

STUDY REGARDING THE EVOLUTION OF MOUNTAIN TOURISM AND RURAL MOUNTAIN TOURISM IN ROMANIAN CARPATHIANS

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Abstract

The paper aimed to analyse the evolution of mountain tourism and rural mountain tourism in Romanian Carpathians for us to understand our tourists' preferences, and their reasons for that. To be able to do that, we checked the number of tourist arrivals by years and months, in each part of the Romanian Carpathians, we analysed the dynamic of the tourists number between 2014-2019 and we checked the seasonality index, to see what season they love the most. All these research were done with the help of the reports from National Institute of Statistics (NIS). We discovered that one of the main reasons that helps people on to decide about the destination is the climate and the activities that they can perform. In addition, the fact the infrastructure is in a continuing development, and that the investments in tourism are constantly growing, and also that we have lots and many Museums, castles, monasteries, memorial houses, landscapes, hiking, waterfalls and cages make our mountains attractive for our tourists. They can recharge themselves after a hard time, after a crowded city life, in an unbelievable place: Carpathians. The study showed that the tourists are very excited about the rural tourism and all that this is offering them. We have an amazing country, with amazing landscapes that can make everyone love our mountains.

Key words: dynamic, mountain tourism, rural, seasonality

INTRODUCTION

We can describe Romania as a country that presents a great variety of historical and cultural values, such as – folk art, folklore, ethnography, traditions, and historical vestiges, a harmonious natural setting combined with varied and picturesque landscapes. All of these elements are creating a valuable potential for the rural mountain tourism [9].

In Romania, rural tourism has always been practiced, but it happened in a spontaneously way, sporadically, casually, and most important unorganized. Its form of materialization started in the 20's-30's from the 20th century, with the accommodation of the occasional visitors at citizens houses [4].

Only 60 years later, ANTREC (National Association for Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism) made the transition from a simply holiday at the countryside, to different hosts, to the concept of rural tourism [6].

If in 1994, Lane. B, in his paper called "What is rural tourism?" he defined this concept as a

sort of "tourism that is located in rural areas, is rural in scale, character and function, reflecting the differing and 'complex pattern of rural environment, economy, history and location"[5]. World Tourism Organization launched in 1997 a definition for the rural tourism as being "the form of the tourism that includes any touristic activity organized and ran in the rural space by the local population, that capitalizes the local touristic resources (natural, cultural, historical, and human) as well as tourist facilities and structures, including guesthouses and agritourist farms." [7]. According to World Tourism Organizations definition, we can consider that the rural tourism emergence and development is directly determined by the conservation of the rural infrastructure by the traditional life and by the preservation of the specific cultural identity. Based on these definitions, we could create our own interpretation by saying that basically, the tourism was born out of a necessity, when the psychic energy consumption grew and the urban area "snatched" the human being out from their

natural habitat, the only habitat able to give him strength and fresh air.

The rural space in Romania is being called “Carpato-Danubiano-Pontic”(Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic), because it is Carpathian by the relief, Danubian because hydrographic network and Pontic due to its opening to the Black Sea, implicitly to the Planetary Ocean.

Since almost a third from the surface of Romania is occupied by the Carpathian Chain, the below study was created to have an overview upon the evolution of the mountain tourism and rural mountain tourism between the years of 2014 and 2019, because the Romanian Carpathians have long tradition in tourism and rural tourism.

We can define the mountain tourism as being that type of tourism places that offers incredible landscapes, picturesque ambiances, and unpolluted environments among the specific endowments such as ski slopes, chairlifts, mountain trails.

One of the most common definition was that, says that “rural tourism includes all forms of tourism in the rural area. It includes in the same time outdoor tourists activities but also activities that allows tourists to discover the nature, the cultural environment and also the gastronomy”[3]. Another one says that “rural tourism includes all the activities that are having as final destination the rural space (farms, natural reservations, small villages) and which encompasses all the local features and the specificity of the rural regions, in order to attract tourists” [8]. Urry J. in 1988 said that “rural tourism is a form of tourism that creates individual characteristics of the tourism product, ensuring a diversification and high volatility of consumer preferences”[10].

