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TOURISM CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR IN NATURAL PROTECTED AREAS

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Abstract

From the perspective of tourism consumers, researchers as well as of other categories of stakeholders, protected natural areas have become holiday destinations based on the principles of sustainable development. The tourism activity is proving to be a real support for the sustainable development of these areas, for the protection of their natural resources, as the degree of awareness with respect to their value and importance is increasingly higher locally, nationally and, sometimes, even regionally. However, the prerequisite for this support is the responsible behaviour of tourism consumers in protected natural areas.

International scientific research in this field emphasizes two main trends. On the one hand there is a high degree of awareness with respect to the importance of developing and practising a form of sustainable tourism. However, on the other hand, the offer only partially reaches the level of the demand for sustainable tourism consumption. The main reason for this is the fact that travel agencies do not sufficiently know the potential demand for this type of tourism. The research performed within this article is meant to mitigate this disparity.

This study is exploring the behaviour related to tourism consumption in protected areas, focussing on identifying the forms and especially the preference for tourism activities of the representatives of the demand. In the second semester of the 2013/2014 university year, complying with the principles of probabilities in the selection of subjects, 200 questionnaires were administered to the young population; 187 valid answers were obtained. The SPSS software was used for data processing and, as a result of the analysis performed on the survey results, the main characteristics of tourism consumption in protected areas have been identified.

Keywords: natural protected areas, tourism activities, tourism forms, tourism consumption

JEL Classification: Q26, Q56, L83

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Introduction

Representing approximately 12% of the surface of mainland worldwide, the system of protected areas is increasingly more present in the preferred holiday destinations, which justifies the preoccupations regarding their scientific management with the aim of ensuring a balance between the output and the efforts to preserve the environment. Starting from the importance of natural protected areas in the global flow of tourists, on the one hand, as well as from the changes registered in the tourism behaviour in the recent years, this article is aimed at investigating the youth's travelling preferences, with an emphasis on identifying the tourism activities that are being practiced. Knowing the consumer profile for this type of holiday is a necessary effort in elaborating the development strategies for sustainable tourism, as well as in capitalising on the tourism potential of natural protected areas.

1. Literature review

Over the years, protected areas have stood out as some of the most efficient means of preserving the biodiversity and, to a wider extent, the environment and its natural and anthropic components. International studies have indicated the fact that tourism contributes to the creation of a higher level of awareness regarding the necessity of preserving the environment, by preserving its natural magnificence for tourism purposes and increasing the investments in the environmental field. (Kyungmi, Muzaffer and Joseph, 2013, pp. 527-529). At the same time, there is an increasing necessity to encourage high-quality tourism, which is not necessarily synonymous with expensive tourism, but with a fair attitude towards the monetary value, by maintaining the optimal standards of tourism resources as well as the respect for the environment and for the local communities, which represents a great responsibility both for the public and the private sectors. (Angelevska-Najdeskaa and Rakicevikb, 2012, pp. 210-213).

As it has been repeatedly demonstrated, the fast development of world tourism is creating threats to the environment, to the universal heritage, to the social relations within and outside the borders of a country, which has led to a high level of concern for the environment. In its turn, this concern has generated the development of alternative forms of tourism. New communication strategies are emerging and new partnerships are being formed with the aim of promoting these new forms of tourism. (Hociung and Frâncu, 2012, p. 15)

The term protected area refers to a variety of terrestrial (mainland) and maritime (wetland) areas such as national parks, natural reservations, wilderness areas and exceptional landscapes etc. marked for the purpose of preservation. Consequently, there is a justifiable diversity of opinions and a high number of significances/definitions encountered in the specialty literature and practice with respect to the content/notion of protected area. At present, there are globally over 1400 terms (expressions) that signify the same as protected areas, each of them being established through a national act. Starting from these considerations, the Fourth World Congress of National Parks and Protected Areas (Caracas, Venezuela, 1992) gave way to the modification of the historic view on protected areas, which were considered to be places far from humankind's main concerns, islands separate from the surrounding areas and neighbouring communities. In its place, a new approach emerges, placing protected areas in the centre of development strategies, an approach that can be sustainable, that focuses on the connection between protected areas and surrounding areas and pays attention to the economic benefits they can bring.

