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THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ACTIVITY ON SUPPORTING PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS. TENDENCIES AND ESTIMATES FOR EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract: *The protected natural areas, by their aesthetic, recreational, educational and scientific valences, represent extremely attractive tourist destinations, some of them unique at international level. Their touristic exploitation has different forms from a country to another, from a type of protected area to another. In this paper, the analyses performed point out that the exploitation of natural areas by tourism has different forms, according to their extension, their landscape complexity, their structure and dynamics of the environment components. The touristic theory identifies a series of tourist forms associated to the environment preservation, such as: tourism in natural areas, ecotourism, adventure tourism, tourism in wilderness, camping. As a conclusion, we can say that the protected areas have become more and more a part of tourism, being appreciated as they represent an environment less affected by the human pressure. Presently, they generate a new form of tourism called tourism in protected areas, requiring special care on behalf of the governments in order not to aggravate the impact of tourism on the local environment and cultures.*

Key words: the protected areas, tourism in natural areas, ecotourism, national park.

1. INTRODUCTION

The preservation of biodiversity should be approached as a new pluridisciplinary research field, developed as an answer to the today's crisis of the living world. The protected area is a conservative term used for what is known as natural reservation, national park, natural park, biosphere reservation.

Within the current technical and economic progress, the protected areas appear as vital needs for the existence of nature and of human community, representing more than some aesthetically remarkable spaces.

Only isolated fragments of the real natural forests survive in the entire Europe. Almost all forests have been modified by human intervention during hundreds or thousands of years. Such alterations can reduce or increase the biodiversity but they always change the structure

of the forest. Where there are prime forests, they should be urgently preserved, mostly by protected areas. Anyway, the preservation of forests in Europe generally refers less to the preservation of prime forests and more to the fact that the administration of all forests should be sustainable.

2. TOURISM IN NATURAL AREAS

National parks and other protected areas in Europe are remarkable natural areas and offer a huge tourist potential. The promoters of the tourism in nature acknowledge that the promotion of the sustainable tourism will accomplish the visitors' satisfaction and will bring benefits for the local community, which is reflected in the adequate integration of tourism and environment preservation policies.

The tourism sustainable development allow the generation of necessary incomes for the preservation of important natural areas, fauna and flora. Tourism contributes to improving the environment quality because tourists want to visit non polluted areas and attractive landscapes, thus determining that the factors involved in tourist activities and in tourist development decision taking give special importance to environment preservation.

2.1. PROTECTED AREAS

An important step in the sustainable tourism planning is represented by the legislative creation of protected areas. The most frequent way of creating them is the governmental action at national, regional or local level by land demarcation and by enacting laws allowing certain degrees of resource use and of tourist intrusion. Many protected areas were created by partnership between certain private organizations, governments of some developing countries, multinational banks and governments of some developed countries. Until 1998, 4500 strictly protected areas were declared worldwide, covering 500 million hectares, and 5899 partially protected areas covering 348 million hectares, all these representing only 6% of the continents (Primack, 2002). As an expression of world concerns in this field, in 2003, the protected areas world network had 30,361 protected areas covering 13 245 528 km² representing 8,84% of the earth surface (Nistoreanu, 2003).

To guarantee the social economic sustainable development, it is absolutely necessary that a diverse and balanced structure of the Natural Capital should be preserved and that its resources and services should be used within the bearable capacity of its components. Thus,

the Natural Capital preservation supposes mainly the maintenance of an acceptable rapport between the natural ecosystems, semi natural and human made, by maintaining the heterogeneity within each type of ecosystem and assuring the connectivity of these ecosystems.

The protected area is terrestrial and/or marine area specially dedicated to the protection and preservation of biological biodiversity, with natural and cultural resources, duly administrated (Țigu et al., 2003).

