

THE ANALYSIS OF THE TOURISTIC ACTIVITIES IN THE CARPATHIAN REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL REGULATION

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Abstract

The Carpathian region contains a unique natural and cultural heritage, offering a true "paradise" of wildlife. The Carpathian Mountains are a real living environment for millions of people and the biodiversity and the natural heritage are constantly threatened by the land abandonment, the habitat conversion, industrialization, pollution and overexploitation of resources.

Most of the area covered by the Carpathian Mountains area is considered weaker (less developed areas) because the mountains are less suitable for agriculture and arable lands are found only up to approx. 600 - 700 m altitude.

The dynamics of rural tourism in the Carpathian Mountains is spectacular, considering that 20 years ago this area of activity didn't even exist. On one hand, rural tourism is an additional source of income for rural populations and on the other hand, rural tourism has created disparities between rural areas, because not all areas have had the same opportunities (cultural resources, historical, natural, etc.) and even led to distortion of the village image by architectural changes of the houses or by loss of traditions of the area. Still, rural tourism remains the most promising type of tourism in the Carpathians.

Key words. Agri-tourism, industrialization, pollution, resources, migration, protected areas.

INTRODUCTION

The Carpathian region covers an area formed by eight European countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine (Map 1.1). The total length of the Carpathians is over 1.500 km, and depressions vary between 12 and 500 km. With an area covering more than 190.000 km², the Carpathians are, after the Alps, the most extensive mountain system in Europe.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The Carpathian Mountains represent a natural variety including mountains, rivers, which are generally subject to conservation and protection policies (Map 1.2). All Carpathian countries are involved in international networks to protect biodiversity and they all have appropriate legislation. They also have national parks and protected areas.

Map 1.1 Landscape typology for Carpathian Region



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Austria, The Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia declared they have more than 15% of their territory as protected area.

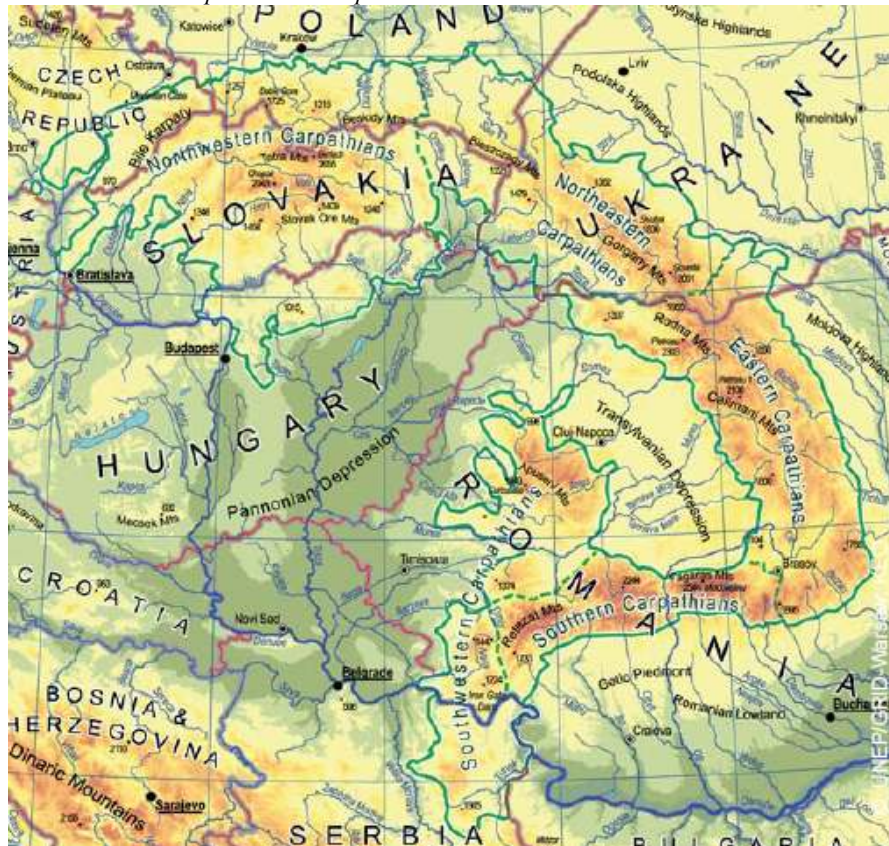
Ukraine has 30 national parks (9 in the Carpathian Mountains) that extend over an area of approx. 19.091 km², representing 85% of the protected areas.

It is followed by Romania, with 12 protected areas in the Carpathian Mountains (out of 13) extending over 3.047 km², which represents 72% of the total area of protected areas.

The Czech Republic has the last place which holds only one protected area in the Carpathian Mountains, covering 79 km², representing 11% from the surface of the 45 protected areas of the country.

The issue of the Carpathian protected areas is a sensitive subject in international conventions, many organizations denouncing intensive economic activities in these areas. In some national parks they have denounced cutting down trees and poaching activities, which occurred amid the underfunding of these locations.

Map 1.2 The Carpathian mountains and their sub-units



Sursa: The Carpathian Project - Visions and Strategies in the Carpathian Area (VASICA)

Cultural heritage is another important element of the Carpathian Region. There are here Romanesque monuments (Hungary, Poland), Gothic monuments (Brasov, Sibiu, Alba Iulia, Sighisoara) or Renaissance monuments (Lviv, Kraków and Tarnów), places of worship with specific architectures (Catholic, Orthodox), traditional furnishings; traditional crafts, and so on.