Furthermore, the Congress of parks emphasised that protected areas must adapt to a new world that is constantly and rapidly changing. The following decades will witness an increase in the global rate of change, which will harm the air, the soil and the water – resources fundamental for existence of mankind. Climate change and trans boundary pollution, demographic pressures, international trade and tourism – these and other pressures will bring along challenges different than ever before. The value of protected areas for mankind has never been greater, but, in their turn, they are being subjected to high pressures. If the intention is to reach success in their contribution to development that can be sustainable, protected areas must be able to adapt to these changes.

Generically, the International Union for Conservation of Nature defines a protected area as being "*of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means*", as stated in the Financing Protected Areas report, from 2000.

On the other hand, the Convention for Biodiversity– CBD considers, on their official website, that a protected natural area is "*a geographically defined area, which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives*".

A more complex definition is adopted by the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET). Therefore, a protected natural area is represented by "*portions of land protected by special restrictions and laws for the conservation of the natural environment. They include large tracts of land set aside for the protection of wildlife and its habitat; areas of great natural beauty or unique interest; areas containing rare forms of plant and animal life; areas representing unusual geologic formation; places of historic and prehistoric interest; areas containing ecosystems of special importance for scientific investigation and study; and areas which safeguard the needs of the biosphere*" (Doderó, 1983, quoted in EIONET, 2014)

Some Romanian authors suggest that a protected area be defined in the environmental protection lexicon as a "*geographically defined area, with rare or high number of natural elements, designated or regulated and managed in the sense of achieving specific conservation objectives; it is comprised of national parks, natural reservations, biosphere reserves, natural monuments and others*" (Bran et al., 1999, p. 77)

In accordance with the majority of points of view from the specialty theory and practice, a natural protected area can be defined as being represented by "*an area regulated by specific legislation and managed accordingly, with the role of protecting and preserving representative elements of flora, fauna and their habitat, remarkable physical geographical and ecological elements, with significant opportunities for scientific, educational and recreational activities, having a sufficiently sizeable and well-defined surface so as to be able to ensure the integrity of its characteristics*" (Smaranda, 2008, p. 26)

2. The typology of natural protected areas

In January 1994, in Buenos Aires the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) General Assembly adopted Resolution 19.4 within its 19th Session, which improved the classification adopted in 1978 and correlated it more to the experience of the various countries and to the new requirements for conservation. Therefore, the following

six categories of protected areas have been established, structure that is still in use at present, as presented in the report Guidelines for Protected Area Management Categories, from 1994.

Category I: Strict Nature Reserve/Wilderness area: protected area managed for science or wilderness conservation. This category is comprised of two subgroups, which are: - *Category I a: Strict Nature Reserve:* protected area mainly managed for science purposes. The equivalent of the category in the system established in 1978: scientific reserve/strict natural reserve. - *Category I b: Wilderness area:* protected area mainly managed for the conservation of the wilderness area. It represents a sizeable area that has not been modified or has slightly been modified retaining their natural character and influence without permanent or significant human habitation, which are protected and managed so as to preserve their natural condition.

Category II: National Park: protected area mainly managed for the conservation of the ecosystem and for recreational purposes. It represents an area on land and/or on sea with the aim to: - protect the ecological integrity of one or several ecosystems for the present and future generations, - exclude the exploitation or hostile takeovers with the purpose of designating the area, - provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible, spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational, and visitor opportunities.

Category III: Natural Monument: protected area mainly managed for the preservation of specific natural features. The natural monument is an area containing one or several natural/cultural features of remarkable or unique value, with an essential rarity, having representative or aesthetic qualities or cultural importance.

Category IV: Habitat/Species Management Area: protected area mainly managed for the preservation performed through management interventions. This category designates a land and/or maritime area that is the subject of regular, active interventions to address the requirements of particular species or to maintain habitats.

