

MOUNTAIN TOURISM IN ROMANIA AND ITS ATTRACTIVNESS ON STUDENTS

Alexandra ZBUCHEA*, **Olivia RADU****

Abstract: Mountain tourism is considered to be one of the most popular forms of tourism, especially among young and dynamic people. In the last years many shifts registered in terms of diversification of activities that could be developed while into the mountains. In the same time, mountains are increasingly more associated with eco-tourism. There are no different typologies of tourists preferring the mountains, but people preferring mountain tourism tend to be allocentrics and interactional. Various ways of segmenting mountain tourists are discussed in the paper. The investigation is mainly dedicated in observing the tourism behavior of the Romanian students, both college and master degrees. The main dimensions investigated are: sources of information used when planning the vacation, destination selection, forms of mountain tourism preferred by students, length of travel, motives for mountain tourism, activities developed during the travel, preferences and companionship.

Key words: tourist typology, mountain tourism, motives, segmentation, student travel, Romania

Tourism is increasingly more popular in all its forms. One of the current trends is the growing diversity of types of tourism developed in the last 20 years. Old forms of tourism are transforming themselves; they are rediscovered by tourists in innovative approaches. Tourism agents are offering to tourists more activities and challenges while on travel. These phenomena are especially true in the case of mountain tourism.

Mountain tourism is one of the oldest forms of tourism, particularly in Romania. Some of the oldest associations were formed by people loving the mountains and mountaineering in all its forms. The oldest organization, founded in 1880, is the Siebenbürgischer Karpatenverein (SKU). In the following years other associations interested in promoting mountain tourism started, especially in Transylvania. These associations are among the first to establish accommodation facilities in Romania (i.e. chalets), of course, into mountain

* National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest, Romania.

** Romanian-American University, Bucharest, Romania.

areas. The aims of these associations were primarily to promote the idea of mountains, to make others love the mountains and to make people to be more “alive”. (Wedekind, 2005) Part of these associations seem to have had also educational aims, since many of their members were teachers. Nowadays persons interested in mountain tourism are extremely diverse, as well as the opportunities to travel into the mountains.

Mountain tourists’ typology

Trying to define tourists was never easy. Such attempts have also been called segmentation, classification, clustering. In order to plan, manage and develop tourism, distinct tourist types have to be identified (Smith & Smale, 1980; Taylor, 1986). Tourist typology information makes it easier to state different motivations, to launch more experiences, and evaluate impacts of tourism. It is also a piece of basic information in understanding which tourists types are more likely to be found at different stages in the evolution of tourism areas (Duffus & Dearden, 1990). A connection between tourism types and resources is important when talking about tourism typology. For example, Cohen (1972) proposes a four-part tourist typology, based on the tourist’s desire for familiarity and the level of institutionalization preferred.

Organized mass tourism and individual mass tourism are a part of the institutionalized tourism, which faces the routine of tourist industry. The exploratory tourist and the non-conventional type are a part of the non-institutionalized tourism or solitary tourism, where getting in touch with tourism industry is not necessarily an option. All the four types are to be met into the mountains, but the first one – tourists preferring organized mass tourism – in a lesser extent. The dimensions of Smith’s tourist typology (1977) are similar, but more detailed; as the classification was made according to the impact that tourism has on the environment and to the tourist relations to the destination.

According to Murphy (1985), there are two general categories of tourist typologies; interactional and cognitive-normative. First, interactional tourist typologies are primarily based on the interactions between the tourists and the destination. Using the same topic, and based on travel behavior, interests and opinions, as trip indices, Uysal & McDonald (1989) came up with other similar interactional tourist typologies. The main point is that interactional tourist typologies are used in tourism research studies which identify tourists, based on activities. Mountains offer a suitable frame for various activities, both nature- and person-related. When considering mountain tourism, in many cases, the interaction with nature or host communities is the main purpose of travel (e.g. climbing, rafting, riding, rural tourism etc.)

Second, cognitive-normative tourist typologies focus on the travel motivations of tourists. For example, in Plog's vision (1972), a tourist typology recognizes allocentrics (adventuresome, individual travel), mid-centrics (individual travel to destinations with facilities), and psychocentrics (packaged holidays to popular destinations), depending on how tourists conform to societal or individual desires. Especially the first category is met within mountain tourism, but mountains support all the mentioned forms. Cohen (1979) refers to a tourist's motivations, based on a spiritual center, where tourists seek travel for existential, experimental, or recreational reasons. Cognitive-normative typologies have also been applied to more specific outdoor user groups. Information needed to develop cognitive-normative typologies usually comes from interviews, but occasionally by self-designation. Cognitive-normative typologies have been used to identify tourists on the basis of their motivations, attitudes, and values.