By having almost 79,919 square kilometres. The Carpathian Mountains covers almost 66,700 square kilometres from the total mountainous area, offers a great diversity of original and particularly valuable tourist attractions.

Romanian Carpathians are being divided into three major units: Eastern Romanian Carpathians, representing 52.2% from the entire Carpathian area, Southern Carpathians

that covers 21% from the entire mountain area and least but not last Western Carpathians with a percentage of 26.8% from the entire mountain area (Fig.1).

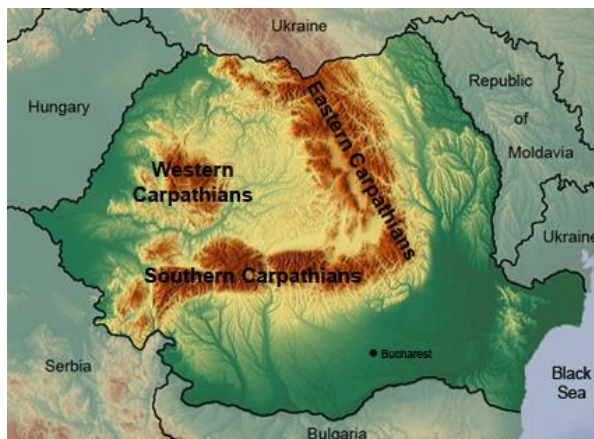


Fig.1. Carpathians Mountains in Romania

Source:<https://bonebroke.org/2016/12/15/archaeological-fieldwork-in-romania/map/> [2].

Compared to other forms of tourism, rural tourism stands out for its originality and variety and it is based on the potential of the rural space, products specific to the place and on the people.

The rural tourism is the result of the modern human being behaviour, who wants to travel and visit original places that will send him back to the nature avoiding as much as possible the congestions that forms the dedicated tourism areas. On the other hand, we could say that could represent alternatives for relaunching or invigorating some rural settlements to revive popular traditions, customs and crafts. This being said, we can conclude that Romania has a very big potential to offer quality mountain tourism and rural mountain tourism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main purpose of our research is to be able to see the evolution of mountain tourism and rural mountain tourism in Romania and especially in the Romanian Carpathians. The methodology we used is step by step approach:

Step 1 – we identified the cities that are based in the mountain area within the Romanian Carpathians. We realised this selection made

based on the information that we were able to find within the “Mountain Law” from 20th of July 2020. Once this was done, we generated reports with regards to the tourist arrivals from National Institute of Statistics (NIS).

Step 2 – we started to make different comparisons by making the dynamic (2014 and 2019) to see what was the flow of tourists. To determine the dynamic the formula: $\text{Dynamic} = \frac{\text{Total Number of Tourists Arrivals in 2014}}{\text{Total Number of Tourists Arrivals in 2019}} \times 100$.

Step 3 – We wanted to check also the seasonality index – to be able to understand when exactly the tourists like to travel and what reasons would they have. For this we used the formula: $\text{Seasonality Index} = \frac{\text{Average of the Season}}{\text{General Average}} \times 100$.

Step 4 – We determined the total number of tourists for each group in the Romanian Carpathians within the 2014-2019 timeframe in the wintertime, to see what are the tourists preferences for winter holidays.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To have a first observation of the tourism evolution in Romanian Carpathians, we

analysed the dynamic of the tourists number between 2014–2019 (Fig.2). The analysis shows a slightly upward trend between 2014-2019 especially for the rural mountain tourism.

The rural mountain tourism becomes more and more popular among the Romanian tourists, especially for the ones that are trying to run away from the busy life of the big cities, from the artificial food, and closed spaces. The rural mountain tourism has the biggest increase, 251.41%, in the last years in Western Carpathians. Western Carpathians are followed by small differences by Eastern Carpathians with 237.70% and Southern Carpathians with a dynamic of 207.22%. By this, we could understand the fact that the people are trying to get in less polluted places, to a virgin nature, untouched by other human beings – or at least less untouched. They are trying to avoid the crowds, to enjoy the unique sensations that the rural mountain tourism offers them.

