

NATURE, PHOTOGRAPHY AND TOURISM IN BIHOR-VLĂDEASA MOUNTAINS (ROMANIA)

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Abstract: The aim of the current study is to quantify the impact of the involvement of nature photography in tourism. The methodology relied on a questionnaire by which data from the tourists of the Bihor-Vlădeasa Mountains were collected. A total of 248 usable responses were obtained. The results suggested that the attractiveness of landscapes, the natural (such as forest resources and landscape resources) and man-made tourist sites, related to the historical and ethnographic cultural resources, emotions, joys, feelings and the emotional connection to certain areas of the Bihor-Vlădeasa Mountains were the main reasons for involvement in nature photography. Data interpretation revealed that there is a strong correlation between the involvement of tourists in nature photography and sightseeing, photography being a good reason for walking, movement and exploration.

Keywords: tourist sites, nature, tourist, natural milieu, man-made tourist resources

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INTRODUCTION

It can be said that the Bihor-Vlădeasa Mountains (Figure 1) hold a special place in the ranking of the most attractive tourist areas of the country through their spectacularity, density, originality and uniqueness of the natural (i.e. relief shapes, hydrography, biogeographical resources such as forestry and landscape resources, etc) and man-made tourist attractions (such as historical, cultural, ethnographic resources,

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etc). The local interest resorts of Arieșeni, Stâna de Vale, Beliș - Fântânele (Figure 4) and tourist destinations such as The Limestone Plateau Padiș, Vlădeasa, Ruginoasa Grove, Drăganului Valley (Figure 2), Sighiștelului Valley, Remeți and Lesu Lake belong to the high tourist potential areas' category given their natural landscape and altitude, the slopes' exposure, the length of the slopes, as well as the cold but not very humid summers, favorable to hiking and winters with a stable snow layer favorable to winter sports and thus to tourism in general (Figure 3).

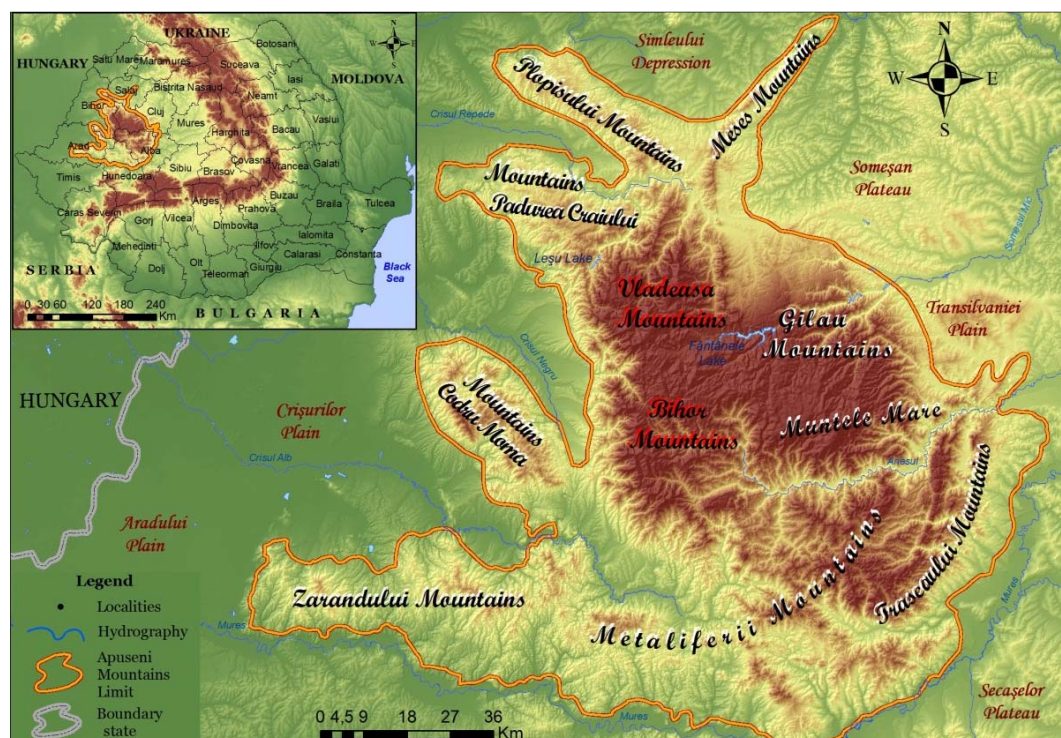


Figure 1. Geographical layout of the Bihor Vlădeasa Mountains within the Apuseni Mountain range and Romania