There are several criticisms of tourist typologies. First, many tourist typologies are tautological. Lowyck *et al* (1992) and Sharpley (1994) explain how generalizations from a typology are restricted to the data that created the typology, then without methodological consistency, the names chosen for tourist categories vary widely and strongly reflect the researcher's point of view. Also, without extensive case studies, the use of questionnaires, the most common method of gathering typology data, is problematic. When taking into consideration tourists' motivations and activities, Lowyck stated that they may be too complex to collapse into rigid categories. For example, the line between motivations and activities is very thin, as features that attract tourists to a site can be considered motivations, but when acted upon, considered activities. Most typologies are static and cannot model the evolution of tourist types over time, and therefore typologies have limited predictability. Nevertheless, it has been shown that markets among mature tourists remained relatively stable over a 10-year period. Most typologies are theoretical, and only a few have been empirically tested. Pearce (1985) argues that it is necessary to interrelate tourist roles to assess their similarities and differences. Although tourist typologies are limited in many ways, they are widely used to segment tourist populations. Given their conceptual basis, there is much potential overlap between the interactional and cognitive-normative approaches, but this overlap has not been tested in ecotourism or mountain setting.

Murphy (1985) argued that both cognitive-normative and interactional typologies are relevant, since tourist choices of activities and destinations (interactional) relate to, and result from, tourist motivations (cognitive-normative). The choice of holiday destination will give the identity of the traveler

and, in an increasingly homogeneous world, set him apart from the hordes of other tourists. (Morgan *et al.* 2003)

Motives and preferences for mountain tourism

“Mountains” have always been difficult to define. We all know a mountain when we see it; mountain people all know that they are mountain people and are proud of it (Hamilton and McMillan, 2004). Tourism helps to diversify mountain economies and provides alternative livelihood opportunities for mountain people. Because traditions and life-styles of rural mountain populations are of rising interest, old habits (e.g. special handicrafts, ways of cooking, patterns of constructing houses or traditional folk dances / music) are revitalized. Tourism is not omnipresent in the mountains. At any space scale, the degree of its development is highly variable and over time its importance may increase and then wane (Price, 1995).

Historically, all over the world, mountain areas have been attracting people – pilgrims, ascetics, naturalists, explorers, and, in recent years, mountaineers, trekkers and cultural tourists from near and far-off. Features that attract tourists are the pure, original nature, natural monuments and the healthy climate. More recently mountains attract people interested in ecology. Ecotourists, no matter the destination, often demand higher environmental care-taking (regarding waste management, water purification, etc.), than the local population does. Interest in wild fauna and flora and in ecosystems rise awareness and respect towards the regions nature assets. Because mountain ecotourism offers alternative income for mountain communities, unsustainable use of nature resources like overuse of mountain pastures, poaching wild fauna might be reduced and better controlled, paradoxally, through tourism which is in the same time accused of destroying nature.

As Beedie and Hudson (2003) show, in the last decades a commodification of mountains is going on. Mountaineers are becoming tourists; the mountain holidays are increasingly more “packaged”. In the same time mountaineering diversified and reinvented itself (Beedie & Hudson, 2003: 626). Mountain tourism is a form of recreation, but tourists are risk-aware, are looking not just for leisure, but also for excitement, unique experience, are eager to reach their own limits. Mountain tourism involves in many cases adventure in various degrees. Even in the case of tourists accommodated in tourist resorts, the mountains’ vicinity determines them to seek adventure, at least to explore the area.

Exploration is one of the main reasons people prefer mountain tourism. It is an exciting journey, in the middle of nature. The exploration of nature’s beauty

is so different from everyday activities and busy life in a town. Challenges and engaging difficulties is a plus to some persons, making mountain tourism even more appealing. To certain degree mountain tourism is an exotic form of tourism. Mountain and nature are not a familiar environment for the modern man, the communities surrounding the mountains could be preservers of traditions. Part of mountain tourism is undergone into or close to rural areas. Additional characteristics of certain locations, such as extremely high peaks or remote places, increase the desire to visit those locations, to practice different forms of mountain tourism in those areas.

Analyzing the relations between landscape and rural tourism, Daugstad (2008, 413) shows that nowadays people are not satisfied just with seeing a beautiful landscape. They want to experience it, to be part of it, to emerge into it. This desire is one of the factors that has led not only to the development of rural tourism (no matter if in mountain regions or not), but also to the development of mountain tourism in general. The interest in nature is more profound than experiencing the landscape; it is routed in a deeper respect and care for nature. The study of Modela and Albaladejo (2007) shows that, at least in the case of rural tourism in Spain, nature is the most important reason of travel.

The growing interest and valorization of nature is one of the reasons for the increase of interest in mountain tourism (Moss, 2006: 9). This development influences not only the magnitude of mountain tourism, but also determines amenity migration and second-homes setting into the mountains. Some look for soft adventure, while others for hard adventure. A study undergone in the United States in 1998 shows that compared to soft adventure seekers, the hard adventure tourists are younger, with higher incomes and better educated. More single men enter this category. Other characteristic is that they tend to be activity focused, while soft-adventure tourists prefer to undergo several activities (Beedie & Hudson, 2003: 632). It is impossible to set a hierarchy of motivations for tourists, because they change in time. To represent their array and evolution different studies should be developed. Motivations are close related with desires and needs.