The Western Carpathians stretch between the Danube Gorge and the Somes Valley. The tectonic collapses that took place here created an insular appearance with wide colours.

At the same time the area offers a great variation of landscapes and spectacular reliefs.

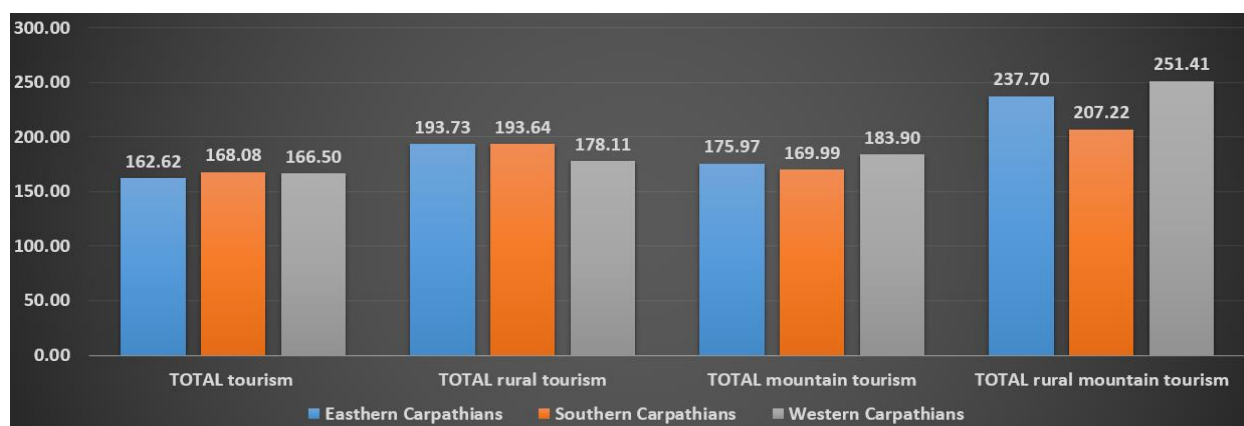


Fig. 2. The dynamic of the tourists number between 2014-2019 in the Romanian Carpathians
 Source: Own calculation.

The basalts from Detunata, the gorges, the cliffs, the sinkholes and the caves are just some of most incredible tourist attractions. And because beauty without purity is nothing, the chain has in composition the ancient and

rich Apuseni Mountains plains detached from the story books.

The second place is being occupied by Eastern Carpathians with a dynamic of 237.70%. Eastern Carpathians are being known especially for the natural passes-by,

that made possible the circulation on both sides of the Carpathian Chain since ancient times. In East Carpathians we can see a wide variety of rocks, geophysical, geological and morphological aspects, heights, afforestation, flora and fauna.

The most spectacular and imposing part of the Romanian Carpathians is, without a doubt, the Southern Carpathians, also called Romanian Alps. Here we can find the highest peaks in Romania. Even though all these things are being said, the Southern Carpathians have the least dynamic within the last years with only 207.22%. Less than Eastern Carpathians with 30.48% and less than Western Carpathians with 44.19%. We can assume that being very popular and spectacular, the Southern Carpathians became a very crowded place, a characteristic that makes people to choose different places.

By having these numbers, we wanted to find out the seasonality index as well. To be able to determine when the tourists choose the most the rural tourism from different part of the Carpathians Mountains.

Within the Eastern Carpathians, as we can see below (Fig. 3), the favourite time of the year of our tourists is in the summer time. They have registered 1.65 in July and 2.09 in August. It starts to decrease in September, up until the wintertime.