Category V: Protected Landscape/Seascape: protected area mainly managed for the preservation of the landscape/seascape and for recreational purposes. This category recognises a landscape and/or coastal and island seascape of high and/or distinct scenic quality where the interaction between people and nature has endured over time and has produced an area remarkable for its characteristics, with aesthetic, ecological and/or cultural importance and, often, with a high degree of biodiversity. Safeguarding the integrity of this traditional interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area as well as for its evolution.

Category VI: Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources: mainly managed for the proper use of natural ecosystems. This category designates an area mainly consisting of unmodified natural systems, managed in order to ensure long-term protection and conservation of biodiversity, concurrently supplying a sustainable flow of natural products and services for the needs of the community.

Therefore, one could state that, over time, since its foundation up to the present, the IUCN has managed to enforce certain principles in the organisation of natural protected areas, which are globally accepted and which support the elaboration of national systems for protected areas.

Other protected areas systems

Along with the categories of protected areas established by the IUCN, which represent national designations of the various states, there are other types of protected natural areas that can be added to the list, such as protected natural areas approved by agreements, conventions and treaties, among which the most important being the areas internationally or regionally (continentally) designated. Some of the most important internationally designated protected areas are the ones set forth by international conventions or by multinational organisations, such as UNESCO. These include universal heritage sites, biosphere reserves, Ramsar sites (Appleton, 2002, p. 32), geoparks etc.

Universal Heritage Sites – are meant for the conservation of certain objectives considered to have a remarkable value for mankind. This is possible due to the fact that, in 1972, UNESCO adopted the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. Since it is one of the oldest conventions in the environmental field, the World Heritage Convention has led to the establishment of the World Heritage List, a list of properties forming part of the cultural heritage and natural heritage of mankind.

Biosphere reserves – Biosphere reserves are areas of terrestrial and coastal ecosystems promoting solutions to reconcile the conservation of biodiversity with its sustainable use, as shown in the UNESCO report, from the year 2000. They have the role of activating ecological connections with the economy, sociology and politics as well as of ensuring that good political intentions do not generate inadequate results. The performances and achievements are evaluated on a regular basis, and the observations and desires of local communities remain a priority. Biosphere reserves are truly remarkable places for the population and nature and they represent a key element in the biosphere management process of these areas.

RAMSAR sites – are set forth in the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance signed in the city of Ramsar, Iran, in 1971. This convention represents an intergovernmental treaty that supplies the framework for national actions and international cooperation for the conservations and wise use of wetlands and their resources. The objective of these categories of protected natural areas is that of protecting the species of water and wetland birds of international importance along with their habitats.

Geoparks – working aside the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) and governmental institutions, UNESCO, through its Division of Earth Sciences, took the initiative of coordinating and bringing together the national and international efforts for the preservation of the geological heritage. The result of these actions has been the Geoparks Programme that acts in synergy with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the World Network of Biosphere Reserves founded on the basis of the Man and Biosphere Programme (MaB UNESCO).

European Ecological Network NATURA 2000

In the context of the protected areas network, Natura 2000 ecological network plays a special part. The idea behind creating this network dates back to the 1970s as an initiative of the European Union member states, being an efficient and effective tool for the protection of the common heritage and a reference model for the development and organisation of protected areas (from the perspective of the EU, the Natura 2000 sites are not considered to be protected natural areas, although there are numerous cases where they

overlap the declared protected natural areas within each EU member state). Starting with this period, the member states have strived to standardise the legal texts and regulations in the field of nature protection. This has been necessary because it has been observed that the regulations in the European Union countries indirectly competed for nature conservation through: guidelines regarding land management and the elaboration of impact studies, contract programmes, certain changes at a national or local level in the view of sustainable economic development. The efficacy of such measures greatly depends on a unitary vision and does not allow divergent perceptions regarding habitats and species, as shown in the 2002 report issued by the Office for Official Publication of the European Communities.

In conclusion, we can state that, through its complexity, the present classification system of protected areas manages to cover the entire typology that exists in the practice of the countries in the world. Furthermore, the bodies involved in the process of structuring the categories system have proven over time to be receptive and adaptable to the various situations and to the evolution of this phenomenon, which entitles the consideration that in the future the positive course of action will be carried on, thus ensuring a widespread allegiance to the theoretical framework.