All these elements above mentioned have led tourism to be the most dynamic sector of local economies in the Carpathian Mountains. That is owed, on one hand, to the facilities for winter sports in Slovakia, Poland and Romania, and on the other hand, to rural tourism.

In Slovakia winter sports are the main form of tourism of the country, more than 30% of domestic tourists coming here during the season. There have been major investments in hotels, residential parks, ski slopes, and so on. In the recent years the domestic tourism has surpassed the international tourism: 42% are Slovaks, Czechs 32%, 8% Hungarians. This

has affected the activity of the Tatra National Park, where tourism is promoted particularly in pedestrian way, cycling or skiing tours (ski run). The Czech winter resorts are not located in the Carpathian Mountains, in Ukraine they are not yet developed, and in Hungary they offer limited conditions.

The dynamics of rural tourism in the Carpathian Mountains is spectacular, considering that 20 years ago this area of activity didn't even exist. On one hand, rural tourism is an additional source of income for rural populations and on the other hand, rural tourism has created disparities between rural areas, because not all areas have had the same opportunities (cultural resources, historical, natural, etc.)and even led to distortion of the village image by architectural changes of the houses or by loss of traditions of the area. Still, rural tourism remains the most promising type of tourism in the Carpathians.

Map 1.3 The Carpathian Development Regions



Sursa: The Carpathian Project (VASICA)

The analysis of statistical data on tourism in the Carpathian region can be achieved only by taking into account the administrative regions, namely the NUTS 2 level in Austria, Poland and Ukraine and NUTS 3 in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania (Map 1.3).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the situation and dynamics of the tourism in the Carpathians, from the existing statistical data on administrative regions whose surface they cover, reveals the following:

Table 1.1 The main touristic indicators, Carpathian Mountains (1996-2006)

Țara	Suprafață Km ²	Hoteluri - număr -			Locuri (paturi) - număr -			Înoptări - număr -			Grad de Înoptare	
		1996	2006	%	1996	2006	%	1996	2006	%	1996	2006
Cehia	21723	2737	4314	157,62	167058	236104	141,33	20766	25889	124,67	12,4	11,0
Ungaria	54322	1687	1921	113,87	127650	154060	120,69	11584	15749	135,95	9,1	10,2
Polonia	45514	1247	2301	184,52	102272	178056	174,10	8024	21821	271,95	7,8	12,3
România	165013	2362	4125	174,64	204374	226383	110,77	18464	18098	98,02	9,0	8,0
Slovacia	49034	476	922	193,70	41700	57985	139,05	7014	6792	96,83	16,8	11,7
Total	335606	8509	13583	159,53	643054	852588	132,58	65852	88346	134,16	10,2	10,4

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As we can see, new facilities have been built in the area and the number of beds increased by over 32%. Poland and Hungary, which record the most impressive dynamic in the provision of accommodation, experienced increases in occupancy rates of 57% and 12%. On the other hand, although the number of tourists has increased the occupancy rate has decreased in the Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia.

Following the SWOT analysis of tourism activities in the Carpathian region the power points in terms of tourism activity can be summarized as follows:

- In the Carpathian Mountains there are many areas of well-equipped and easily accessible resorts for winter sports: Zakopane (PL), Tatranska Lomnica, Stary Smokovec, Strbske Pleso (SK), Sinaia and Predeal Azuga (RO)
- The Carpathian Mountains are rich sources of mineral water and spa resorts: Krynica (PL), Teplice and Piešťany (SK), Borsec, Sovata, Tusnad, Herculan and Covasna (RO)
- The Carpathian Mountains lie within the territories of eight European countries (this aspect is unique in the world), important countries in terms of strategic geographic, political, economical and environmental aspects;
- The Carpathian Mountains is one of the European regions where the architecture, arts and rural crafts are best preserved;
- High potential resources can be found in the Carpathian Mountains: agricultural products of interest to the food industry, forest that are an interest point in wood processing and furniture industry; rivers of interest to the energy industry, etc..

Weaknesses in the Carpathian Region tourism activity are:

- The Carpathian Mountains are considered, economically speaking, a "disadvantaged area";
 - The Carpathian Mountains are less accessible than the Alps, because here, on a stretch of 1450 km there are only 12 railway lines (including five on the border between The Czech Republic and Slovakia) and there is not even one highway, jeopardizing the potential of exploitation by tourism;
 - In the Carpathian Mountains the population density is high, leading to poverty and migration;
 - A large part of the Carpathian regions are border areas, remote, economically isolated from the others;
 - Due to political and economic changes, the small and medium towns that are close to the mountains have lost their traditional function of processing products from the mountain villages, or have become "mono-producers", depending entirely on a crop or an animal product;
 - In several areas from the Carpathian Mountains it takes place an intense process of cutting trees.
- The Carpathian Mountains present also a number of risks in the development of tourism, such as:
- The population pressure and lack of agricultural resources indirectly determine tree cuttings, over grazing and inappropriate land use, which can lead to flooding, landslides and soil degradation;
 - The climate changes may cause flooding or decrease of offer for winter sports;
 - In the absence of economic development, the migration may increase, materializing in income transfers between regions;
 - The relative isolation and the role of the border line can lead to increased illegal activities such as poaching and smuggling, black labour, and so on.

CONCLUSION

The opportunities that the Carpathian Mountains create for the tourism development are:

- They represent one of the European region where the population is increasing, thus providing educated and cheap labor;
- High potential for tourism: undeveloped areas where people can practice winter sports, wildlife areas, large national parks, and so on;
- The presence of developed cities with economic functions;
- The trade, the processing and marketing of mountain products represent an important source for economic development, and so on.

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