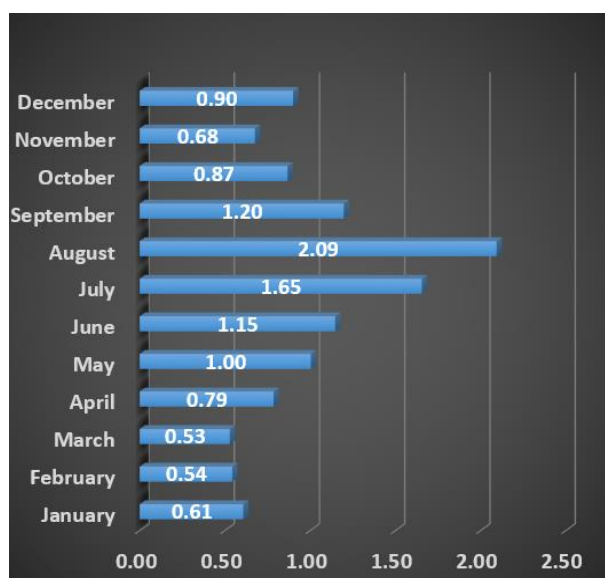


Fig. 3. Seasonality Index in Eastern Carpathians 2014-2019

Source: Own source.

Easter Carpathians, bring to the fore some of the most beautiful places in our country which tourists should not miss. The Muddy Volcanos from Buzau City, the Living Fire and the Putna Waterfall from Vrancea City, the Saint Ana volcanic lake from Harghita City, the monasteries from Moldova or the Zimbraria from Neamt are some of the reasons why our tourists chose Easter Carpathians. We could consider that they chose the summer time due to the fact that they can do long walks to visit all the tourist attractions, running away from the heat that can be found in the urban cities. The average summer temperature is 18°Celsius, a very good temperature to explore places.

Going forward to the Southern Carpathians, we can see that summer time is the preferred season for the tourists to travel (Fig.4).

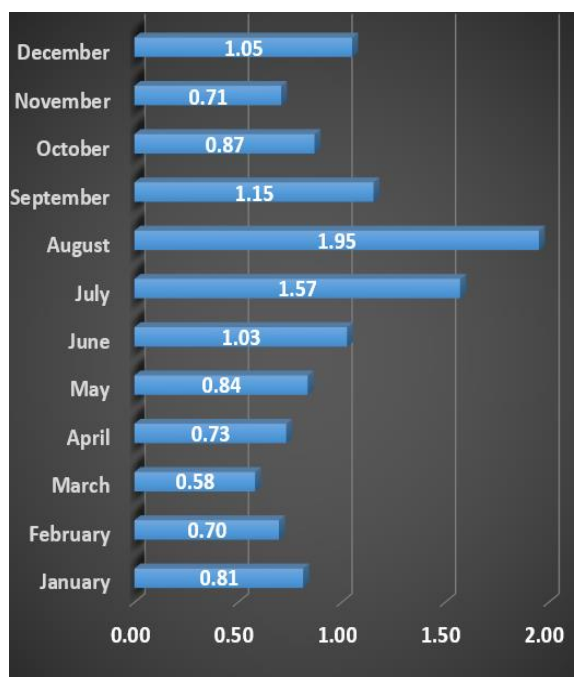


Fig. 4. Seasonality Index in Southern Carpathians 2014-2019

Source: Own source.

The seasonality index starts to increase from June, when its value is 1.03 and reaches the maximum value, 1.95, August. Right after the last month of summer, the index starts to decrease by reaching out 1.15 in September, and a maximum of 1.05 in the wintertime.