3. Tourist flow in protected natural areas

Travels in protected areas are based on tourists' desire to know nature, to live unique experiences in their destinations, to relax in a natural environment, free of pollution. Furthermore, it is necessary that these trips comply with the principles of sustainable tourism behaviour. A study performed in 2014 (Imrana, Alama and Beaumont, 2014) has examined the different orientations regarding the environment within four groups of tourism-associated stakeholders in protected natural areas, with the purpose of identifying the factors that influence their intention of showing a responsible behaviour to the environment.

The results have highlighted, among others, an upward trend in favour of adopting the necessary measures in support of the premises for such behaviour. In addition, tourists represent an important category of stakeholders in aspects related to the management of natural protected areas. A research performed by Müllera and Jobb (2009) has shown that, though interested by adopting a responsible behaviour in protected areas, tourists generally have a neutral attitude towards the management of these areas, especially regarding the existence of possible disruptive factors for the ecosystem. Therefore, it is recommendable to take educational measures meant to increase tourists' degree of awareness, in their quality of stakeholders.

3.1. Travel motivations

Summed up, travel motivations have given rise to four categories of tourists looking to spend their holidays in nature (Lindberg, 1991 quoted in Burton, 1995): - hard core nature tourists, which category includes scientists or members of education or preservation specialized bodies, - dedicated nature tourists, represented by people who wish to get acquainted with nature as well as with the local cultural history. – Mainstream nature tourists, represented by people who mainly visit wild destinations as part of a regular trip.

They generally have no strong commitment to wild areas and they expect, accommodation wise, a level of comfort equal to that of other (non-nature destination based) holidays. – Casual nature tourists are people who just happen to be in nature programmes, as part of their holiday. These more general nature tourism motivations will be doubled by protected area specific ones. (table no. 1)

Table no. 1: Components of the protected areas experience

Motivation	Experience
Aesthetics/perception	Enjoying the landscape and the wilderness
Religious/spiritual	Experiencing God or the inner self into the wild
Escape	Finding freedom away from life's constraints and urban alienation
Challenge	Satisfaction attained through the overcoming of extreme situations
Historical/romantic	An opportunity to relieve or imagine the pioneers' experience in various fields
Time alone	Respecting solitude in a vast and indifferent setting
Companionship/fellowship	Desire to share the setting with friends and tighten the social bond
Discovery/learning	The thrill of discovering or learning about nature in an appropriate environment
Indirect appreciation	The pleasure of admitting that there are wild areas never seen before.

Source: Hall, C., 1994, p. 34

Each of these components comes with its unique experiences which the visitors to the natural areas wish to live during their journey. Most often this means enjoying the specific landscape and wildlife. On the other hand, some tourists want to spend time away from the daily stress of big city life, either by themselves or alongside other tourists interested in experiencing new situations. Added the cultural experience provided by some of the protected areas, it becomes easily clear why these are important arguments to visit.

Ambergera et al surveyed, in a research conducted in 2012, the attitudes of the visitors to the Gesaeuse National Park, Austria, including their take on motivations to get involved in tourist activities in the area.

These have been observed in correlation with the tourists' affinity and attitudes towards environmental protection. This has proven the hypothesis that a higher degree of affinity is directly proportional to the type of motivations pushing them to visit protected areas. Tourists highly motivated to conduct tourist activities in natural protected areas are the same ones that develop a positive attitude towards the preservation of nature and natural processes.

3.2. Trends in tourist consumer behaviour in protected areas

According to the results of a Eurobarometer survey for Romania, 30% of all European tourists have chosen to spend their holidays in nature in 2013, while only 34% of Romanian tourists have preferred nature, as shown in the Flash Eurobarometer Report, from 2013.

Among the leisure activities mentioned, the large share goes to hikes and landscape photography.