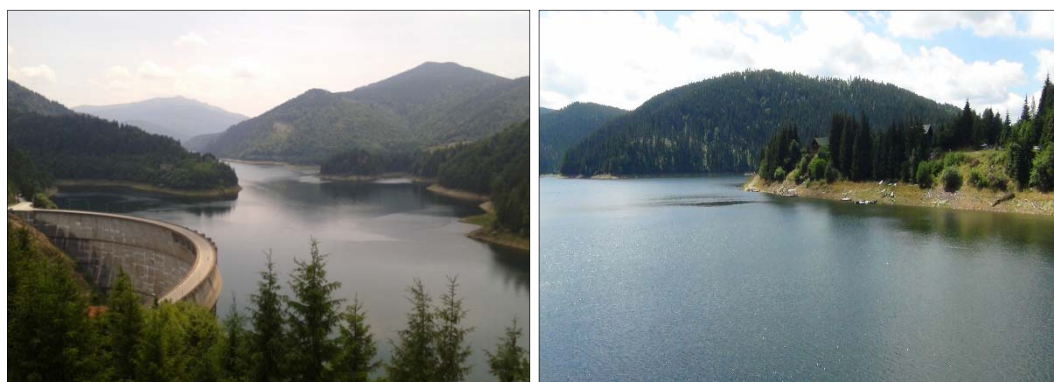


Figure 2. The dam and reservoir on the Drăgan Valley (left) and the reservoir of Leșu Lake (right)

In order to carry out the current study on the involvement of nature photography in tourism, a series of geographic research classic methods, as well as modern means have been used. After the reference documentation, field work (Cocean, 2004, 2005, 2017; Ianos, 2000; Kothari, 2004), and after conducting a survey on this topic, the impact of the involvement of nature photography in tourism was quantified. In making the questionnaire, we proceeded from generally valid hypotheses and relying on them questions were formulated so as to produce viable feedback on the subject. The time taken to evaluate the questions was relatively scarce because tourists who are on vacation for rest and recreation are not always willing to waste time filling out the questionnaires. The survey was designed so as to maintain the interviewees' anonymity (Sandu et al., 2009).



Figure 3. Vlădeasa Mountain landscape, during the winter (left) and summer (right)

