



Development of tourism products in cross-border destinations

Amalia Niță

University of Craiova, Geography Department, Craiova, Romania

INTRODUCTION

Currently, sustainable tourism activities in mountain areas become more attractive for main tourism markets. Although it is hard to quantify the results of tourism development especially on short term, the practice demonstrated that tourism is one of the few sectors in the economy that can bring sustainable development of the areas.

The study aims at highlighting the necessary (1) sustainable use of natural and cultural resources in the mountain region of the Southern part of the Carpathian Mountains located in Caraș-Severin and Mehedinți counties in Romania and Bor district in Serbia. Due to the great tourism potential of this area in terms of resources, historical and cultural values, there (2) were recorded more and more visitors. Thus the area is prone to (3) unsustainable development and to a short-term activity of tourism sector without an effective guideline and products development. An (4) improper usage of the existing touristic resources will affect the environment and the income generators of the business sector in the target area.

STUDY AREA

The study area consists of three counties in two countries – Mehedinți County in Romania and Caraș-Severin County in Serbia. The counties in Romania are located in the south-western part of the country, while the Bor district/county is situated in eastern part of Serbia.

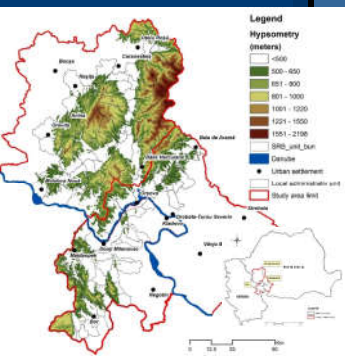


Fig. 1. – The study area: the counties of Caraș-Severin, Mehedinți (RO) and Bor District (SER)- local administrative units above 500 m

The study took into consideration only the settlements located above 500 m (fig. 1) which include 41 administrative units in Caraș-Severin with a population of 205 414 inhabitants, 14 administrative units in Mehedinți with 24 302 inhabitants and 35 administrative units with 69 979 inhabitants in Bor.

REFERENCES

- Byers, E. (1998). Mountain agents: Environmentally sustainable and equitable development opportunities. The Mountain Institute, Franklin, West Virginia, USA.
- Buckley, R. C. (2007). Adventure tourism products: price, duration, size, skill, remoteness. *Tourism Management*, 28, 1428-1433.
- Datza-Masp, J. (2006). Cultural Heritage Tourism: Opportunities for product development. The Barcelona case. *Tourism Review*, Vol 61, No 1 A/EST.
- Eber, S. (1992). Beyond the Green Horizon: A Discussion Paper on Principles for Sustainable Tourism. London, United Kingdom: WWF and Tourism Concern.
- Pratt, D.J., Shilling, J.D. (2003). Sustainable development in mountains: managing resources and reducing poverty. Background Paper World Development Report Dynamic Development in a Sustainable World.
- Ritchie, B. Orwash, G. (2003). The Competitive Destination: a sustainable tourism perspective. CABI United Kingdom.

METHODOLOGY

Diagnosis of the current situation

- baseline information about tourism at the global level and its dynamics, highlighting also the concept of sustainable tourism development
- existing situation in the target area, with focus on stakeholders and their interests, and what are basically the potentials and problems of the area

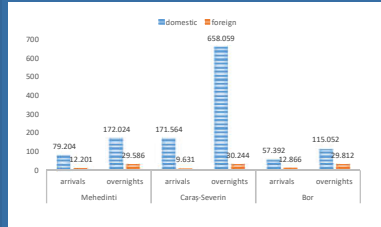
Stakeholders consultations

- Views about tourism in the cross-border area, destination development and management from 23 stakeholders from Romania and Serbia
- a clear vision of the cross-border mountain destinations in terms of sustainability and competitiveness was obtained

Tourism products development

- an operational plan with defined tourist products for targeted groups and a proper positioning on the market was elaborated

For both indicators, arrivals and overnight stays in 2021, the major tourist flows are the domestic ones, with more than 90% of the total tourist number, again Caraș-Severin recording the highest values.



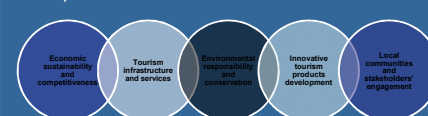
STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATIONS

The consultations took place in Romania and Serbia in 2019, and 23 stakeholders were involved. Almost half (48%) of them are NGOs, a fifth tour operators and guides, while representatives of public agency, local administration, cultural heritage sites or information centers are less numerous.



Most of the respondents' institutions work at a regional level for the tourism industry (52%), while other 22% at local level, which implies a thorough knowledge of the situation of the cross-border area and potential for future development.

The vision for tourism development in the study area focused on 5 areas of intervention and this study addresses the tourism product development in the cross-border area.



TOURISM PRODUCTS DEVELOPMENT

Visitors do not simply want to see the sights, but they value engaging with the locals and gaining an understanding of the people and the character of places that they visit. Four major visitor experiences were developed in order to capitalize the existing assets and strengths of the area.