Given that the demand for nature holidays is constantly on the rise, the survey conducted by the UNDP/GEF (2013) looks into unexplored tourist and leisure opportunities that could be developed in order to increase revenues generated by protected areas. It is considered that tourists and visitors of the five pilot national parks (Apuseni National Park - ANP, Retezat National Park (ReNP), Piatra Craiului National Park (PCNP), Vânători-Neamț 20 Natural Park (VNNP) and Munții Maramureșului Natural Park (MNP) are willing to pay almost 42 million euro more yearly over the amounts they are currently charged. However, in order to tap into this potential income flow, additional funding and strategic measures are necessary.

The same survey states that the estimate value of all tourist and leisure activities in the five PAs amounts to little over 109.5 million euro in 2010. According to the Ecotourism Association of Romania (EAR), around 80 to 90% of the ecotourism expenses are limited to the areas where the tourist programme has been deployed, benefitting many rural communities. It is also mentioned that according to the World Travel and Tourism Council, in 2011, pilot parks tourism yielded 365 million euro (or 0.3% of GDP), including gross visiting expenses of over 280 million euro, capital investments exceeding 194 million euro, plus around 37,100 full time jobs. As a first measure, they recommend the use of ticketing type mechanisms, also useful for controlling the tourist flow inside the park and thus minimising site impact. It is well known that entry fees are currently small or nonexistent, the goal being therefore to increase already existing fees or to establish an entrance, especially for high tourist potential sites.

A 2012 Weaver report (pp. 371–372) on the psychographic traits of the protected natural area visitor showed that tourists who are highly aware of environmental issues and who have an average to highly positive approach towards environmental protection are not open, however, to "larger investments", such as willingness to volunteer, donate or pay a higher entrance fee in order to visit protected areas.

Nevertheless, this tourist potential can be tapped into and turned to high profits, on condition of prior investments into specific infrastructure, such as tourist and leisure equipments, especially at a time of ever growing competition on the international tourist market. Given the context, the constant inquiry into the tourists' consumption behaviour inside protected natural areas is one of the important premises for the future policies and strategies aimed at the development of tourism in these areas.

4. Research on visitor preferences for tourism activities in protected natural areas

In order to determine the types of activities considered attractive for the next holiday in protected areas a field research has been conducted that targeted potential tourists. The methodology is, as problematic, knowing the achievement of different forms of tourism in protected natural areas. The research objectives were supposed to identify tourist activities to which tourists participated in their last vacation in protected areas.

4.1. Research Methodology

Regarding the method of gathering information, structured communication was chosen which resulted in a questionnaire with 15 questions, and recording responses was achieved by the interviewer technique, the questionnaire duration being of approximately

10 minutes. The fact that the selection of subjects was randomly respecting the probability principles must be added. However, collecting information design took into account the researched community who was young population and sampling unit represented by students of II, III year and Master, aged between 20 and 25 years. The research was conducted in the second semester of the academic year 2013/2014, researched community being made up of 200 people. Setting sample size was achieved using simple random unrepeatabe sampling (Titan, 2008, p. 222). The classic model was elected with a 95% probability coefficient corresponding to $z = 1.96$ and the accepted error limit of 5%. With no previous research, the maximum dispersion has been introduced in calculating which is $f(1-f) = 0.5 * 0.5 = 0.25$, thus resulting sample size of 181 questionnaires. SPSS software was used for data processing. Out of 200 people surveyed were obtained 187 valid responses. Under these conditions, the results can be extrapolated unreservedly to the whole community.

4.2. The results of the processing and interpretation of information

Regarding the option to spend the vacation in protected areas, 148 respondents considered it very feasible, while the rest of 39 had not practiced tourism in protected areas. (table no. 2). When inquired about the achievement degree of the different forms of tourism in protected areas the Likert scale was used with five gradations: very low, low, medium, high and very high. As a statistical tool for data processing SPSS software was used. For all types of travel the respondents answer is that the degree of achievement of these in protected areas is low to medium (the highest average responses meets for ecotourism and the lowest average for scientific tourism), the answers are quite homogeneous, standard deviations ranging between 0.815 and 1.543 (table no. 2).

Regarding the order responses on the degree of achievement of various forms of tourism in protected areas on the first place is ecotourism (average 4.1377), followed by tourism in nature (average 3.0722), rural tourism (average 3.0258), cultural tourism (average 2.7087), adventure tourism (average 2.6675), hiking (average 2,475), scientific tourism (average 2.2874).