The specialists consider that the recreation activities which can be developed inside the protected areas are (Istrate et al., 1996):

- study of nature, flora and fauna;
- photograph taking, landscape painting;
- mountainous camping;
- mountaineering;
- speleology;
- diving;
- walking on foot or ski going, in winter;
- cycling and canoeing;
- visits to cultural, historical and ethnographical objectives;
- get acquainted and learn some traditional crafts;
- visit of ecomuseums within the protected areas;
- film watching, accession of scientific documents regarding the protected areas within the tourist reception centre.

Protected areas were established firstly because they satisfy people's needs. Out of this necessity, a variety of types of protected areas resulted, mainly differentiated by their degree of protection (or the allowed degree of human intervention) and according to the purpose of the protected area. thus, they established protected areas which protect the most natural areas on the earth where the human intervention is barely present and where human intervention is present, such as modified landscapes with a particular landscape and cultural importance.

2.2. TYPOLOGY OF PROTECTED AREAS

The World Conservation Union (IUCN) is trying to influence, to encourage and to assist the societies worldwide in order to preserve the nature diversity and to ensure that each natural resource use is reasonable and sustainable.

A system of defining and classification of protected areas resulted following the almost 25 year activity deployed by IUCN in this field. This system was adopted by governments and explained by guiding lines. At present, the IUCN categories are spread worldwide and are reference points in any debate regarding protected areas. The purpose of this defining and classification system is to contribute to the increase of the level of understanding of all concerned regarding the different categories of protected areas. The relationship between the objectives of management and the typology of protected areas is shown in the table below:

Table no. 1. Classification of protection areas

Name	Management objective
I.a. Strict natural reservation; I.b. Wild natural area	Strict protection
II. National park	Ecosystem preservation and recreation
III. Monument of nature	Preservation of natural features
IV. Areas of habitats and species management	Preservation by active management
V. Protected terrestrial and marine landscapes	Preservation and recreation
VI. Protected area with managed resources	Sustainable use of resources

Source: www.pronatura.ro

According to the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the protected areas have many features.

- *The strict natural reservation* is a terrestrial and/or aquatic area with ecosystems, geological or physiological characteristics and/or particular or representative species, area available primarily for scientific research and/or monitoring.
- *The wild natural area* is a non modified or slightly affected terrestrial and/or aquatic big area, which maintains its natural character and influence, without a significant or permanent habitation, protected and managed to maintain its natural conditions.
- *The natural park* is a natural terrestrial and/or aquatic area meant to protect the environmental integrity of one or more ecosystems for the present and future generations, the exclusion of exploitation or inhabiting against its designated purpose, and the provision of a basis able to ensure spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visiting possibilities, all compatible with the principles of environment protection and cultural diversity (the National Park of Retezat in Romania, the National Park of Plitvice in Croatia).
- *The natural monument* is the area containing one or more specific natural/cultural features, with a particular or unique value due to its own rarity, its

representative or aesthetic quality or to its cultural meaning (Piatra Teiului, Râpa Roșie in Romania).

- *The area of habitat and species management* is a terrestrial and/or aquatic area which is the object of an active intervention for management purposes in order to ensure the maintenance of habitats and/or to accomplish the needs of some species (the Sfânta Ana Lake in Romania).

- *The protected terrestrial and marine landscape* is a terrestrial area, with coast and marine area, if any, where the interaction of humans with nature generated along the time a surface with distinctive features, with significant aesthetic, environmental and/or cultural values, and often with a great biologic diversity. The protection of the integrity of such a traditional interaction is vital for the protection, the maintenance and the evolution of the area (the Porțile de Fier Natural Park in Romania).

- *The protected area with managed resources* is an area containing mostly non modified natural systems, managed to ensure a long term protection and maintenance of biological diversity and at the same time to ensure goods and services to satisfy the consumers' needs.

2.3. THE EVOLUTION IN THE DYNAMICS AND STRUCTURE OF EUROPEAN NATURAL AREAS

The protected area data base made by the World Conservation Monitoring Centre includes 30350 registrations of protected areas recognized by The World Conservation Union (IUCN), 13915 registrations of some areas not recognized by IUCN and other 16288 protected areas with an uncertain statute. The data base updates periodically, approximately every three years, to ensure the production of a new edition of a Protected Area List of United Nations.