Wildlife and unspoiled nature	Adventure tourism	History and culture	Rural lifestyle
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new wilderness-based experiences • Increase and diversify the sources of income for the local communities • Improve social integration of marginalized communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop new adventure tourism in the cross-border area • Foster networking among existing operations to attract new adventure food tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect cultural heritage and make use of the characteristics that have been preserved for the last 50 years • Set up more signs and billboard information on how to reach cultural tourism sites • Strengthen the dimension of intangible cultural heritage in cultural tourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate employment possibilities for the rural communities (employees in rural lodgings, local guides, craftsmen, local food producers) • Increase and diversify the sources of income for the local communities • Improve social integration of young people and women (host visitors, do crafts, sell local products)
Objectives			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean, natural environment • Opportunity to view unique or endangered species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woods, meadows, fresh air and clean nature is also suitable for camping, walking, horseback riding, cycling. • The least area is quite vast, offering some of the largest and most beautiful caves, gorges and other karstic relief forms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Villages architecture, idyllic landscape, farms • Events – handicrafts fairs, folk music festivals • Life style • Churches • Castles and fortresses • People (traditions, folk costumes) • Food and drink 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature-based guided tours • Agri-tourism activities, namely farming and harvesting activities • Wine tourism and visits to wineries • Educational activities: crafts making, folk dances lessons, local cuisine practices
Attractions			

RESULTS

TOURISM POTENTIAL

One of the main tourism resource in the area is represented by the mountains and national parks as shown in the map below (fig. 2).

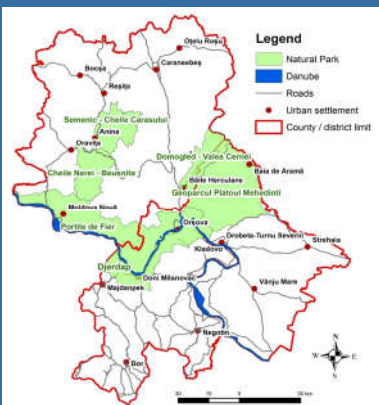
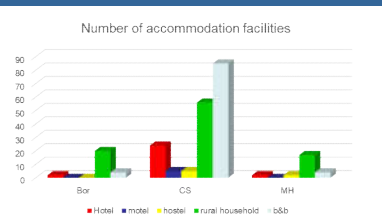


Fig. 2. The national and natural parks in the Romanian-Serbian Cross-Border Area

Table 1. The natural tourism resources and infrastructure in the cross-border area

Natural Resources	Mehedinți/Caraș-Severin	Bor
Protected areas:	5	1
national/natural parks:	National Parks: Cheile Neretzi-Brușnița, Damogel-Valea Cernei, Semeric-Cheile Carașului	Djerdap National Park
Protected areas:	Natural Parks: Mehedinți Plateau Park, Porțile de Fier	
Health tourism resources:	Băile Herculane spa resort	Brestovacka spa
Nature trails and hiking paths:	55	29
Network of marked trails:		Hiking trails, visitor centres
Organized biking tours and under development biking destinations:		Eurovelo 6
Ski facilities:	14	1

According to the official statistical data (2021), there are more than 220 accommodation units within the mountainous area (exceeding 500 m altitude). Almost three quarters of them are located within Caraș-Severin county, since it is the largest county and mountains cover much of it, while Mehedinți and Bor counties have much lower number.



Out of the total of 226 accommodation facilities, 93 are rural households and another 93 B&B structures, most of them family-owned business, which is a good thing for the local communities.

Wildlife and unspoiled nature	Adventure tourism	History and culture	Rural lifestyle
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free educational lectures about wildlife • Guided tours interpretative stories • Certain types of accommodation (campgrounds) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More rustic types of accommodation (rustic lodges, tents) • Cycling infrastructure • Signage, good guide training and clean trails 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering information in more foreign languages • Producing more informational materials free of charge • Provide audio guides (where possible) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer not only accommodation, but a mix of activities, events and services that will ensure memorable experiences for the visitors. • Develop some family friendly recreational and educational activities. • Form CLUSTERS to improve the visibility of the offer, by bringing together complementary services and thus bring benefit to more than one farm or village.
Services & Infrastructure			
Tourist profile			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: between 35 and 47 years old • Education: more highly educated • Sex: fairly evenly split male to female • Income: higher level of household income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: mostly between 35 and 47 years old, but also between 18 to 70 • Education: more highly educated than other types of travellers • Sex: fairly evenly split male to female • Status: more likely single or married 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: mostly between 35 and 47 years old, but also between 18 to 70 • Education: high education • Income: middle to high income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: all age groups, most of them older than 50, families with children • Education: highly educated • Income: higher level of household income

Thus the tourism product development in the study area focused on the capitalization of the mountain resources but also on the existing cultural and rural heritage.

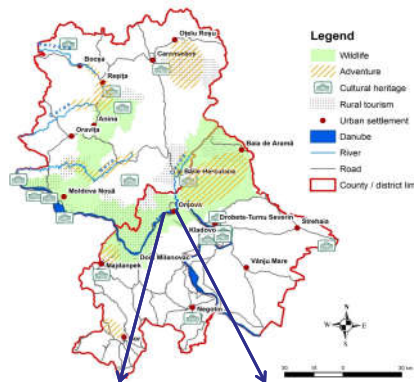


Fig. 3. The geographical location of the 4 mountain tourism products (wildlife, adventure, culture and rural lifestyle) in the target area RO-SER

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of sustainable tourism products in the cross-border area under study must be based on long term strategic actions. Some of the intervention and improvement areas are highlighted below:

- The conservation and sustainable use of tourism resources, promotion and support of initiatives for hotspot areas and cross-border networks should be strengthened.
- A strong support is required to include local goods and services into offers provided to tourists.
- Engage mountain inhabitants, local communities and stakeholders in the sustainable tourism activities.
- Raising the awareness of the local cultures/traditions/customs/fairs.

