

*Like any other human activity, without containing intentional elements, tourism, being a consumer of space and tourist resources, participates implicitly in the degradation and the pollution of the environment of the tourist potential, either through the direct pressure of the tourists on the landscape, the flora and the fauna, or on other tourist objectives which can be damaged partially or totally, or through the wrong conception of revaluation and equipment of some areas, points or tourist objectives. The natural environment probably represents the greatest wealth of the Romanian tourism. The protection of the environment is thus crucial for tourism. The tourist experience has demonstrated, in time, that, regardless of the type of tourism people practice, a series of impacts results and they are felt by the society as well as by the natural environment. The development of tourism in a certain area must not affect the social and economic interests of the resident population, nor of the environment, and, most of all, of the natural resources which represent the main attraction together with the historic and cultural sites.*

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**JEL Classification: L83, O13, Q27, Q34, Q56.**

## THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE AND CHALLENGES OF THE ENVIRONMENT

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Tourism is an important consumer of space and natural and anthrop resources, a generator of changes at the level of the environment and economy, leading to several types of effects. The analysis of the impact of tourism on the environment seen as a cumulus of all these effects, positive or negative, is interesting because it takes into consideration the fact that tourism development keeps the ecological balance, avoids resource overload, pollution and any other negative effects on the environment. Thus, tourism sustainable development appears especially in the following three important fields:

- The economic field – the development of society under the circumstances of a proper resource management, thus obtaining the economic effects, both on a short term and on a long term;
- The ecological field – preventing environmental degradation and proper development, respecting the biological diversity;

- The social and cultural fields – increasing the number of work places, practicing traditional jobs, attracting the population into practicing tourism, as well as developing and protecting cultural values.

Thus the development of tourism must be sustainable from an ecological point of view, viable and profitable from an economic point of view, and fair from ethical and social points of view for the local community. In order to achieve this, tourism has to integrate the natural environment, the cultural environment and the human environment and to respect the fragile balance which is characteristic of many tourist destinations.

Although it seems that tourist activities are the less polluting ones, in time, they can have unpleasant results, especially when the development of tourism in the protected areas does not comply with two fundamental conditions: the capacity of ecological charge and the features of each protected area. Evaluating the negative impact means knowing the main negative aspects of tourism development.

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There is a number of disturbing aspects:

- The erosion of the Black Sea shore, which destroys the main attraction of seaside tourism.
- The alluvial deposits in the Danube Delta and the river beds. Although this is the result of many natural causes, urgent remedy action is required against degradation etc.;
- The abusive use of the protected areas by the uneven cutting of trees and the improper building of accommodation and residential facilities;
- The improper management of litter, especially in the rural areas, by placing it on unprotected lands or disposing it randomly;
- The permanent disposal of untreated residual water;
- The visual pollution as well as the environmental one due to out of order industrial units;
- The garbage and its collection – a fundamental approach is necessary in order to encourage everyone to throw the garbage away properly;
- The lack of education regarding recycling among the population;
- Visiting excessively sensitive natural areas, heritage attractions etc., which needs visitor management plans.

Equally important in the tourism field as well as the current environmental issues, is the perception that the environment is damaged and at a national level there is no concern regarding environmental protection. Romania's advantage is an extended environmental protection law. But complying with the regulations of this law is very difficult and allows many abuses on the environment. In some cases, the degradation of the environment is may be due to man's previous actions, and in many cases, it is obvious that these improper actions are still perpetuated. This might be an impediment for the visitors. Remedy measures must be taken and must be applied efficiently. The Romanians are generally proud of their country and of their natural environment that is why they will promptly adopt environment-friendly policies if there are campaigns like "cleaning", "recycling", "floral" etc.

As tourism develops continuously worldwide, the problem becomes more and more serious, with tourists increasingly destroying the environment.

The destructive actions can be numerous, especially in the areas or objectives which have a lot of visitors and do not have specific facilities for food and accommodation, necessary for the practice of different tourist activities and especially for their visitation. They are triggered especially by:

- The uncontrolled tourist traffic in the areas or at the tourist objectives outside the marked paths, leading to the destruction of the flora and vegetation, to the cutting of the trees, to the destruction of the sapling, to the breaking of rocks, of stalactites and stalagmites in the caves etc. Other prejudices are brought by the starting up of fires, by the hindering of the plants' regeneration, the soil sinking, the pouching and the disturbing of the biotopes specific to hunting, and, generally, to the fauna, leading sometimes to the elimination of some species.
- The disappearance of some types of flowers might be the result of the abusive collection of the flora, of the plants protected by law, on the insufficient number of protected plants and on the tourists' ignorance regarding the serious implications which can be triggered by their uncontrolled actions, on the environment factors. This is the reason why the lion's foot (*Leontopodium alpinum*), china pink (*Dianthus spiculifolius*) with its endemic variety "Garofita Pietrei Craiului" (*Dianthus callionus*), the tulip of the Gorges and other species of plants are endangered in some areas, even if protected by law.
- The massive visitation, the lighting with candles and the lack of technical equipment of ventilation or cleaning, have lead to the degradation of some frescos and paintings inside historic monuments and some art monuments, (such as those in Bucovina), and in the past, the lighting of some caves, with rudimentary candles, without any protection, has led to the permanent destruction of the lime deposits inside some caves (the cave of lalomita, Topolnita etc.)
- The lack of proper places for halts and for camping in the areas and along the tourist paths or around some tourist objectives inevitably causes the destruction of the landscape and of other components of the environment, because of the residual traces left randomly by the tourists in the places of halt. Such situations are found in all places destined for leisure tourism, especially around the urban centers, in the mountains, in the proximity of chalets and tourist resorts, on the river banks or lakes etc.
- Travelling by car in places which were inaccessible in the past and the fact that tourists leave the main roads and take side-roads, stopping in wonderful clearings and destroying them or because of the exhaustion gases, polluting the rivers and the lakes etc. Pollution of nature has become more complex.
- The increased number of tourists travelling by car to tourist resorts, in general, and to health