The way these are fulfilled, determine the satisfaction degree of tourist. The theory of self-congruity applied to tourism also reveals that the satisfaction of tourists is directly linked to the correlation between the self-concept of the tourist and the destination image (Beerli *et al.*, 2007: 572, 582). Thus tourists would prefer destinations that match the image they have about themselves, as well as the image they want to project in the social environment they are part of. Mountain destinations could be associated with dynamism, sports,

adventure, risk-taking, ecology, body strength, performance, endeavor, friendship, team work and others. Tourists attached to these values, considering themselves as such or projecting such an image would seriously take into consideration mountain tourism. Beerli *et al.* (2007, 574-575) point out that the model of self-congruity does not fully explain the tourist pattern of destination choosing, other criteria being taken into consideration, such as previous experience, innovative spirit, degree of involvement in the selection process and others.

Preferences for tourism are not influenced just by inner-desires, but also by the context the travel is taking place. For instance, in the case of mountain-based sports tourism, researchers point out a decrease of downhill skiing for the benefit of hiking, backpacking, cross-country skiing and snowboarding (Fredman & Heberlein, 2003: 485). Reasons for these developments vary from person to person, country to country, and could range from the higher investments in some forms of tourism and the disposable income, to the increased sport practice of senior tourists.

We stress that preference and interests are not the only criteria of the decision making in tourism. As Wong and Yeh discuss (2009), other important factors are risk perceived, expectations or tourist knowledge. The study developed by Decrop and Snelders (2004) on Belgian households show that the decisions regarding vacations are taken in time. Multiple criteria are used. Some use a compensatory decision model, in which strong points could “cover” some weak aspects. The research shows that the decision making is an ongoing process, that goes on even after the vacation has been booked (if the case). Alternatives are considered all the time.

Segmenting the mountain tourism market

Understanding tourists is extremely important to better project the offer and to develop the most appropriate and appealing accommodation, facilities and services. In this context segmentation of the market is important. Even if the concept of segmentation is well-known and its importance is largely recognized, implementing it – *i.e.* identifying the market segments – is quite difficult.

The simplest way to segment the tourist market is to take into consideration socio-demographic characteristics of tourists. More effective would be to base the segmentation on their attitudes and behavior (e.g. how often do they go into the mountains, what do they do during their travel and such). A behavioral segmentation implies a more profound knowledge and understanding of tourists. It is more reliable; the segments obtained would be more relevant,

thus decisions based on them would be more effective. More difficult segmentation methods generate clusters of tourist. Blooms (2005) develops an even more complex model of segmentation using artificial neuronal networks. This model takes into consideration more relationships between inputs and outputs, being more detailed and providing more information on tourists. It also highlights connection between tourists' characteristics and their attitudes. It also highlights the strongest inputs, with the most consistent impact on tourists' behavior. Three segments of tourists (in Cape Town) are identified: vibrant and energetic, pleasure seekers and established and settled. The model could not be extended without thorough analyze on mountain tourism. Nevertheless it is noteworthy to observe that the vibrant and energetic segment encloses tourists who take shorter trips, but are more satisfied with the location (cleanliness, friendliness, cosmopolitanism, variety of arts and crafts etc.) compared with the other segments, especially with the pleasure seekers. This might suggest that active tourists discover more interesting things, tend to be less critical and enjoy more the vacation.

Chen (2003) proposes other segmentation model, highlighting sentiments and opinion developed after the travel. He identifies four tourist segments, two of them defined as actionable segments – tending to make recommendations to others -, with specific characteristics in terms of demographic and travel characteristics. The segments considered to be non-actionable are those with negative opinions on pricing and assistance. More males tend to be in these segments. The decision-time-frame is also different; the non-actionable segments making the travel decision with just one-two months in advance. The study shows that more satisfied women, who planned their travel with more than three months in advance, tend to share opinion and recommend the destination. The results would help especially accommodation providers in mountain region to better design and promote their offer.

Alvarez and Asugman (2006, 320-321) point out the need to use different criteria to segment tourists, among which is specially mentioned the information needs and habits in relation with tourist's travel pattern: explorer or planner. The study identified two predominant types of Turkish tourists. The "spontaneous explorers" are mainly male, are less concerned with risk and do not plan thoroughly their travel. They do not tend to go on packaged tours, but return frequently to the destinations they like. The second type of tourists are "risk-averse planners". They are cautious, avoid all risks, plan holidays using a wide variety of information sources. They prefer packaged tours and four-five stars accommodation. These tourists are constantly looking for new

destinations and are less involved and active while traveling (Anvarez & Asugman, 2006: 331). In mountain tourism, these patterns might not be present due to the risk associated to an active vacation, to the diversity of activities that might be undergone and to the specific relationships between accommodation location and the natural resources/attractions which generate tourist flows.

We do not know a segmentation specific for mountain tourism, but researchers were interested in rural tourism. Because of the similarities between mountain tourism and rural tourism, as well as because part of rural tourism develops close to or even into the mountain, the tourist segmentation for rural tourism has to be considered. Molera and Albaladejo (2007) identified five segments of tourists in the rural region of Southeastern Spain. We stress that this region happens to be mainly a seaside region, thus the results have to be carefully considered in the context of mountain tourism. Four of the segments consider that environment and nature extremely importance, but just two of the segments are attracted by outdoor activities. The fifth segment is just interested in spending time with friends.