The world network of protected areas contains 30350 protected areas spread on a 13.232.275 km² surface representing 8.83% of the earth surface. However, this percentage has to be warily considered as it can be a percent higher due to the great number of marine protected areas or to the areas containing marine territories. This protected area network can be very spread in a global perspective but with many empty spaces at national level.

The protected areas are often considered natural islands within a development ocean, and the greater their surface is, the more they are protected against external pressures. The current situation shows that 17892 (59%) protected areas have a surface smaller than 1000 ha,

with a total of 28713 km² representing only 0,2% from the total surface of protected areas. In exchange, only 1673 (6%) of the protected areas exceed 1000 km², with a total of 11,56 mil. km², representing 87% from the total surface of protected areas.

The distribution of protected areas according to their management objectives, based on IUCN categories, shows the concerns at world level for the different purposes of protected areas.

Table no. 2. Distribution of protection areas

Protected area category IUCN	No.	Percentage (%)	Surface (km²)	Percentage (%)	Average surface (km²)	Percentage in earth surface (%)
Strict natural reservation	4389	14	978.698	7	223	0,65
Wild natural area	809	3	940.360	7	1162	0,63
National park	3384	11	4.001.605	30	1183	2,67
Monument of nature	2122	7	193.021	1	91	0,13
Areas of habitat and species management	11171	37	2.459.703	19	220	1.64
Protected terrestrial and marine landscapes	5578	18	1.057.448	8	190	0,71
Protected area with managed resources	2897	10	3.601.440	27	1243	2,40
Total	30350	100	13.232.275	100	436	8,83

Source: adaptation after UNO statistic reports

It is shown that the entire services spectrum offered by protected areas is very well represented at the level of the protected area world network, except though for the Monument of Nature category that is less applied which invites us to reflect upon the limited role given to the preservation of specific natural features. The category of Areas of habitat and species management is the most numerous of the applied categories, including over a third from the total of protected area which indicates the importance of the active management and of interventions in maintaining the biodiversity, although this category represents the smallest areas in surface. Another frequent category is the Protected terrestrial and marine landscapes which, in spite of the important role played by the “protected landscapes” for the preservation of biodiversity especially in Europe and North America, are among the smallest surfaces. The biggest areas in surface are Category II – National Park and Category VI – Protected areas with managed resources, playing an important role in the protection of some entire natural ecosystems. There are just a small number of these, with a total of 57% from the protected area world network due to their very large surface which is often a size order higher than the other types of protected areas. There are many strictly protected areas and they tend to have a small surface. Parts of them are central areas within the functional surfaces of some larger

protected areas, such as national parks, but many of them are isolated areas. The wild natural areas are less numerous but they have, by definition, a very large surface contributing significantly to the total surface of protected area world network. This type of protected areas is mostly seen on the vast territories of North America and Eastern Asia and less in the other areas of the globe.

In Europe, there are 9325 protected areas registered on a 603.601 km² surface. Among the most visited national parks in Europe, there are the Tatra and Niede Tatra National Parks in Slovakia, the Plitvice National Park in Croatia, with lakes, waterfalls, many caves and good touristic equipment, the Hohe Tauern National Park in the Austrian Tirol, the Abruzzo and Gran Paradiso National Parks in the mountain Italian area, the Ordesa National Park in Pyrynees.

