

## STRATEGIC OPTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTURISM IN THE DORNELOR COUNTY

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### **Abstract:**

*International tourism practice has shown over time that regardless of the type of tourism practiced, it ultimately results in a series of effects felt by both society and the natural environment. Table tourism is responsible for the most visible and deeper negative influences on tourist destinations. Sustainable development of tourism is often associated with a tourism industry, but all forms of tourism must bring economic and social benefits to the local community and encourage the protection of the environment.*

*Ecotourism includes the following: tourism product, which must be based on its nature and its elements and ecological management that must contribute to the preservation of biodiversity and to the welfare of communities in tourist areas and to achieve ecological education among both tourists and among the population local.*

**Key words:** strategies, ecotourism, environment, tourist, community

**JEL classification:** Q56, Z32

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This paper aims to analyze the development of the Dornelor County Tourism Area through ecotourism as this form of tourism has seen a very high growth rate in recent years, both internationally and locally. Protecting local nature, traditions and customs is an important objective of 21st century society, a society that has forgotten the basic traditions.

To begin with, some conceptual aspects have been presented regarding ecotourism and its international trends. The issues related to the development of ecotourism in Romania were also considered. Thus, the association that contributed to the development of ecotourism (AER) was presented on the basis of the principles underlying the development of ecotourism in Romania and some initiatives for the development of ecotourism.

Finally, a brief description of the Dornelor county area was made, the calculation and interpretation of the tourist traffic indicators in the area and the development of an action plan that could help to develop ecotourism in this area.

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## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the perspective of sustainable development, tourism potential is considered a valuable resource for the benefit of current and future generations (Cocerhan, C., & Năstase, C., 2012). Some researchers consider that the importance of sustainable tourism development has also increased due to the danger of degradation of natural heritage and culture, as well as the need for conservation, on which the future of tourism activities also depends, which was considered very important because it was found that ecotourism is what is more preferable to the detriment of mass tourism (Năstase, C., Scutariu, A. L., & Chaşovschi, C. 2011). Another aspect to which we are concerned is that, in the current economic, social and geopolitical context, safety and security are determinants of the competitiveness and attractiveness of tourist destinations (Costea, M., Hapenciuc, C. V., & Stanciu, P., 2017).

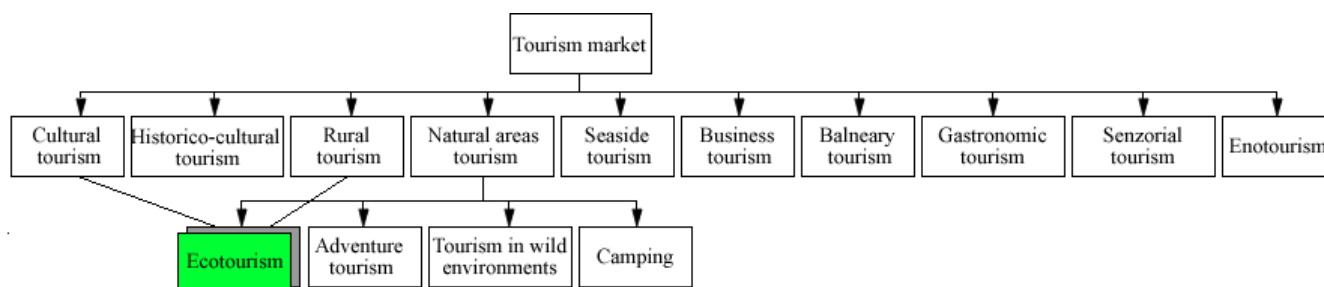
On the other hand, there are authors according to whom the global tourism industry continues to grow, people traveling and generating more domestic and foreign revenues is often done at the expense of the social and ecological integrity of destination regions. At the same time ecotourism can involve both cultural and environmental tourism and, in addition, benefits to the local population should be an integral part of the activity (Candrea A.N., Herţanu A., 2015).