resorts, in particular, contributes to the alteration of the air quality, of the healing factors, because of the lack of parking spaces outside the resorts, thus influencing the specific treatments of those resorts.

- The wrong idea of revaluation of the tourist resources of some areas, shaped by an unscientific and irrational exploitation of these resources or by the improper completion of tourist investments, leads finally, to the drainage or degradation of natural resources, of raw materials necessary to this specific activity. This situation is found in the case of the treatment mineral substances exploitation (Baile Felix, Techirghiol, Lacul Nuntasi, Mangalia, Lacul Sarat, Strunga etc.), as well as in the exploitation of the areas, locations and points of tourist interest.
- A special situation is the deterioration or the wear out of sources of treatment mineral substances, which are greatly vulnerable to hexogen factors, any unfavorable intervention may change their physical and chemical parameters, declared treatment resources (Vatra Dornei, Buzias, Calimanesti, Sovata, Ocna Sibiu, Ocna Mures, and Baile Herculane etc.).

The degradation phenomena of the treatment mineral substances, especially in the case of mineral water and thermo-mineral water, result most of the times, from ignoring the general protection and exploitation principles which stipulate: the limitation of minerals exploitation in relation with the declared resources of treatment mineral substances, the execution of the geological works according to research stipulations and the projects, avoiding minerals exploitations until their wear out and a scientific and rational exploitation of these, the foundation of the parameters of hydro-geological and sanitary protection around the minerals etc.

Some significant cases of degradation of the treatment resources are can be found at the hydro-mineral resources in Covasna and Buzias, where, the wrong exploitation of these has led to the decrease of sources of potential, the decrease of CO<sub>2</sub> quantity etc. At Baile Felix, the resort overloading with tourist treatment and accommodation units, without correlating them with the mineral water resources has led to an increased water exploitation up to the limit of the exploitation of the hydro-mineral deposit, its reconditioning being very difficult.

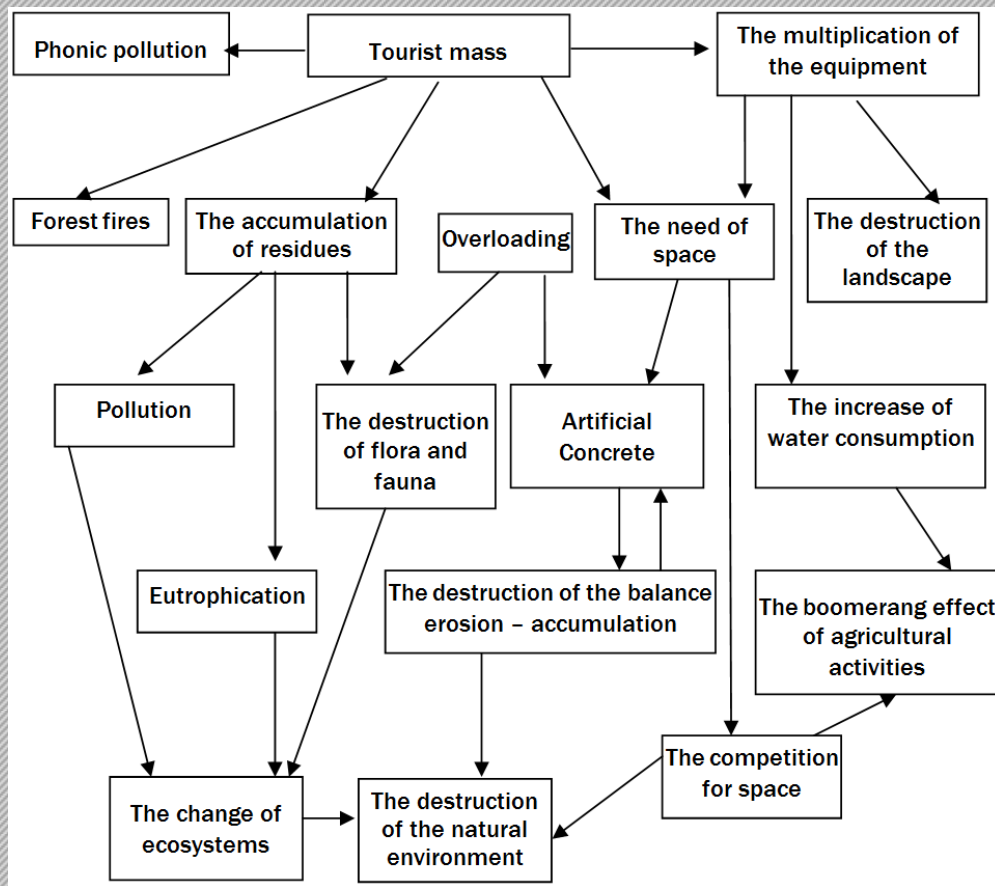
Ignoring and sometimes even not establishing the parameters from a hydro-geological and sanitary point of view and allowing polluting economic activities within