At European level, Romania own the most diversified and valuable natural patrimony which led to more 950 protected natural areas along the time, their total surface being about 7% of the terrestrial area of the country, thus making Romania be placed below the level of European countries as their average surface is 14,24%, and below the level of the states that acceded to the European Union in May 2004, whose protected natural area surface is 23,04% in Estonia, 22,37% in Slovakia, 21,98% in Poland, 19,78% in Malta, 18,27% in the Czech Republic, 15,24% in Latvia, 9,92% in Lithuania, 8,92% in Hungary, 8,52% in Cyprus and 7,40% in Slovenia. Besides these, in the process of accession to the European Union, 273 sites of community importance were selected and approved and 110 special protected avifaunistic areas are waiting for approval, as part of the Natura 2000 network in Romania, covering about 15% of the terrestrial surface of the country.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS GENERATED BY THE USE OF TOURISM FORMS ASSOCIATED TO ENVIRONMENT PRES ERVATION

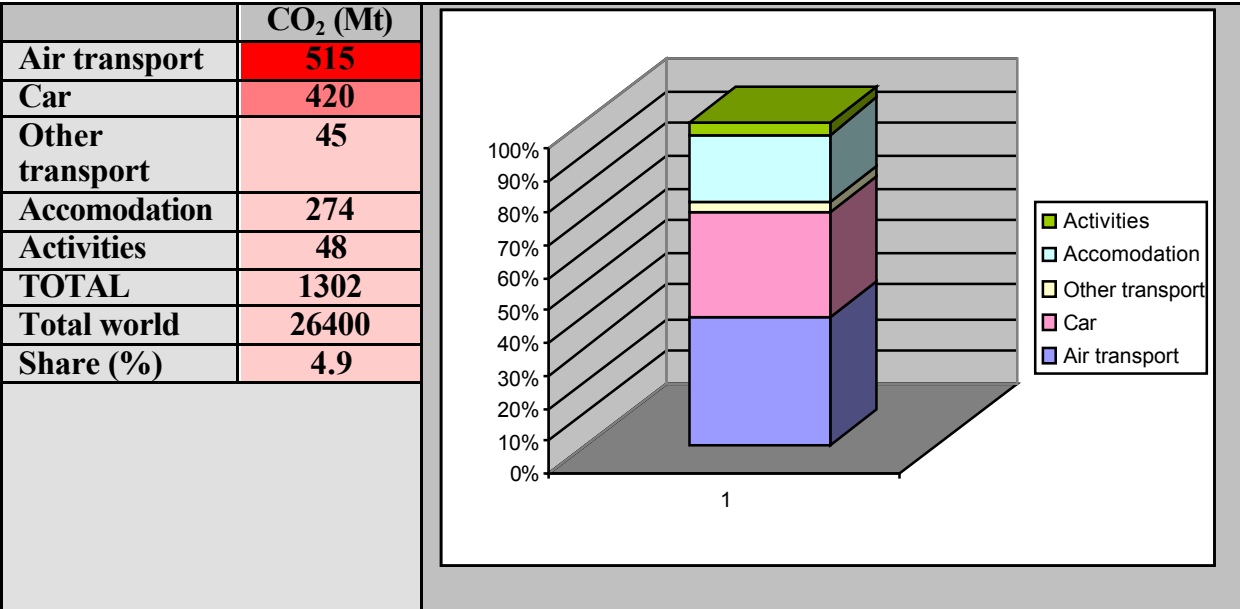
The involvement of tourism in the protected areas is headed two ways: on the one hand, the tourism benefits from the protection of these areas against other forms of development and on the other hand a well-planned, organized and conducted tourism can have a positive economic contribution to the environment protection in these areas.

The Action Plan provides for safeguarding the Europe Union's most important habitats and species. Achieving this objective involves stepping up the Natura 2000 network by re-establishing the most endangered species and by conservation measures in the outermost regions.

The Action Plan emphasizes the potential of biodiversity to limit atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases, thanks to carbon capture mechanisms. The impact of climate change on biodiversity is also highlighted; this is why the Action Plan insists on the need to cut greenhouse gas emissions in order to reduce future pressure on biodiversity. It also envisages supporting biodiversity adaptation to climate change by securing coherence of the Natura 2000 network and minimising potential damage to biodiversity arising from climate change adaptation and mitigation measures.