Achieving sustainable ecotourism involves a balance between economic, environmental and social goals, and ethical values and principles. The principles of a real sustainable tourism are: using resources sustainably, reducing over-consumption and waste, maintaining diversity, integrating tourism into. (Barna C., Epure M., Vasilescu R., 2011)

For rural areas, the fast pace of change has brought with it not only opportunities but also favourable challenges. Sustainable development of Romanian local communities through ecotourism and rural tourism represents a requirement and at the same time a tendency of contemporary evolution. (Dorobantu M., Nistoreanu P., 2012)

## 3. ECOTURISM-DEFINITION AND TRENDS ON THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET

Following an extensive process involving academic names at international level and the World Tourism Organization (1999), ecotourism has benefited from a unanimously accepted definition. Accordingly, ecotourism is an alternative form of tourism and must include the following elements: the tourism product is based on its nature and its elements, ecological management at the service of a minimal impact; contribution to conservation, contribution to the wellbeing of local communities, respectively ecological education.



**Figure 1- Ecotourism on the tourism market**

Source: Wood M, 2002, *Ecotourism: Principles, Practices and Policies for Sustainability*

Exploiting the natural environment is one of the fundamental requirements of ecotourism. This statement leaves a wide open door to a wide range of activities, provided they comply with the conditions outlined above. From this perspective, ecotourism interferes with other forms of travel based on nature.

The place of ecotourism in the tourism market appears as a sub-area of tourism in natural areas, having strong links with cultural and rural tourism (see Figure no.1)

Tourism is not only an increase in the number of tourists, it has turned out to be a diverse and complex activity. Although mass tourism remains the predominant form, other types of activities related to culture, environment, education, health, etc. they came out. These reflect preferences for environmental quality and a much more energetic and participatory form of recreation. Skiing, hiking, cycling, canoeing, etc. have become much more enjoyable than ever, satisfying the need to be close to nature, moving, exploring and learning.

The International Society of Ecotourism has identified the main trends of this form of tourism at international level:

- Since 1990, ecotourism has grown by 20-35% annually;
- In 2004, ecotourism has grown globally 3 times more than the global tourism industry;
- the international nature-based tourism market is currently developing 10-15% annually;
- The classical tourism market within tourist resorts has matured and its growth will remain constant. Unlike this, experience-based tourism - ecotourism, in-kind tourism, cultural tourism - is among the sectors that can grow very fast in the next two decades;

All these trends indicate not only an increase in demand for ecotourism, but also a transformation of it from a market niche into a major segment. If ecotourism originally came to experienced tourists with high levels of income and education, the clientele is now expanding to include a wide range of income, studies and travel experiences.

#### **4. COORDINATION OF ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA. STUDY CASE- DORNELOR COUNTY**

Romania owns about 820 protected areas, which currently cover around 6% of the country's territory. Most ecotourism destinations are located within or near these protected areas, for example: Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, "bird paradise"; communities in the northern area of the Piatra Craiului National Park; Retezat National Park and Apuseni Natural Park.

Taking into account the existing situation on the European tourist market, as well as the strengths Romania has in its competition with the other possible destinations in the Central and Eastern Europe region, ecotourism can represent a solution for the revival of Romanian tourism.

The development of ecotourism in our country is primarily due to the efforts made by the Ecotourism Association of Romania (AER). This is a partnership for the preservation of nature and tourism in Romania between tourism associations, non-governmental local development and nature conservation organizations, nature preservation projects and tourism agencies.

The innovative concept promoted by the AER is to bring together the public and private sectors in a partnership for nature conservation and the development of sustainable tourism.

The ERA considers it absolutely necessary to develop an Ecotourism Certification System - a mechanism that basically applies the basic principles of ecotourism - to ensure nature conservation and the sustainable development of local communities through tourism. This is an important step given that the World Tourism Organization (WTO) has recommended to governments, since March 2003, to support initiatives that promote sustainable tourism certification.