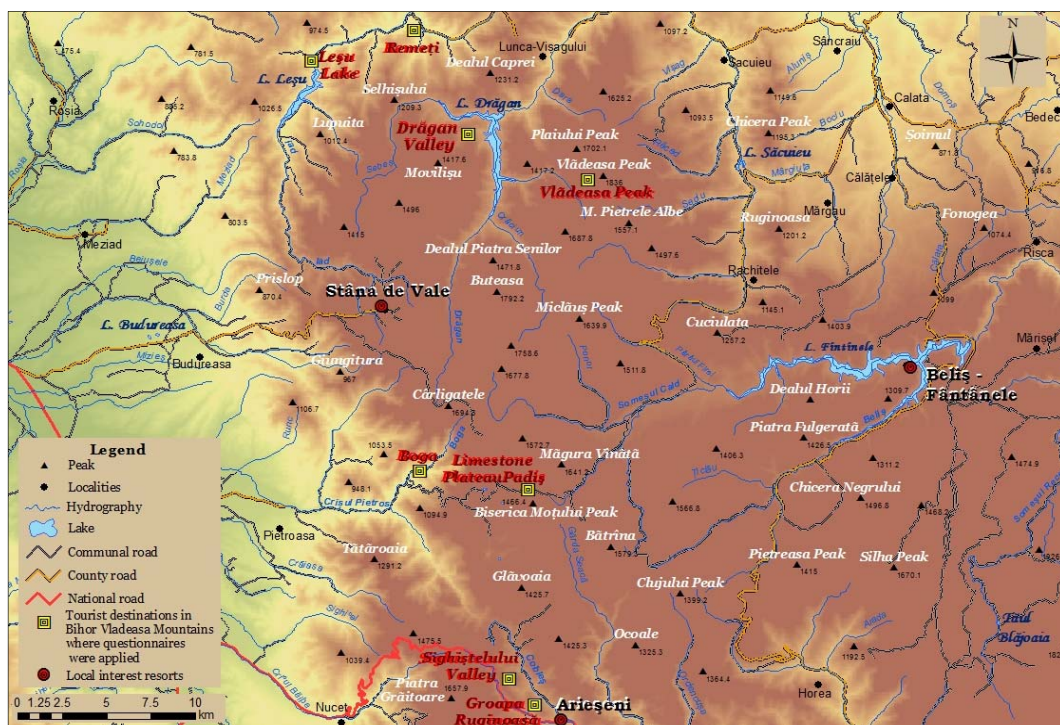


Figure 4. The local interest resorts and tourist destinations of the Bihor-Vlădeasa Mountains

METHODOLOGY

The mental sphere features of tourists, their motivation and satisfaction degree were captured by the questionnaire and survey (Gheorghilaş, 2008), the attention being focused on the tourists' behavior (Chirs, 2004). The data collection was carried out by applying questionnaires to tourists who visited the local interest tourist resorts and tourist destinations (Figure 3) between January 2015 and December 2016. Thus a number of 260 questionnaires were applied, out of which 248 were kept for analysis and 12 were inaccurate being removed from further analysis. The cartographic material was developed by using specialized software such as Arc Gis, Adobe Photoshop and Microsoft Excel (Clifford et al., 2010) and the synthesis method led to conclusions on the relations between nature, photography and tourism.

DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the 248 respondents. More than half of the respondents had Romanian nationality (68%). Hungarian tourists were present at a rate of 21%. A larger number of respondents were between 30 and 44 years old (41%) and more than half were married (58%). Respondents were mostly graduates of secondary and university education (77%) and 23% were students. The demographic profile (Ilieş & Staşac, 2009) of the respondents was graphically represented in the figures 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the respondents

	Number of tourists	Percent (%)
Nationality of tourists		
Romanian	169	68 %
Hungarian	52	21 %
Other	27	11 %
Age of tourists		
Between 15-29	87	35 %
Between 30-44	102	41 %
Between 45-65	59	24 %
Gender of tourists		
Female	116	47%
Male	132	53%
Marital status		
Married	156	58 %
Single	112	42 %
Occupation of tourists		
Employees with higher education	59	24 %
Employees on their own / employer	27	11 %
Civil servants / technicians	31	12 %
Worker / Farmer	28	11 %
Retiree / Housekeeper	21	8 %
Student	56	23 %
Unemployed / disengaged	14	6 %
Other	12	5 %
Education of tourists		
No studies	11	4 %
Mandatory minimum studies	19	8 %
Vocational school	28	11 %
High School	41	17 %
Post secondary school	52	21 %
University studies	97	39 %
	248	