A more recent study of Park and Yoon (2009), undergone in Korea, segmented the rural tourism market according to tourists' motivations to travel. Four segments are defined: family togetherness seeker, passive tourist, want-it-all seeker, and learning and excitement seeker. The first segment appreciates relaxing in nature and hiking, still they prefer cultural activities and socialization with the family. The second segment prefers sports and leisure activities. The third segment wants also to travel and do housework. The forth segment, the smallest one (19%), is interested in socialization, learning, and social excitement. Ecological activities are considered attractive by all segments, but the passive tourists are a bit less interested (Park and Yoon, 2009: 105). All four segments could be satisfied by the opportunities offered by a vacation in a mountain region.

A useful criterion for segmenting mountain tourists is the purpose of the travel. Each form of mountain tourism would generate a specific type of tourists, with specific interests, attitudes, and lifestyle.

Mountain tourism in Romania

Developing mountain resorts is an always changing area, especially at international level. The scientific research together with tourist new experiences and the changes in the structure and the motivation of tourists are the main reasons of this process. Recent trends show an increasing interest in the "middle" mountain area as well as in middle and small mountain resorts that

bring more advantages to the local community. Other tourist resorts that came in the light are the rural mountain resorts, which show a great interest in protecting the environment.

At international level, most of the mountain resorts go through a changing process that implies: ecological project planning and taking measures of protecting the mountain environment; creating resorts as a result of cooperation between local communities and tourism associations, developing specific infrastructure for youth; getting the local community involved in the process of development of mountain resorts; a general overview of the low mountain resources, expanding the area for downhill ski, according special attention to all season resorts close to decentralization of responsibilities and initiatives.

In Romania, mountain resorts come to a common ground with the international statements, not only because they were shown to be fruitful, but also because they are what the Romanian mountain resorts need. A full integration of tourist activities in economy and also in the life of local communities is of great benefit for all the parties involved. This is the main reason why local communities are increasingly more involved in the development of low mountains resorts. Romania takes into account the good practices of other European countries with experience in developing tourism in mountain resorts but at the same time analyses its strong, weak points, on its opportunities and threats and takes action upon them.

Nowadays there is a big difference between tourist offer and tourist request in most mountain resorts in Romania. This difference points out the quality and the attractivity of every resort. When the request is greater then the offer, the service quality is appreciated (Sinaia, Poiana Braşov, Predeal, Buşteni, Semenic, Cheia), when demand for that resort is not high enough, economic loss may occur (Borşa, Izvoarele, Durău). Certain bad judgments regarding privatization, state property, and fiscal legislation have led to difficulties in managing resorts and small companies in mountain tourism. Although it is certain that the main tourist activity is focused in three main mountain resorts - Sinaia, Predeal and Poiana Braşov (>50% of incoming tourists since 1998 until present) – while other mountains destinations are generally criticized in media for the quality of their tourist offer.

Mountain resorts may be easily defined if we take into considerations the tourist activities: winter sports, summer activities and spa. The Romanian Carpathians attract tourists by providing an opportunity of skiing in winter while, in summer, many tourists come in the same locations for outdoor

activities such as hiking, or just for relaxing closer to nature. The infrastructure necessary for various forms of tourism has been developing especially in the last 10 years, but the main attractions are the older mountain resorts. Besides their more established image, they still offer the best infrastructure. For instance for skiing, the longest and better managed sky runs are in Poiana Braşov, Azuga, Sinaia and Predeal, all of them situated in Prahova Valley. Besides them, other ski resorts which are popular are Păltiniş and Stâna de Vale in Transylvania, Secu, Trei Ape and Crivaia in Banat, Durău and Vatra Dornei in Moldova and Borşa in Maramureş. These are smaller resorts and they generally attract locals. Not all the Romanian sky runs are homologated. The total number credited for Romania is 80 downhill slopes, most of them having just one lift-facility, which are less than 100 km. long according to an investigation developed by *Săptămâna Financiară* (2007). Other sources (www.viaromania.eu) index more than 120 sky-runs of more than 150 km. in length. All of the information agree on the undevelopment of the Romanian winter resorts.

Into the Romanian mountains several spas are also located. We mention that their actual location is in general in depression or valleys into the mountains. Some of them are old and famous – such as Băile Herculane which is documented since Roman times, some others are young. Even if some of them benefit from investments in the last years, generally the Romanian spas are small and not very well managed. The most well known spas are Băile Tuşnad, Călimăneşti-Căciulata, Băile Olăneşti etc. The Romanian spas and resorts are classified in resorts of national relevance or local importance. From the 35 resorts of national importance listed in 2004 (HG 1307 / 2004), almost half of them are in mountain areas. From the 41 resorts of local relevance (HG 2264 / 2004) more than 60% are mountain resorts. Therefore, mountains are preferred locations for resort development in Romania, but it is not the only scene.