Located in the north of the Oriental Carpathians, Dornelor's intramontan depression has a lobed form, its lower compartments drained by the main tributaries of the Bistrita, being separated by higher peaks, representing mostly extension of the main ridges of the Calimani Massif, located in its southern part. This fact determines the geographic separation of: the Chara's compartment

(belonging to Șăr Dornei and Panaci communes), slightly more isolated from the Dorna river valley compared to Vatra Dornei.

#### 4.1. ECOTURISTIC ACTIVITIES ACTIVATED IN THE DORNELOR COUNTY

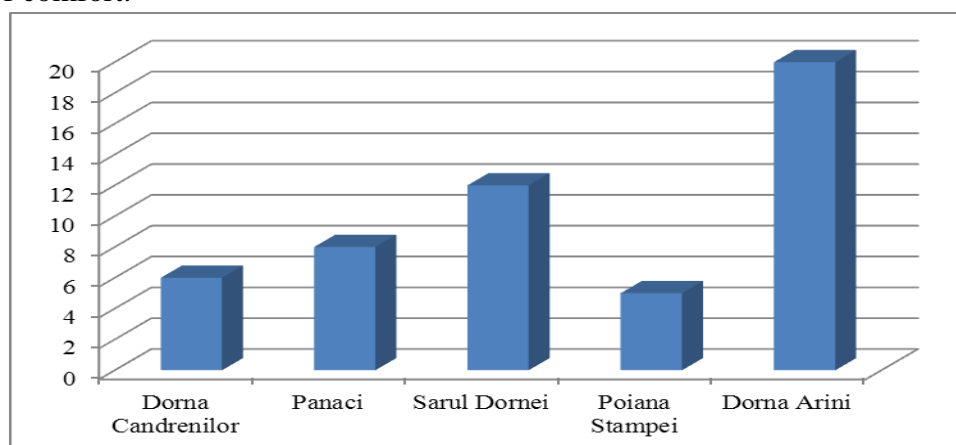
The range of ecotourism activities that can be offered at this time the Dornelor county includes: hiking (it is a good opportunity for active relaxation, area knowledge and nature observation.) More accessible hiking areas are the Suhard and Giumalău massifs that generally offer low or medium difficulty), mountain-biking (this is an activity that is very well developed in the Dornelor county with even some trails for fanatics of this sport.) In April - December 2011 AER and AETD implemented a project called "Bicycle in the Dornelor county financed by the Partnership Foundation, Miercurea Ciuc and Apemin Tusnad), cycling, equestrian tourism and equitation.

#### 4.2. PRESENTATION OF THE TURISTIC OFFER OF THE DORENELOR COUNTY

The Dornelor county offers a wide range of accommodation facilities. In the tourism industry, construction is booming and new accommodation and food structures are created.

##### 4.2.1. Accommodation units in Dornelor county

As a result of the analysis of the tourist promotion sites in the area, in the rural area were identified about 40 hostels with an average number of 10 places / unit, most of them classified as 2 or 3 daisies. To this is added the 41 units of accommodation in Vatra Dornei resort, of different categories of comfort.