their limits, have also led to the degradation of the treatment resources (Nuntasi, Techirghiol, Amara, Balta Alba and Lacul Sarat lakes) because of the irrigation system, the chemical agriculture and the industrial residual waters.

Generally, the degradation produced on tourist activities are firstly due to the absence or the poorly planned and tourist exploitation (visitation, the enrolling of specific action etc.). Thus, the lack of or improper status of the access roads to an objective from the mountain area, natural reservation etc., spreads the tourists on a very wide area, and the lack of specific equipment (ladders, parapets, signs etc.) lead to a chaotic driving, accidents and to the changing of the cultural and educational, recreational message, of the areas or of those objectives. Such situations are found in the case of the majority of tourist attractions in our country, and especially in the mountain areas. Neither the Retezat National Park (founded in 1936), nor the other parks or natural reservations are meant to be visited. A positive example is the employment of some rangers in the Iron Gates Natural Park, instructed and trained as guides for organized groups of tourists, who by their simple presence offer the guarantee of quality and sustainable tourism. But, despite the tourist impact saturation, with all protective measures adopted by the Natural Monuments Committee of the Romanian Academy, these resources seem to be subjected to a continuous degradation with very serious consequences in some territories, with elements of originality and real scientific interest, found in a state of natural balance.

Another cause which leads to the degradation of the environment and of the tourist potential as a consequence of engaging in improper tourist activities, is the improper design of the objectives of tourism investments, through the establishment of improper positioning of the tourist facilities, unaesthetic constructions, not adapted to the ethnographic, architectural and natural specific of the tourist area, the intensive preoccupation with tourist buildings which can alter the ecological balance of that certain territory etc.

Such situations exist, for instance, in some health resorts, where the ratio between tourist units and their facilities is unbalanced, compared to the receiving capacity of the territory and of the hydro-mineral reserves (Sovata, Buzias, Vatra Dornei, Sinaia, Poiana Brasov etc.). The result is the overloading of the territory with equipment and tourist units, leading to an urbanization of the resort. (Baile Felix, Sovata partially and most of the resorts and tourist areas). See *Figure 1*.



**Figure 1. The impact of health tourism on the environment**

*Adapted after J.J. Bavoux, 1998*

The irrational exploitation of some areas with great tourist activity, especially during the week-ends, with the lack of arrangement of other areas which could attract the flux of tourists during the peak periods of request (arranged peri-urban areas, insufficient as far as the number and the accommodation capacity is concerned, the tourist resorts situated in the proximity of great cities like: the resorts in Prahova Valley, Brasov etc.).

- The construction of some marked networks of paths and forest roads or of means of climbing which, through the great density of works required (deforestations, protection walls, bridges, viaducts, pillars etc.), can affect the landscape charm (Bucegi Mountains, Postavari, Cindrel, Lotrului).
- The improper condition for caves visitation, which were executed without complying with the specific technology, produce the total or partial degradation of these caves. It is the case of Muierii Cave (Parang Mountains), Ialomitei Cave (Bucegi Mountains), and Ionel's Cave (Bihor

Mountains) where the conditions offered by the local initiative do not meet the demands.

As a conclusion, I consider essential that the tourism process should not destroy nature, but on the contrary, should consolidate it and place it into a favorable light. Nature is the environment in which we live either if we are in the centre of a city or if we are on the highest mountain in the world. That is the reason why it is important to use ecology and our education in order to preserve our nature.

The elements which should guarantee the success of all eco-tourist projects refer firstly to the survival of the natural environment, which represents the foundation of tourism, such as:

- The assurance that these contributions help the preservation of the natural areas and the sustainable development of the areas and of the communities;
- The development of some specific strategies in order to avoid the destructive elements of the environment;

- The efficient coordination between the public sector and the private one, including the active implication of the communities and of the local, managerial and development projects;
- The reduction of the impact of transportation, accommodation facilities and of other tourist activities on the environment;
- The assurance that the tourist movement will avoid the overloading of some green areas and the monitoring of the effects on the environment.
- It is important to mention the fact that tourism sometimes brings great prejudices to the environment and, implicitly, to the human being, because of the lack of education or of too much carelessness. That is why, it is the responsibility of the individuals as people and as tourists, to actively participate in preserving the environment, by having a proper, sustainable, ecological attitude.

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