Evaluation of the contribution of tourism to human-induced climate change is most important, as international and domestic tourism emissions from three main sub-sectors are estimated to represent between 3,9% and 6,0% of global emissions, with a best estimate of 4,9%.

Figure no. 1 Estimated emissions from global tourism (including same-day visitors), 2005



Source: Climate Change and Tourism - Responding to Global Challenges, UNWTO, June 2008.

In 2005 transport generated the largest proportion of CO2 emissions (75%) from global tourism, with approximately 40% of the total being caused by air transport alone. Emissions from accommodation and activities were estimated to be substantially lower than transport emissions, but emissions from the accommodation sub-sector are also not negligible. At international level there can be identified more than 80 different accommodation categories like hotels, hostels, motels, pensions, bed and breakfast, self-catering accommodation, bungalows, vacation homes, holiday villages, campsites and farms a.s.o. Each type of accommodation has a different average energy use (table no. 3)

Table no. 3. Average energy use by type of accommodation

Type of accommodation	Energy use per guest night (MJ)	Emissions per guest night (kg CO ₂)
Hotels	130	20,6
Campsites	50	7,9
Pensions	25	4,0
Self-catering	120	19,0
Holiday villages	90	14,3
Vacation homes	100	15,9
Estimated average	98	15.6

Source: Climate Change and Tourism - Responding to Global Challenges, UNWTO, June 2008.

The calculation of emissions from accommodation can be achieved by multiplying the number of tourists by length of stay and an emission factor (CO₂ per guest night). The total number of international guest nights is estimated by UNWTO to be in the order of 6,1 billion. For domestic tourism, the total number of guest nights is estimated at 13,7 billion. While an average of 19 kg CO₂ per international guest nights is estimated, the emissions for domestic tourism are assumed to be at 11,5 kg CO₂ per guest night, because of lower emission levels in accommodation used by domestic tourist in developing countries. Total CO₂ emissions associated with accommodation are estimated at 274 Mt.

3.1. FORMS OF TOURISM ASSOCIATED TO ENVIRONMENT PRESERVATION

In this paper, the analyses performed show that the capitalization by means of tourism of the natural areas has different forms, according to their extension, the structure and dynamics of environment components. The touristic theory identifies a series of forms of tourism associated to environment preservation, such as: tourism in natural areas, ecotourism, adventure tourism, tourism in wilderness, camping.

The tourism in natural areas is that form of tourism in which the activities performed depend on the features of the natural framework. It has two basic components: a high quality level of the environment and the offer of some specific services.

The ecotourism differs from the tourism in nature by its focus on preservation, education, responsibility and active involvement of local communities. A tourist in natural areas can go bird watching, but an ecotourist will watch the birds accompanied by a local guide and will stay in a native's chalet, thus contributing to the prosperity of the local economy.

As an organized form of public use of the protected area territory, the ecotourism does not exclude the existence of an infrastructure and of some flows of persons with different culture, values and needs. Unlike classical tourism, the ecotourism tends to minimize the negative impact on the natural ecosystems and to have a socially positive impact on the local economy, too.

The adventure tourism (the least environment principle – oriented) is the travel in new and exciting places in search of adventure. The tourists practicing this form of tourism don't have a fixed programme, they prefer spontaneity and incertitude. The adventure tourism often includes activities such as: mountaineering, diving, extreme cycling, kayak-canoe, etc., which require resistance and physical skills. Although this type of tourism is carried usually out in the middle of the nature, it implies a little or no environment preservation and protection.

The tourism in wilderness means the travel in places not touched by man, non polluted, in order to get to know and enjoy the nature, to watch the birds and the fish in their natural environment. These travels imply the use of some non polluting means of locomotion: going by bicycle, by boat, using traction animals or on foot. This type of travel raises interest for the beauty of nature, but contributes only a little to the preservation of the fragile balance of nature.

Camping supposes travelling to a space somewhere between civilization and wilderness, often accompanied by family and friends and sometimes using the automobile as means of transport (carcamping). The main motivation is the relaxation amidst the nature, but the use of the automobile indicates a lack of concern for the environment protection (Nistoreanu, 2003).