**Figure 2. Number of accommodation units in the communes of the Dornelor county**

Source: County Statistics Department of Suceava

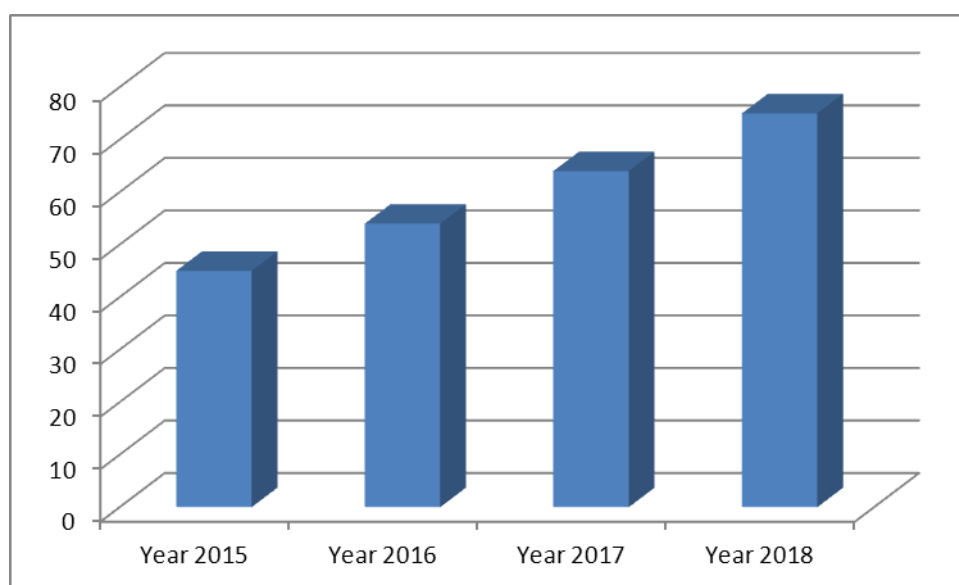
Some of the most important accommodation units in rural areas of the Dornelor county are the following boarding houses:

- Valea Dornelor Pension located in Dorna Arini is cataloged in 2 daisies, with a capacity of 5 rooms;
- Pensiunea Popasul Hunea from Panaci, has 2 daisies and a capacity of 5 rooms;
- Pension Amfora, 3-star pension is located in Neagra Șarului and has a capacity of 11 rooms;
- Florea House in Poiana Stampei, has only one daisy and has a capacity of 5 rooms;
- Poarta Călimanilor Guest House in Gura Haitii, Șăr Dornei commune is a 2-room pension with a capacity of 5 rooms;

These 5 accommodation units have been certified as eco. Apart from these, there are also several pensions of 2 or 3 stars, namely: Poiana Izvoarelor Pension, Doru Muntelui Pension, Bistrului Valley Pension, etc.

#### 4.2.2. Accommodation units in rural area Vatra Dornei

The information regarding the accommodation units was obtained after a discussion with those from the Suceava County Direction, who informed me of the number of units and places of accommodation for a period of 4 years respectively 2015-2018.



**Figure 3. Evolution of the number of accommodation units for the period 2015-2018**

Source: County Statistics Department of Suceava

As can be seen in Figure 3 in Vatra Dornei, the accommodation units increased in 2010 compared to 2009 by one unit and in 2011 compared to 2010 same with one unit.

#### 4.2.3. Indicators of tourist flows

**Table 1. The number of overnight stays in Vatra Dornei for the period 2015-2018**

	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Overnight stays</b>	197112	197895	198162	198396

Source: County Statistical Office of Suceava

As can be seen from Table 2, the number of overnight stays increases steadily during the studied period, which indicates the involvement of the authorities in the development of ecotourism, as well as the interest of tourists in this activity.

**Table 2. Evolution of the number of tourists arrivals in Vatra Dornei during 2015-2018**

	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Tourist arrivals</b>	42390	42568	44321	44771

Source: County Statistical Office of Suceava

## 5. PROGRAM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DORNELOR COUNTY ECOTOURISM AREA

Starting from the presentation of the Dornelor Country area earlier, from the fact that this area is defined as an ecotourism area and the development needs identified from the previous analysis, I will set up a program to help wider development of the Dornelor county as an ecotourism area.

The development of ecotourism in the Dornelor county through the promotion of local culture and nature and the development of ecotourism activities will contribute to increasing the quality of ecotourism services and the tourist attractiveness of the area by supporting the sustainable development of local communities.