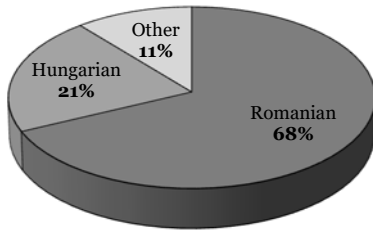


Figure 5. Nationality of tourists

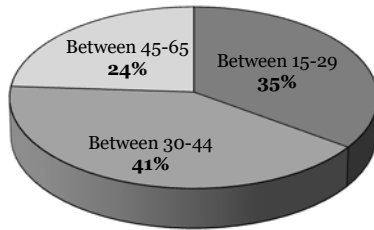


Figure 6. Age of tourists

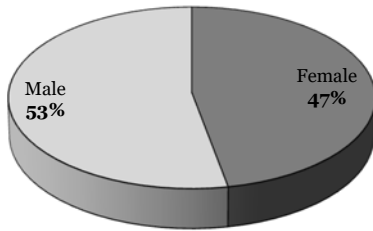


Figure 7. Gender of tourists

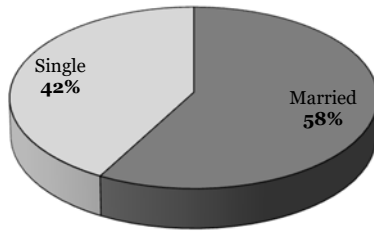


Figure 8. Marital status

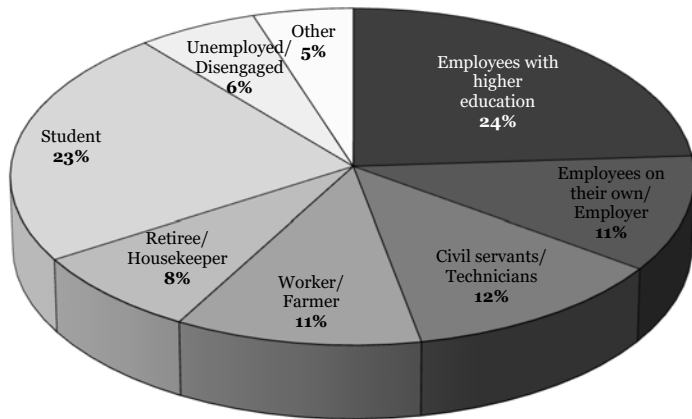


Figure 9. Occupation of tourists

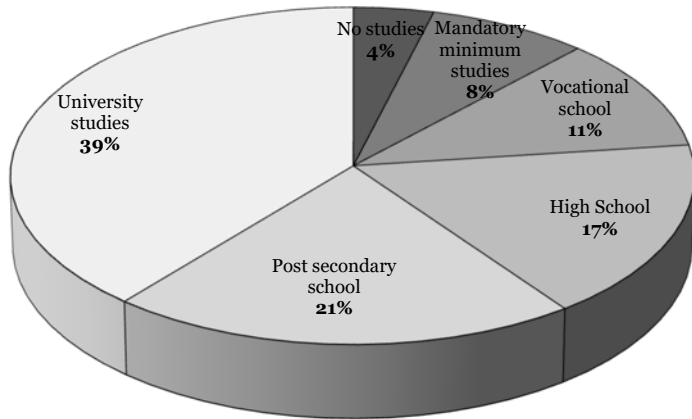


Figure 10. Education of tourists

By its content and role, tourism represents today a distinct field of activity, a first rank component of the economic and social life. Due to the fact that tourist resources are practically inexhaustible, tourism is one of the economic sectors with real long-term prospects for development (Baiaş, 2013; Ilies et al., 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017; Herman & Wendt, 2011; Herman & Gherman, 2016; Ilieş & Josan, 2009; Ungureanu, 2015). When deciding on our holiday destination each of us uses his/her own alternatives. But the image that a particular tourist destination has to convey is one of the most impact elements on the decision about the holiday destination, for spending the weekend or for leisure. In other words, PHOTOGRAPHY is an important element that helps creating the image of a tourist destination. The photo can also be said to speak for a thousand words. For over a century and a half, photography has been the most popular and widespread means of making images (Becker, 2015) but the medium by which they are disseminated nowadays has changed as most photos are digital and posted online. Many leisure travellers shooting nature and man-made attractions use the social network sites to post their photographs (SheungtingLo et al., 2011) as a predilect media.