For ecotourism the most common response is high achievement level (the mode is 4000) with frequencies 33% of the valid responses, while for nature tourism, cultural tourism and rural tourism the most frequent answer is medium achievement level (the mode 2000 and 3000), with frequencies of 25% and 31%. In terms of adventure tourism, scientific tourism and hiking the most common response was low achievement level (the mode is 1000) with a frequency between 26% and 27% of valid responses.

Table no. 2: The achievement degree of tourism forms in protected areas

Variables	Answers Question 4						
	Valid N	Average	Median	Mode	Frequency	Std.Dev.	Standard error
4.1	148	3.0722	3.000000	3.000000	30	0.93152	0.125867
4.2	148	2.7087	3.000000	3.000000	31	1.01377	0.140382
4.3	148	4.1377	4.000000	4.000000	33	0.81593	0.093451

Variables	Answers Question 4						
	Valid N	Average	Median	Mode	Frequency	Std.Dev.	Standard error
4.4	148	3.0258	3.000000	2.000000	25	1.10238	0.173418
4.5	148	2.2874	2.000000	1.000000	27	1.21547	0.136768
4.6	148	2.2475	3.000000	1.000000	26	1.42309	0.164873
4.7	148	2.6675	2.500000	1.000000	27	1.54388	0.144887

Source: elaborated by authors

From the perspective of the involvement in the activities within protected areas visited, tourists rank them as follows (table no. 3): the firsts are photography, painting landscape (average 3.6477), followed by the study of flora and fauna (average 2.9378), visits to cultural, historical and ethnographic objectives (average 2.8854), special guided hikes (average 2.7087), adventure expeditions (average 1.9122), knowledge and learning traditional crafts (average 1.7456), watching movies, studying documentary material on protected areas, within tourist information centers / eco-museums (average 1.6242), speleology (average 1.6048). Respondents gave a high degree of involvement (4.000) for photo shooting, landscape painting, a medium degree of involvement (3000 and 2000) for special guided hikes, studying of flora and fauna, visits to cultural, historical and ethnographic, adventure expeditions (the median is greater than average). In terms of homogeneity of responses, the first are visits to cultural, historical and ethnographic objectives (Std.Dev 1.60697), which means that in general the respondents rated their involvement in this activity mostly with 3 (medium).

Table no. 3: The degree of involvement in protected areas

Variables	Answers Question 7						
	Valid N	Average	Median	Mode	Frequency	Std.Dev.	Standard error
7.1	148	1.9122	2.000000	1.000000	32	0.99083	0.10788
7.2	148	1.6048	1.000000	1.000000	44	0.84388	0.08975
7.3	148	2.9378	3.000000	3.000000	40	0.91232	0.10443
7.4	148	1.6242	1.000000	1.000000	41	0.83053	0.08993
7.5	148	3.6477	4.000000	4.000000	25	1.09578	0.11887
7.6	148	2.8854	3.000000	3.000000	27	1.60697	0.17922
7.7	148	2.7087	3.000000	3.000000	30	0.93456	0.10645
7.8	148	1.7456	1.000000	1.000000	43	1.07567	0.11963

Source: elaborated by authors

At the opposite pole are watching movies, studying documentary material on protected areas within the tourist information centers / eco-museums (Std.Dev. 0.83053), which means that the majority of respondents rated their involvement in this activity mostly with 1 (very low). It is also observed for all the activities in protected areas a high degree of statistical significance of the media, since the ratio between the mean and the standard error is less than 2 (the result is significant at 95% level). Moreover, there is a high frequency of responses providing a very low degree of involvement in protected areas (the mode is 1) and those given a medium involvement (the mode is 3), with the exception of photo shooting, landscape painting (how is 4).

Regarding the intention to repeat the experience of spending holidays in protected areas, 161 of 187 people (86.09% of total responses and total respondents) answered yes, and the remaining 26 (13.91% of total responses and of total respondents) stated that they would not be practicing tourism in protected areas in the future.