**Table 3. Development plan of the Dornelor County Ecotourism Area**

Objectives	Actions	Responsible
<b>1. Local policy within the area on tourism development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adoption of ecotourism principles</li> <li>- Adoption of tourist signaling standards</li> <li>- Adopting standards to keep a traditional local specificity of buildings.</li> </ul>	Ecotourism Association Country of Donors (AETD)
<b>2. Development of tourism infrastructure and services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developing a circuit of cycling and mountain bike routes</li> <li>- Establishment of bicycle hire centers, sleighs</li> <li>- Improve the access roads to tourist objectives</li> <li>- Development of winter sports infrastructure</li> </ul>	Vatra Dornei City Hall, the mayoralties of all the communes forming the Dornelor County
<b>3. Staff training and improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Organizing training courses for guides, training RNC ranks</li> <li>- Training of tour operators: language courses, communication, guide</li> </ul>	Administration of Călimani National Park (ANPC)
<b>4. Making people aware of the significance of the term ecotourism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoting the concept of ecotourism in the area by producing informative materials, working groups, information campaigns, etc</li> </ul>	Local tour guides, connoisseurs of ecotourism
<b>5. Tourist information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Drawing up informative materials (maps, flyers, brochures) that address different groups of tourists and allow them to know the specifics of the area</li> <li>- Collaboration between local actors who produce these materials so that the information is as concise, relevant and accurate as possible in order to avoid misunderstandings</li> </ul>	Local Action Group Dornelor County (LAG)
<b>6. Promoting the area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Developing the promotion and marketing system for the already existing ecotourism product network</li> <li>- Participation in tourism fairs</li> <li>- Improve and maintain promotional sites (AER, AETD)</li> <li>- Promotion of the local specificity by organizing events: festivals, local celebrations, presentation of costumes, local products fairs with local specifics, etc.</li> </ul>	Ecotourism Association Dornelor County (AETD), Ecotourism Association of Romania (AER)

Source: authors

By implementing this eco-tourism development plan in the Dornelor County Area, the aim is to improve tourism services and tourism products and to promote it at a higher level. Although it is an area with amazing potential, some tourists have not heard of the Dornelor Land, while others have heard they do not visit this area due to the fact that accessibility to the various tourist attractions is very difficult and the roads are not upgraded.

The Dornelor county is an attractive area due to the variety of ecotourism activities that can be practiced here. Cyclists, horseback riding, hiking and adventure sports in general can choose this area to suit their needs.

Following the implementation of this plan, there is an increase in the number of tourists visiting the area, the number of overnight stays and the growth of the local economy resulting

therefrom, and the increase of knowledge of the Dornelor county as an ecotourism area among the Romanian population, of the foreign population.

## 6. CONCLUSION

It is noticed that people want more and more to spend their free time and holidays in a cleaner environment, trying to avoid overcrowded areas. Due to this, ecotourism occupies today a very important place in the tourism industry. In addition to this, agritourism, which offers tourists the opportunity to take part with the hosts, to the specific activities of the place. The Dornelor county benefits from these types of tourism, it has the potential for practicing these types of tourism and that is why it tries to promote the area through ecotourism.

Following the presentation of the characteristic natural and cultural heritage elements specific to the Dornelor county region, a first conclusion can be made that a tourism activity should be supported by an economic activity.

In order to achieve these objectives, a management plan appropriate to the Dornelor county is needed, development strategies, planning and refurbishment of the existing tourism framework.

In this respect, the City Hall of Vatra Dornei, in collaboration with other institutions, created and implemented projects and the plan for the development and redevelopment of the area. This meant the green space in the area, the redevelopment and restoration of anthropogenic objectives and, last but not least, the reconstruction of the infrastructure.

The latter is among the factors underlying the development of tourist activity, thus facilitating the entry of tourists and their movement throughout the entire Donor Country. From the presentation of the Ecotourism Association in Romania, which is involved in the development of ecotourism in the Dornelor county, which took place during a course on Ecotourism and Rural Tourism, I understood that these projects are being implemented but not all because the officials local projects aim at sustainability in time of these projects as well as the protection of the natural environment.

That's why a strategic development distinction is the promotion of ecotourism, being more seen as a component of rural tourism, but most able to capitalize on the natural potential, in order to increase living standards, support and development of local communications, but also conservation of the natural environment

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