Table 2. Responses' centralisation related to photography and tourism

	Entirely agree	Agree	Partially agree	Neutre	Disagree	Entirely disagree	Unimportant	
The photo takes part in keeping your travel memories	231	12	5	0	0	0	0	6.90
Nature photography is one of the most enjoyable and relaxing things	138	53	29	25	3	0	0	6.20
I do not imagine a vacation without photography	132	61	27	24	4	0	0	6.18
The photo is a way of promoting tourist sites	112	85	38	8	5	0	0	6.17
Through my photos, I want to participate in the promotion of tourist sites	151	49	21	17	10	0	0	6.26
Nature photography is very important to me	163	25	22	24	14	0	0	6.20
The photo is the key element of any escape in nature	126	67	32	16	7	0	0	6.16
Photo is a good reason for walking and exploration	184	36	16	3	9	0	0	6.54
Nature photography plays a central role in my life	148	16	44	31	11	0	0	6.08
I agree with the phrase "A photo speaks for a thousand words"	211	29	8	0	0	0	0	6.81
Nature photography is an expression of identity of the tourist site	197	26	14	9	2	0	0	6.64
Most people that I know are interested in nature photography	214	26	8	0	0	0	0	6.85
I like to talk to my friends about nature photos	158	34	25	19	12	0	0	6.23
Sharing life experiences with loved ones through photography	132	74	23	12	7	0	0	6.25
Photo sessions in nature provide the opportunity to be with friends	186	11	18	27	6	0	0	6.38
Photo is the emotional connection with the visited areas	225	17	6	0	0	0	0	6.88

The 248 questionnaires applied within the Bihor-Vlădeasa Mountains provides the necessary data for the analysis of the photo-related involvement level in tourism. A set of statements was made on nature footage (photography) and tourism, the current investigation object, using a scoring system to allow for the calculation of standard averages and deviations. A scale of 7 values was used because many specialists claim that it has a higher degree of accuracy. The Likert scale is widely used in research studies, being a bipolar scale in the sense that it measures the attitude or appreciation of a subject both by positive and negative responses (Babbie, 2005; Harja & Țimiraș, 2010; Wuensch, 2005). The surveyed tourists specified the level of agreement and disagreement (Table 2) with the statements in the questionnaire. By using the scoring system from 1 to 7, it was possible to calculate the weighted arithmetic mean (the grade corresponding to the step with the number of persons that indicated the respective scale is weighted).

The average was over 6 at all questions, some reaching up to 6.90 (the photograph takes part in keeping travel memories) 6.88 (photography is the emotional link to some visited areas) etc. Regardless of the motivation to travel and the practiced type of tourism, the photo behind the trip plays a fundamental role in tourism (Scarles, 2010). Shooting nature or nature photography encompasses a wide range of scapes such as landscapes; seascapes; underwater; underground; wildlife and flora; close-ups of flowers and insects; and representations of climates, weather, and seasons, among others (Eastaway, 2007). The promotion of natural sites and the geoheritage (Cayla et al., 2014) is done with modern digital tools (Hoblea et al., 2014). Most people taking photos are young, better educated and earn more than those who do not (SheungtingLo et al., 2011).

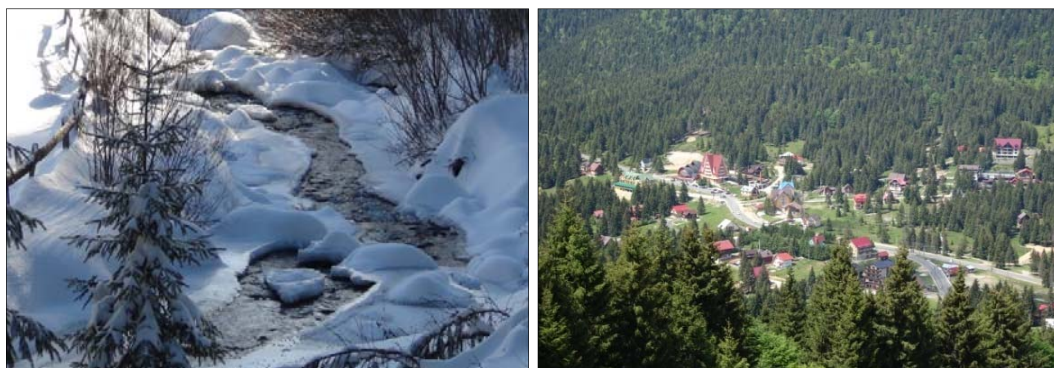


Figure 11. Cobleș Valley, Arieșeni Resort (left) and Vârtop Pass, Arieșeni Resort (right)