Even if analysis tend to consider a decrease in the quality of tourism management in Romania, data gathered by the National Institute for Statistics show a continuous increase of accommodation in the mountain resorts, from 553 units (hotels, chalets, camping facilities, villas etc.) in 1993 to 1010 in 2008 (www.insse.ro). The comfort rate of the accommodation units is medium and low, since the statistics register for 2008 just 3 hotels of 5 stars, 41 – 4 stars hotels, 4 – 5 flowers boarding houses and 22 – 4 flowers boarding houses. The capacity for 2008 registered by the same source is of almost 9.5 millions bed-days (excluding the beds in the rooms or units temporarily closed for lack of tourists, for repairs or for other reasons). Compared to other destinations,

11.5% of the accommodation capacity is in mountain resorts, around 42,7 % is in the seaside resorts, 16,3% is in Bucharest, 15,7% is in spa resorts, and 12,9% in other accommodation areas or tourist destinations. Considering the evolution of arrivals of tourists officially accommodated, one observes a decrease until 2002 – to less than 700 thousands persons, both Romanian and foreigners (www.insse.ro). Since 2002 a continuous increase is registered up to 1 million tourists. Data is small compared with other European countries but the trend is positive. Cca. 10% of these tourists are foreigners. The tourism in mountain resorts counts in January 2008 for 18.8% of the arrivals in Romanian tourist structures, with 0.7% more than the previous year. Data has to be further analyzed in order to observe if there is a trend consisting in the increased preference for mountain tourism, comparatively to other destinations.

The length of the tourists registered in mountain resorts is rather low. The average rate is of 2.4 days. Longer travels are declared by travel agencies as organized tourism in mountain villages and Alpine tourism routes – of 4.6 days in 2006 (www.insse.ro). The number of tourists registered in this context in the same year was of 90 thousands.

We highlight that the statistics do not account all forms of independent tourism which can be observed into the Romanian mountains. Especially young people travel to isolated chalets or they are camping into the mountains. In the same time, the statistics present just the tourist flow officially declared by tourist agents, which are just a part of the total number of tourists. The interest in the Romanian mountains is also proved by the number of alpine clubs. Just on www.carpati.org 100 such organizations are registered. In general, this type of associations is established by young people or most of the members are young.

Research on the Romanian university students' behavior as mountain tourists

The main purpose of our research is to identify the profiles of the Romanian students who prefer mountain tourism. The investigation of mountain tourism among students is extremely relevant, since this form of tourism is one of the most appreciated forms of tourism among young people. The studies also show that persons with higher levels of education prefer active forms of tourism, including mountain tourism. Another aspect which suggests that students would prefer mountain tourism, at least in Romania, is that the specific infrastructure is less developed compared with that for other forms of tourism, thus mountain tourists would tend to be less pretentious, with lower incomes, therefore younger and active, could be students.

Methodology

The main questions of the study are who prefers mountain tourism; which are the reasons why Romanian students go into the mountains; what types of accommodation do they use; which are the preferred activities; how often students go into the mountains; what are the patterns of the visit. The investigation is based on an online survey, undergone in January 2009, addressing all the students in Romania.

The items explored are: source of information, destination selection, forms of tourism, length of travel, motives for mountain tourism, activities undergone during travel, preferences, and companionship during travel.

The first item identifies how useful are various sources of information: friends recommendation, family recommendation, travel guides, promotion campaigns of travel agents (leaflets, flyers, ads etc.), radio and TV programs, travel websites, websites of nonprofit organizations, websites of travel agents, internet forums, blogs.

The second item – destination selection – investigates which are the main factors influencing the selection of the destination. The following aspects are specifically explored: previous experience, information from travel guides, friends' advice, family's opinion, online information, internet forums, blogs, desire to visit a certain region, desire to undertake a certain tourism activity, desire of companions to visit a certain region, desire of companions to undertake certain tourism activities, distance to destination, time of travel to destination, costs, accommodation, facilities at destination, number of tourists to destination, companions. There are also investigated the next elements: how determined are the students when choosing the destination and type of tourism, how deep is the investigation undergone previous to the travel regarding the destination, how often do the students return to destinations they like.

The third item – forms of tourism – shows the frequency with which Romanian students practice various kinds of tourism, such as: rural tourism, seaside tourism, shopping tourism, tourism in the Danube Delta, biking etc. Various types of mountain tourism are separately investigated, such as mountain biking, extreme tourism, mountaineering and others. It also looks into the frequency of various forms of foreign mountain tourism. Another aspect investigated is the way the frequency of travels modified with the change of status – since the respondent became student.

The following item – length of travel – investigates two aspects. The first of them is how long is the travel undergone during the vacation. The second

refers to the length of the mountain travel, no matter the time of year when it is undergone.

The next item - motives for mountain tourism – shows the main motives of mountain tourism among students. The motives of travel proposed for evaluation are “recharge of batteries”, admire of nature, exploration of nature, environment protection, knowledge development, to be with friends, sports, to exercise, new kind of travel, socializing, low costs, adventure, to be alone, entertainment. The respondents were also asked to associate mountain tourism with the following concepts: sports, performance, relaxation, escape, ecology, love, passion, friendship, team, entertainment, boredom, solitude, greatness, novelty, knowledge development and spiritual development.

The survey also identifies the first three activities undergone during the travel into the mountain. The choices offered are: walking, mountaineering, mountain biking, riding, extreme sports, skiing, snowboarding, landscape photographing, animal photographing, speleology, and fishing. It also reveals the activities never undergone by respondents during mountain travel and the desire to experience them in the future.