In terms of the attractiveness degree of activities in protected areas visited for the upcoming holiday, tourists rank them as follows (table no. 4): the firsts are photography, painting landscape (average 3.7578), followed by visits to cultural, historical and ethnographic objectives (average 3.3688), studying the fauna and flora (average 3.1186), adventure expeditions (average 3.0576), special guided hikes (average 2.8803), knowledge and learning traditional crafts (average 2.8282), speleology (average 2.3387), watching movies, study of documentary materials on protected areas within the tourist information centers / eco-museums (average 2.0897). Respondents gave a high degree (4000) for photographing, painting landscape, a medium attractiveness degree (3000) for special guided hikes, knowledge and learning traditional crafts (median is greater than the average). In terms of homogeneity of responses, the firsts are adventure expeditions (Std.Dev 1.67097), which means that in general respondents rated their involvement in this activity mostly with 1 (very low) and at the opposite pole hiking with specialized guide (Std.Dev. 0.82770), which means that in general respondents rated their involvement in this activity mostly with 3 (average). It is noted, for all future activities that can be practiced in protected areas a high degree of statistical significance of averages, as the ratio of the average and standard error is less than 2 (the result is significant at the 95% level). It is also observed a high frequency of responses which gives a very low degree of attractiveness of the activities in protected areas (the mode is 1) and those given an average attractiveness (the mode is 3), apart from photo shooting, landscape painting (the mode is 4).

Table no. 4: The attractiveness degree of tourism activities in protected areas

Variables	Answers Question 8						
	Valid N	Average	Median	Mode	Frequency	Std.Dev.	Standard error
8.1	161	2.8803	3.000000	3.000000	52	0.82770	0.06878
8.2	161	2.3387	2.000000	1.000000	35	1.15843	0.10342
8.3	161	2.8282	3.000000	3.000000	42	1.04376	0.10034
8.4	161	3.3688	3.000000	4.000000	46	0.88778	0.07884
8.5	161	3.0576	3.000000	1.000000	38	1.67097	0.15887
8.6	161	3.7578	4.000000	4.000000	37	1.04334	0.08856
8.7	161	2.0897	2.000000	2.000000	43	1.11984	0.10689
8.8	161	3.1186	3.000000	3.000000	33	1.21256	0.10698

Source: elaborated by authors

Conclusions

Following the analysis undertaken in the article, some main conclusions are drawn. In our country we can observe a trend of increasing awareness of the impact of tourism activity on the environment; in this respect mitigation initiatives occurred of the negative influences, through an increased interest in the development and practice of sustainable forms of tourism.

The protected natural areas, present in our country on large areas and diverse landforms, provide a framework for the practice of such forms of tourism, to support efforts to protect the natural environment, educating tourists in the spirit of conducting sustainable tourism activities and responsible tourism consumption.

The research conducted among young people identified those tourism consumption habits specific to protected natural areas that meet, at the same time, the specific requirements of tourists. In this way we tried reducing the discrepancies observed between tourism offer in protected areas and tourism demand, by shaping the sustainable tourism consumer profile, held in protected areas.

According to the results, a very large proportion of young people practiced and is interested in practicing tourism activities in protected natural areas in the future. In terms of the preferred forms of tourism, the young tourist chooses, in order of preference, ecotourism, nature tourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism. The consumer preferred tourism activities are, in decreasing order: photography and landscape painting, studying the flora and fauna, cultural sightseeing, special guided hikes. Not given a lot of interest in learning knowledge of traditional crafts, these activities, along with the study of speleology and watching documentary materials on protected areas within the tourist information centers, are lower-ranking among tourism activities most often practiced. Regarding the upcoming holidays, the travel consumer chooses to engage himself in tourist activities protected specific to natural areas, similar to those mentioned above, to which adventure expeditions are added.

A future research direction involves combining quantitative research with a form of qualitative research, in order to obtain a more comprehensive set of information to supplement the description of young tourism consumer profile in natural protected areas. It can also be considered widening the spectrum in terms of the studied population, developing a wider research by also including other tourism consumer groups.

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