Figure 12. Ciclotourism, Remeți, Bihor (left) and autumn landscape, Boga, Bihor (right)



Figure 13. Groapa Ruginoasă Gully, Arieșeni (left) and Poieni Peak, Stâna de Vale Resort (right)



Figure 14. Sighiștel Gorge, a national interest protected area, in the summer (left) and winter (right)

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the analysis have shown that the tourist attraction resource of the natural and man-made tourist sites represents the main element around which the tourist phenomenon develops, these being the main reasons for involvement in choosing the tourist destinations in the area under investigation as well as nature photography. During trips, tourists take photos of natural attractions such as flora (Figure 16), fauna, vegetation (Figure 17), lakes, waterfalls etc, man-made attractions such as religious edifices, folk architecture, villages, hamlets, historical and ethnographic cultural attractions, local events, folkloric events, etc.

The analysis revealed that about 42% of the surveyed people use more than two sources of information simultaneously to choose certain tourist destinations in the Bihor-Vlădeasa Mountains (Arieșeni - Figure 11, 13; Stâna de Vale - Figure 13; Beliș - Fântânele - Figure 1; Platoul Carstic Padiș - Figure 15; Vlădeasa - Figure 3, Groapa Ruginoasă - Figure 13; Drăgan Valley - Figure 2; Sighiștel Valley - Figure 14; Remeți - Figure 18, 12; Leșu Lake - Figure 2; Boga - Figure 12).

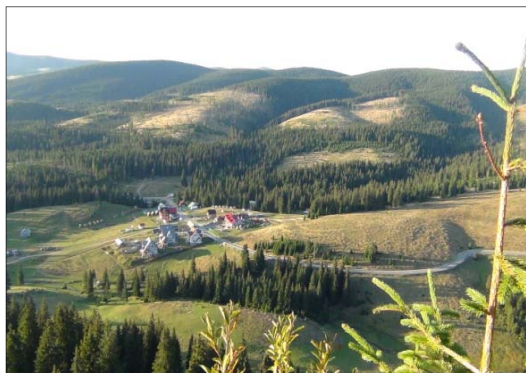


Figure 15. Padiș Tourist complex seen from Biserica Motului Peak - Bihor-Vlădeasa Mountains (left) and Padiș Limestone Plateau (right)



Figure 16. The meadow with globeflowers (*Trollius europaeus*)



Figure 17. Poisonous mushrooms (*Amanita muscaria*)

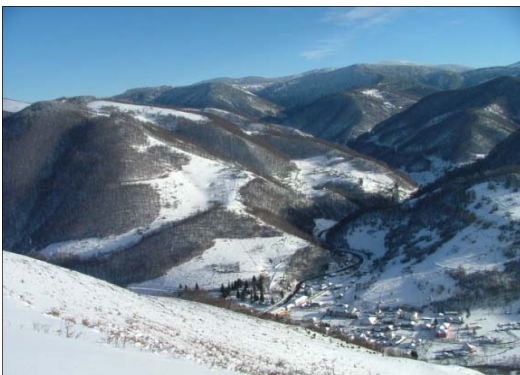


Figure 18. Remeți tourist destination (Bihor County). Autumn (left) and winter (right) landscape

More than half of the respondents (53%) turn to the Internet, relatives' recommendations and other people as sources of information. It is worth mentioning that 31% of tourists consider travel agencies to be the source of information and 16% use tourist guides, leaflets about the region and hotels, catalogues, ads from newspapers, magazines, radio, TV. The study will be further developed in the future for other areas.

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