The next item – preferences – refers to inclinations of respondents regarding mountain tourism compared to other forms of tourism and during the travel. The last item - companionship during travel – shows with who is the respondent traveling into the mountains: alone, with friends, with family members etc.

More than 800 students started the survey, but just 528 completed it. The rate of completion rate is good for an online enquiry. The rate of response is good not only because there is no control on the process, but also taking into account that the time required to fill in is a bit long: almost 20 minutes. The length of the survey is a limit in having accurate answers, since the respondents might get impatient and consequently they might choose the answers aleatory. Another limit is the unrepresentativity of the respondents.

The questionnaire was filled in just by those who wanted to. The invitation to answer was sent on many student forums and discussion groups, from all universities in Romania. Still, not all the students found out about the investigation, and just some of them answered. It is likely that the students who answered are more interested than others in tourism, therefore it is probable that the respondents are traveling more than the students who did not participate. Therefore the results might over-evaluate the actual phenomenon.

Respondents

A little more of half of the students are undergraduates, while the others are master-degree students. More than 90% of the respondents are registered to public universities. Almost 19% of the respondents are registered to forms of distance learning. The field of specialization of the respondents is difficult to identify in some cases. The respondents were asked to specify it in detail, but some failed to do it, writing just their university. Almost 28.5% of the respondents are completing economic studies. 22.5% of students taking part in the survey are graduating communication or public relations. Cca. 19.5% of the respondents study psychology or sociology. Almost 11% are students at humanistic studies, while just 5% follow technical careers. The number of respondents studying tourism or geography is small: 7 students (1.33%) for the former, 14 (2.67%) for the latter. 10 % of the respondents are completing other studies, such as medicine, law, political science etc. We mention that the actual number of students in tourism and geography could be higher, since some responses indicate just the universities. For instance part of the students who pointed out an economic university might study tourism not other economic fields. Therefore, the actual structure of the specialization of respondents might differ in some aspects from the above presented situation. More than 85% of the respondents are under 25 years old. Almost 85% of the respondents are women. 64.5% of the respondents are currently living in large cities (Bucharest – 229 persons, Cluj Napoca – 51 persons, Braşov – 22 persons, Iaşi – 11 persons, Timişoara – 8 persons). The geographic distribution of the respondents, taking into account the historical regions, is as follows: Bucharest – 46%, Transylvania – 28.6%, Muntenia – 9.9%, Moldova – 9.1%, Oltenia – 2.6%, Dobroudja – 2.2, Banat – 1.6%.

35.1% of the respondents are not currently employed. 38% are full-time employees. Cca. 16.5% are working for less than one year. Around 10% are volunteers in nonprofits. The incomes of the respondents are generally less than the average income in Romania – almost 50% have less than 200 euros, and 25% have between 200 and 500 euros per month (including parents' allowances).

To better define the profile of the respondents, they were asked to characterize themselves. Using a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely), they had to evaluate if they consider themselves liberal, modern, non-conformist, if they love to take risks, if they love strong emotions, if they love adventure and if they love new things. All the average answers are above the middle point. The ranking from the strongest agreement to the weakest is as follows: they love new things (4.39), they consider themselves liberals (3.93), they are modern (3.86), they love adventure (3.71). The smallest value is 3.31 – they like to take risks.

Results

a. Sources of information

The most useful sources of information, in the respondents' view, are their friends (4 points out of 5). The following sources are the family (3.9), travel guides (3.29), websites dedicated to tourism (3.27) and internet forums (3.16). All the other sources mentioned are considered rather not useful by the respondents. The least useful of them are websites of nonprofit organizations (2.6) and blogs (2.7). It is also interesting to mention that the travel agents are more useful than information coming from private persons or from nonprofits (2.89 point both for information on their websites and through advertising). Male students are more distrustful than female students at all types of sources, except for websites dedicated to tourism.

b. Destination selection

The most important factors influencing the choice of the destination are: the desire to visit a certain region (4.66 out of 5), the previous experience (4.39), the desire to perform a certain activity (4.3), the costs (4.27) and the companions (4.23). The least important factors are blogs (2.66) and the small number of tourists at the destination (2.84). On the other hand the popularity of a destination is not an important factor of influence when choosing a destination (2.94). The results sustain the idea that students do not really take into account the opinions of people they do not know. For men all the factors mentioned are less important than for women. The biggest difference in opinion is when referring to costs, accommodation, facilities at destination and the possibilities of multiple activities at the destination.

The students tend to do research regarding the destination (3.85 out of 5 – extensive research) and want to undergo new activities while on vacation (3.75). Many of them would also prefer new destinations (3.71). On the other hand, half of them would return to a destination they liked (the average mark is 3.5 points). Also around half of the students are determined in advance on the type of activities they want to undergo during the travel (the average is 3.42 points, where 5 is extremely decided) and on the form of tourism (the average is 3.41 points). Men are more decided on the type of tourism they are interested in (3.74 points) and they do research less on destination (3.75). It does not really matter how comfortable a destination is (2.23) or how difficult to reach (2.43). Even if company is important, in general students would not go to a certain destination they dislike just because friends prefer it (more than 65% of the respondents would not go, but men are less influenced by their friends' preferences).