The protected areas acquire real value in tourism only if they are organized for visits, thus being able to contribute to the making of a competitive tourist offer. The international practice showed that a deficient organization of the protected areas or the lack of it expose them to degradation, caused by natural and economic factors and by tourist pressure, thus causing damages to nature, sometimes irreversible.

The tourism in nature, and the protected areas in particular, has many motivations quite different from those of the other category of tourists. As a result, the industry of the travels in nature should be organized according to these motivations. In time, we noticed the existence of four categories of tourists whose motivation is spending a vacation in nature (Țigu et al., 2003):

- Hard core nature tourists represented by scientists or members of some special organizations with educational or preservation purposes.

- Dedicated nature tourists represented by persons who make specific travels to see the protected areas and who wish to understand the local nature and cultural history.
- Mainstream nature tourists represented by the population visiting the wild destinations first of all in order to make a common travel.
- Casual nature tourists represented by persons participating accidentally to programmes in nature as part of their travel in general.

The arrangements meant for practicing tourism in protected areas and especially in national parks should be preceded by strict studies regarding the tourist bearing capacity or the tourist loading capacity of the landscape. Generally, by tourist bearing capacity we understand the maximum number of visitors that a certain ecosystem can receive without large degradations.

Increased urbanisation and the spread of human infrastructures, over-exploitation of natural resources, pollution in all its forms, the introduction of exotic species into our ecosystems – these factors are all highly damaging for biodiversity. As a result, 42% of mammals, 15% of birds and 52% of freshwater fish across Europe are under threat. In addition, nearly 1000 plant species are at serious risk or on the verge of disappearing completely. In order to safeguard biodiversity and combat the extinction of animal and plant species, the European Union has set up a vast network of protected sites (the Natura 2000 network) and made the protection of biodiversity one of the key objectives of the Sixth Environment Action Programme.

As we can see in the following charts, in European countries, in 2008, between the international tourism arrivals and greenhouse gas emissions, on one hand and between the international tourism arrivals and the municipal waste generated, on the other hand there are positive correlations:

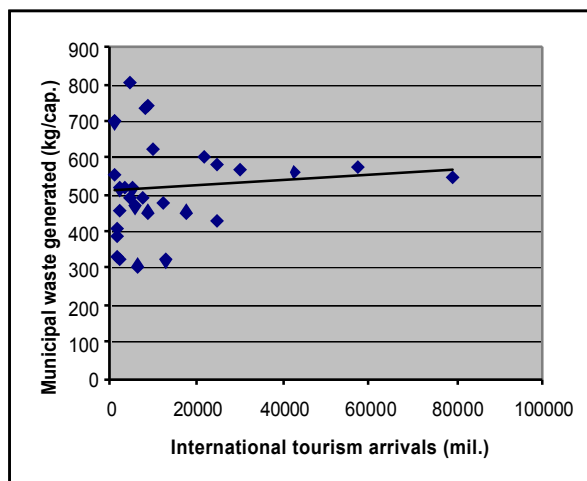
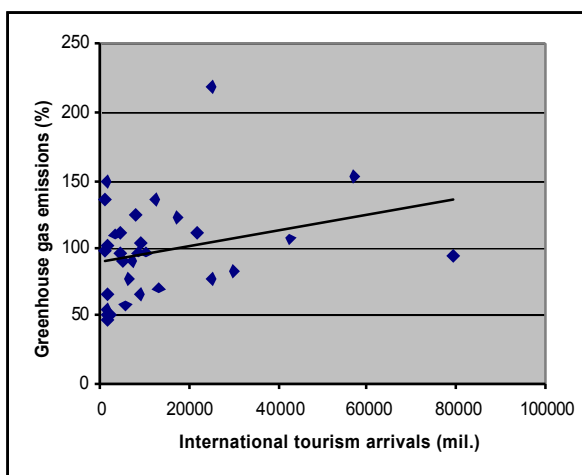


