 169–179. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.12.199

Kunjuraman, V., Hussin, R., & Che Aziz, R. (2022). Commuity-based ecotourism as a social transformation tool for rural community: A victory or a quagmire?. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism, 39*, 100524. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2022.100524

Mieila, M., Craciun (Radu), O., & Manole, A. M. (2022). Research upon the perceptions regarding the Danube Delta, as (eco)touristic destination. *Management Strategies Journal, Constantin Brancoveanu University, 56*(2), 194-201.

www.strategiimanageriale.ro/images/images_site/articole/article_7a56daeeb144ffa48323815a762487eb.pdf

Ministry of Tourism and Entrepreneurship. (2022). *Plan de acțiune al Strategiei naționale de dezvoltare a ecoturismului 2023-2029* [Action plan of the National Ecotourism Development Strategy 2023-2029]. Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism. https://turism.gov.ro/web/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Plan-de-actiune_SE-final-2022.pdf

Ministry of Tourism and Entrepreneurship. (n.d.). Autorizare turism [Tourism authorization]. Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism. https://turism.gov.ro/web/autorizare-turism/

Mocaniţa Maramureş. (n.d.). *Mersul trenurilor* [Train's time list]. Mocaniţa Maramureş. https://mocanita-maramures.com/mersul trenurilor/

Mocaniţa Maramureş. (n.d.). *Online*. Mocaniţa Maramureş. https://online.mocanita-maramures.com:8870/

National Agency for Natural Protected Areas. (2022a). *Inventory of Natural Protected Areas from Romania*. National Agency for Natural Protected Areas. http://ananp.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/inventar_arii_Ro_v1-00000003.pdf

National Agency for Natural Protected Areas. (2022b). *Species Action Plans*. National Agency for Natural Protected Areas. http://ananp.gov.ro/ariile-naturale-protejate-ale-romaniei/planuri-actiune-specii/

National Institute of Statistics (n.d.) *Data series*. National Institute of Statistics. https://insse.ro/cms/ro/content/ipc%E2%80%93serie-de-date-anuala

Radu, O. (2018). Ecotourism în Valea Vaserului [Ecotourism in the Vaser Valley]. *"Ovidius" University Annals, Economic Sciences, XVIII*(2), 519-523. https://stec.univ-ovidius.ro/html/anale/RO/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/28-1.pdf

Samal, R., & Dash, M. (2023). Ecotourism, biodiversity conservation and livelihoods: Understanding the convergence and divergence. *International Journal of Geoheritage and Parks, 11*(1), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgeop.2022.11.001

Thompson, B. S. (2022). Ecotourism anywhere? The lure of ecotourism and the need to scrutinize the potential competitiveness of ecotourism developments. *Tourism Management, 92*, 104568. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104568

Visit Alba Iulia. (2014). *Peştera şi gheţarul Scărişoara, un loc unic în România* [Scărişoara cave and glacier, a unique place in Romania]. Visit Alba Iulia. https://viziteazaalbaiulia.ro/pestera-si-ghetarul-scarisoara-un-loc-unic-in-romania/.