c. Forms of mountain tourism preferred by students

The most popular forms of mountain tourism among students are resort tourism and camping / chalet tourism. 2.3% of the respondents are going into the mountains several times per month for different forms of tourism. The aims of travel, starting with the most frequent form of tourism mentioned, are camping (or are chalet-accommodated), rural tourism in a mountain region, mountain resort tourism, mountaineering, mountain biking, and spa tourism into a mountain region. 6% of the respondents have never been into the mountains as tourists. A bit more than twice as many students have never been camping into the mountains or they have never been accommodated into a chalet. The most unpopular forms of mountain tourism among students are: extreme tourism (86.1% have never been practicing it, but the percentage for men is lower, of 78.5%), mountain biking (82.5% have never tried it – 62.5% among men), mountaineering (74.3% have never practiced it – 62.5% for male students), and scientific tourism such as speleotourism (59.6% the average – 53% for men).

Generally, the frequency of different forms tourism among the respondents did not significantly changed since the respondents became students. They tend to travel a bit more abroad and into the mountains. Just women declared they are going more often to the seaside since they are students. The decrease of religious tourism, shopping tourism in Romania and spa tourism is a bit more evident. Almost 25% of the respondents travel abroad for mountain tourism. The same number of students went skiing outside Romania at least once in their life. Most of them – around 10% of the total - are going skiing abroad once a year.

d. Length of travel

As expected, the length of travels during the vacations is bigger than travels taken in general by the respondents. 5.7% of the travels during the holidays are of more than 15 days long. 18.9% of the students travel between 10 and 14 days during vacations. The length of travel for 37.9% of the respondents is of 7-10 days. 24.1% are traveling for a week, while 13.4% do not afford a longer travel than three-four days. In general a journey into the mountains lasts for just two-three days (almost 64% of the respondents.) Men declare shorter journeys, all the usual travels being of less than 14 days.

Just 7.8% of the students go into the mountains for an average of one week. Male students declare longer trips into the mountains (8.6% declare that they are usually going into the mountains for at least one week) Since the journeys at the seaside are generally longer, data suggests that students tend to go at the seaside during their vacations, and into the mountains all year round.

e. Motives for mountain tourism

The students were asked to associate different forms of tourism with various concepts. Mountain tourism is primarily associated by the respondents with sports (174 students), escape (90 students), performance (37), greatness and entertainment (30 students each), friendship and team (28 associations each). At three of the concepts (sports, greatness and escape) mountain tourism acquired the largest number of associations (respectively 52%, 45.5% and 26.2% of the total number of associations to that category). Less than three associations are mentioned for novelty, knowledge development, spiritual development, and boredom.

The top reasons why students go into the mountains are: to admire nature (4.24 out of 5 – extremely important reason), to recharge the batteries (4.15), to be with friends (3.99), for fun (3.94), to explore the nature (3.91), and to do physical exercises (3.89). To be alone is the most unimportant reason of choosing to go into the mountains (2.7 points on the importance scale). Even if friends and entertainment are important reasons for going into the mountains, they are even more important to choose a seaside journey. The top reasons for male students differ a bit from the average data obtained: to admire nature (4.18%), to do physical exercise (3.92%), to recharge the batteries (3.84), to explore nature (3.84) and for fun (3.84%)

f. Activities undergone during travel

The most frequent 5 activities undergone while into the mountains are hiking (91.6%), landscape photography (88.8%), animal photography (33.8%), ski (27%) and mountaineering (12.2%). Male students prefer more skiing than animal photography. More than 75% of the students have never been to the mountains for activities such as: bungee jumping (489 answers), glider (484), ice climbing (482), rafting (472), hunting (451), or mountain biking (440). Generally those who never experienced a certain activity are willing to try, for the exception of hunting (77.6% of those who never did it, do not want to), bird-watching (61.9%), ice climbing (60%), fishing (53.4%), rafting (51.9%) and ski-fond (50.4%). The biggest interest in activities never experienced before is in riding (87.4% of those who have never ridden before intend to), ski (78.8%) and skating (75.5%). Nevertheless for every activity mentioned, at least 22% of those who have never tried it before want to do it.

g. Preferences

The percentage of students who would like to go into the mountains more often is larger than of those who would prefer to go at the seaside more frequent (4.27 points compared to 3.99 points out of 5). Still the percentage of

students who want to travel abroad more often is even larger (4.55). The preference for mountain tourism is a bit bigger than for seaside tourism (3.26). In general male students are more favorable to mountain tourism than female students. Male respondents would like to go into the mountain on a larger percentage than male students who want to go abroad. They also prefer mountain tourism to seaside tourism in a wider percentage (3.67 points out of 5).

Nevertheless, the respondents declare they go a bit more often at the seaside than to the mountains during summers, even if the journeys into the mountains are more fun (3.02) and the family prefers them (3.07). The data shows that friends prefer seaside tours, so this could explain why students tend to travel more at the seaside. Even if friends seem to be very important when choosing the destination, students declare they do not involve themselves in sports or different activities just because their friends insist on them. In the same time, students have a tendency of going more often into the mountains during winters than during summers.