Figure no. 2. Correlation between international tourism arrivals and greenhouse gas emissions in European countries

Figure no. 3. Correlation between international tourism arrivals and municipal waste generated in European countries

Within the last 15 years, in Europe (both in EU-27 and in EU-15), the greenhouse gas emissions experienced a decreasing trend, despite some fluctuations, while the municipal waste generated experienced an opposite trend-evolution:

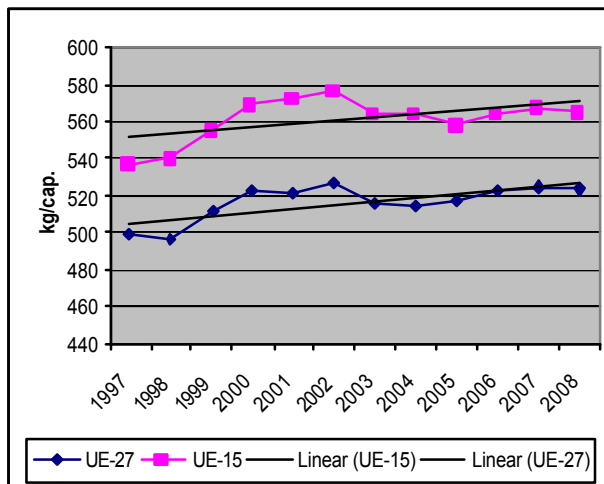
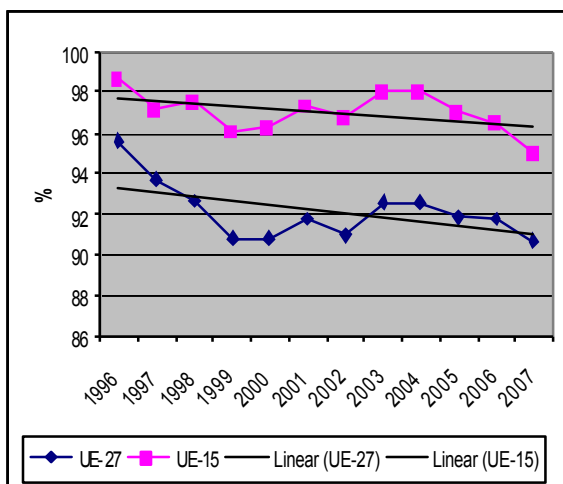


Figure no. 4. Greenhouse gas emissions in U.E., 1996-2007 (base year = 100)

Figure no. 5 Municipal waste generated in E.U., 1997-2008, (kg. per capita)

For both indicators, EU-15 values were higher than EU-27 values along the entire period.

In European Union countries within the last 15 years the energy consumption of transport decreased with a higher rate for EU-15 than EU-27:

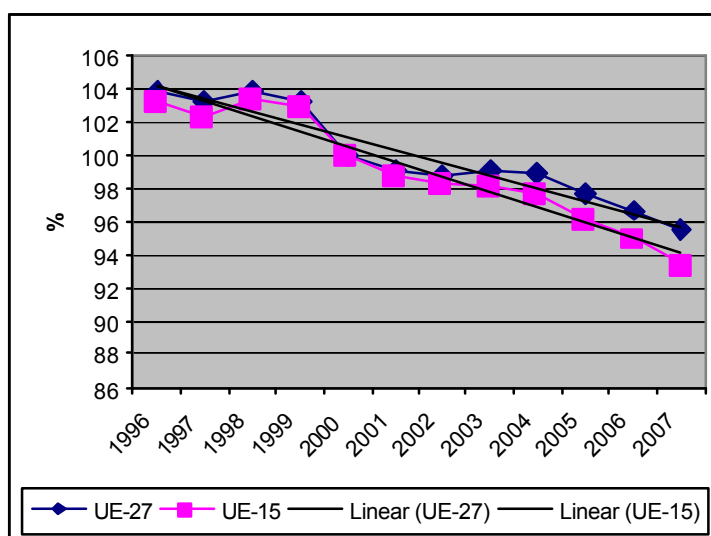


Figure no. 6. Energy Consumption of transport relative to GDP (index 2000=100) in EU

In order to test the existence of a significant difference between the greenhouse gas emissions in various geographical European regions, we have applied the Analysis of Variance Method – one factor.

The data were grouped on four geographical European regions: West, Central-East, North and South-Mediterranean. The result of the Fisher's test show that there is a significant difference between the geographical European regions, according to the greenhouse gas emissions (F test = 16,15), with a maximum probability level of 99,99967%. The highest average greenhouse gas emissions was recorded in Southern-Mediterranean European countries (136,49%), followed by Northern countries (107,06%). Central-Eastern European countries have the lowest average greenhouse gas emissions (60%).

Anova: Single Factor

SUMMARY

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Sum</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Variance</i>
Central-Eastern	9	539.7	59.96667	108.6825
Northern	7	749.4	107.0571	353.3729
South-Mediterranean	8	1091.9	136.4875	1514.916
Western	7	665.8	95.11429	102.1314

ANOVA

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>F crit</i>
Between Groups	25499.13	3	8499.709	16.15358	0.0000033	2.96035132
Within Groups	14206.89	27	526.1813			
Total	39706.02	30				

3.2. IDENTIFICATION OF THREATENING FACTORS ON NATURAL AREAS

It is known that there are very few sectors which do not influence the protected areas in a way or another, but the main domains mostly threatening the protected areas are: agriculture, silviculture, tourism, transport and industry.

Tourism can help to justify the establishment of protected areas in marginal regions and can lead to an economically reinvigoration of local communities and of traditional cultures. National governments should involve the administrators of the protected areas and the tourism industry in the development and implementation of sustainable tourism plans. These should be part of the sustainable development national strategies and should be included into the management individual plans of the protected areas. The protected areas benefit from measures including:

- ▲ change of the existing non sustainable development into a sustainable one;
- ▲ set out the sustainable standards for the new development, especially in the sensitive environments;
- ▲ designate some areas for different degrees of tourism based on the bearing capacity of the protected areas, including sanctuaries and quiet areas, as well as areas adequate for different levels of touristic use and development;
- ▲ reduce pollution and ease the holiday traffic;
- ▲ avoid excessive tourism and recreation in the protected areas;
- ▲ assure that the local communities benefit from tourism, too;
- ▲ ensure subsidies and resources for the application of plans on time;
- ▲ prepare the protected area managers in sustainable tourism.

Also, the tourism legislation should be revised and, if necessary, improved, and especially:

- to grant the protected area managers the power to control the tourism development;
- to require the complete environmental assessment of the proposals regarding the protected areas;
- to work together with the tourism industry, to require that the environmental damages created by the past tourism be repaired and to adopt management techniques to make the future use be sustainable.

The pioneering schemes in the sustainable tourism should be encouraged, for example by:

- loans, subsidies, concession fees for farmers and local communities in order to establish small enterprises to use the protected areas correspondingly;
- administrative projects adequate to the local economies, to show the innovative approach of tourism.

We can also say that, regarding protected area tourism, their visitation should basically be achieved so that any use of resources be made under the conditions of a higher capitalization in which, without destroying the resource or its possibilities to regenerate, what is capitalized should be exploited at the highest possible level, thus accomplishing a maximum cultural, educational, social and economic efficiency.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, the analyses performed show that the capitalization of natural areas by means of tourism has different forms, such as: tourism in protected areas, ecotourism, tourism

in wilderness, camping, and sustainable tourism. As a conclusion, we can say that the protected areas have become more and more a part of tourism, being appreciated because they represent an environment less affected by anthropic pressure. At present, they generate a new form of tourism called tourism in protected areas which require special care from the governments in order not to worsen the impact on environment and on local cultures.

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