The results presented above should be more closely examined. Male students declare they go more often into the mountain during summers and they go more into the mountains during summers than during winters. The final average data is strongly influenced by the larger number of women filling in the questionnaire. Another significant difference between men and women is that the former consider mountain tourism to be more fun (3.23).

Students consider that Romanian mountains are a bit more spectacular than other mountains but they are not as well taken care of, they have fewer facilities. Nevertheless they do not prefer to go abroad for mountain tourism, neither during summers or winters. The situation is different when talking about seaside holidays – students prefer to go abroad.

Taking into account the length of the journeys, students would prefer to go into several shorter trips during their vacations (3.62 points out of 5). They also want active travels not just for relaxing (3.62). Students declare they prefer itinerary forms for travel, rather than staying in one location (3.53). There are differences between the opinions of male students compared to female students. Men prefer in a lesser degree itinerary trips or to take several shorter trips. They also prefer active forms of tourism in a larger degree.

h. Companionship during travel

41.3% of the respondents go into the mountains with at least four friends. The percentage is higher among men – 43.2%. 31.2% go into the mountains just

with his/her partner (the average for male students is lower – 22.2%). 14.7% of the respondents go into the mountain with at most three friends (male respondents report a higher value – 22.2%).

Conclusions and discussions

Students tend to consider that the most useful sources of information are either persons they personally know (friends and family) or the internet websites where a wider range of opinion is presented. It is interesting to point out that usefulness of information generated by a certain source is most of the times related with the trustworthiness of that source. It is to be investigated if the respondents consider that nonprofits and different persons are more biased than travel agents. This would suggest that students do not necessarily distrust travel agents, but consider that the information that they generally produce is not necessarily useful.

Even if costs are important when choosing a destination, tourism is considered a personal endeavor, and personal desires are the most important factors: what they want to see, what are the expectations based on previous experience, what they want to do, with whom they travel. Nevertheless, students do not have a very consistent image on where they want to spend their vacations or what they want to do there. Most of students would prefer new destinations or the possibility of new activities while traveling. For students it seems to be more important what the destination offers, but they would return to places they like.

Students practice different forms of mountain tourism, but the most frequent are the traditional ones – resort tourism or camping. At least 15% of the students have tried some sort of adventure tourism. Mountain tourism is more popular than other forms of tourism, closely followed by seaside tourism.

Data suggests that students are interested in short tours into the mountains, not only during vacations. The survey also reveals that students tend to go at the seaside during the vacation, while this particular period of time does not influence mountain tourism.

Mountain tourism is seen as an active form of escapism. Even if mountain tourism is associated with being with friends, seaside tourism is more related with this aspect. Students prefer mountain for the opportunity to admire nature and to admire the nature. It is considered a more active form of tourism compared with seaside tourism. Even if students did not take part before in activities such as riding, skiing, skating, snowboarding, gliding or

mountaineering they are interested in them, while they do not want to take part in activities such as hunting, bird/watching, ice climbing, fishing, rafting or ski-fond.

Students tend to prefer mountain tourism both for winter and summer. Still, because friends tend to like more seaside tourism, they go a little bit more often at the seaside. There is also large interest in trips abroad, but not for mountain tourism. Generally, students would like to travel more either abroad or into the mountains. They would also prefer itinerary and active vacations, as well as shorter trips but more of them during the holidays.

The survey confirms several times that, for students, friends are extremely important in the context of mountain tourism, more important than in the case of seaside tourism. Women tend to go more with their partner, while men travel more often with friends. Even if respondents did not firstly associated mountain tourism with friends and companionship, they are influenced by their friends when choosing the form of tourism, and they often go into the mountain with more friends.

For women comfort at destination is more important than for man, but there are not large differences. Women also tend to be more careful when choosing a destination or form of tourism, while more are not so influences by others, friends or family, and are more decided on what they want to do. Male students are more active during travel and more experienced in different forms of mountain tourism. They generally prefer mountain tourism, and consider it to be more fun. Also men travel more often with friends, while women travel with their partner on a larger scale. Data also reveals that men stay more into the mountains, but their breaks during vacation is shorter than that of women. Male students prefer mountains more, and tend to do research less.

Implications

Since friends are often companions during mountain journeys and they influence the decisions related to tourism, travel agents have to address groups of students, and have to use word-of-mouth marketing in order to stimulate the transmission of messages among friends. Because students tend to go with several friends into the mountains, travel agents should propose and promote offers for groups.

Students prefer active trips and itinerary journeys. On the other hand, they prefer familiar activities and they take limited risks. Therefore, they are interested in new activities and in unusual forms of tourism but they have to

have references from friends and family. They are also strongly stimulated by the desire to visit some places or to do different things. The accommodation conditions are less important than the activities which could be done at the destination. In this context, travel agents should stimulate these desires, they have to concentrate on the possibilities to spend the time at the destination.

Students prefer active vacations, and are willing to try different activities they have not experienced in the past. Therefore, travel agents should make more affordable sports and other activities students are familiar with, but did not have the occasion to do. Travel agents could benefit from the students' preference for mountain tourism in Romania and active journeys.

Travel agents should take into account that male students and female students have different preferences regarding tourism, but both groups are interested to travel with friends. Thus, they should design their offer in such a way to satisfy both men and women.

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