The most spectacular area of the Carpathians is being represented by the Southern

Carpathians. Also called Romanian Alps, they reach the highest altitude in Fagaras Mountains (Moldoveanu Peak – 2,544 m) and offer great views and hikes in a wonderful landscape. The Transfagarasan road, the most spectacular road in Romania, crosses the mountains and connects Transylvania with Muntenia. The most important tourist attraction in the Southern Carpathians can be considered Vidrau Lake and Dam, one of the largest in Europe, then Poienari Fortress, build in Vlad Tepe’s time, the Balea Glacier Lake and Balea Waterfall. Also, in the Southern Carpathians, we can find in the Retezat Mountains, the Retezat National Park, which has the status of a protected natural area of national and international interest, and since 1979 is well known as Biosphere Reserve. With around 80 lakes, of which 58 are permanent lakes the Retezat Massif owns almost 40 percent of the glacial lakes in Romania. The lakes, fed by the melted snow of the ridges offer incredible views to the tourists. Retezat National Park entered also the race started by the New 7 Wonders Foundation to choose the seven natural wonders of the world. Also Bucegi Mountains offer some of the most beautiful excursions in Romania, with high ridges that have panoramic views, meadows with wild flowers and numerous paths and tourist attractions such as Sfinx and Babele, two major tourist attractions around which many legends have been woven – some say that the ensemble was built by aliens themselves. As well as in Eastern Carpathians, the average summer temperature is 18°Celsius. All the tourist attractions, and all the diversified flora and fauna make our tourists to choose the summertime as well to visit Southern Carpathians.

Cool temperatures and unobstructed trails, with ancient meadows, virgin forests and limestone peaks make the Western Carpathians to be the perfect place for summertime as well, for many of the tourists.

The increase starts in May from 1.09 and reaches out to its highest value in August, at 1.79 (Fig. 5). September is the month when

the decrease starts from 1.19 and it reaches out to the lowest value in December – 0.78.

only few of the tourists attractions that grows the rural mountain tourism in the Western Carpathians. Even CNN included the Western Carpathians – Apuseni Mountains to be more precise – within the list of the 17 tourist destinations that best defines Europe. The average summer temperature is 18°Celsius.

Trying to understand why the tourists choose the mountain especially on summertime we looked at the Romanian climate as well (Fig.6).

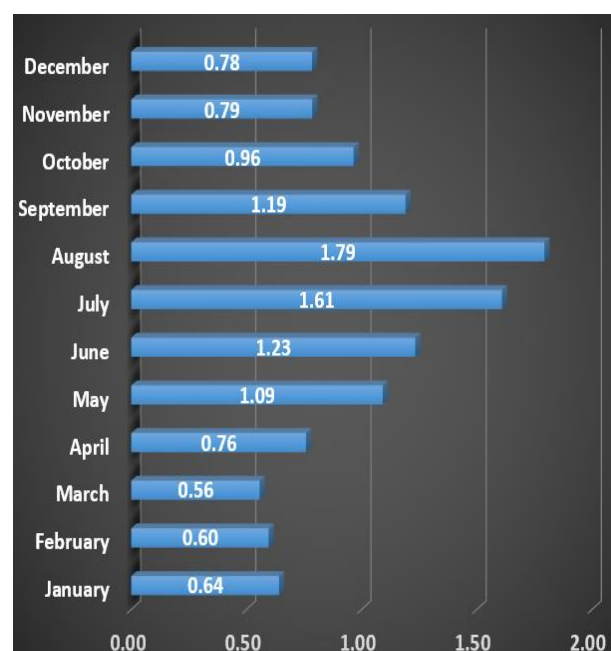


Fig. 5. Seasonality Index in Western Carpathians 2014-2019

Source: Own source.

Cheile Nerei the realm of story waterfalls, Cheile Rametului a mixed nature reserve, Apuseni Mountains with over 400 cages, Poiana Rusca or The Marble Mountains or the mountain trails from Bihoruli Mountains are only few of the tourists attractions that grows the rural mountain tourism in the Western Carpathians. Even CNN included the Western Carpathians – Apuseni Mountains to be more precise – within the list of the 17 tourist destinations that best defines Europe. The average summer temperature is 18°Celsius.

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We can understand from here that in a country with temperate continental transitioning climate, where summer is an extremely hot season, lasting from May until mid-September, with temperatures over 30° Celsius, the tourist often choose to travel to the mountain side where the maximum temperature is 18° Celsius.

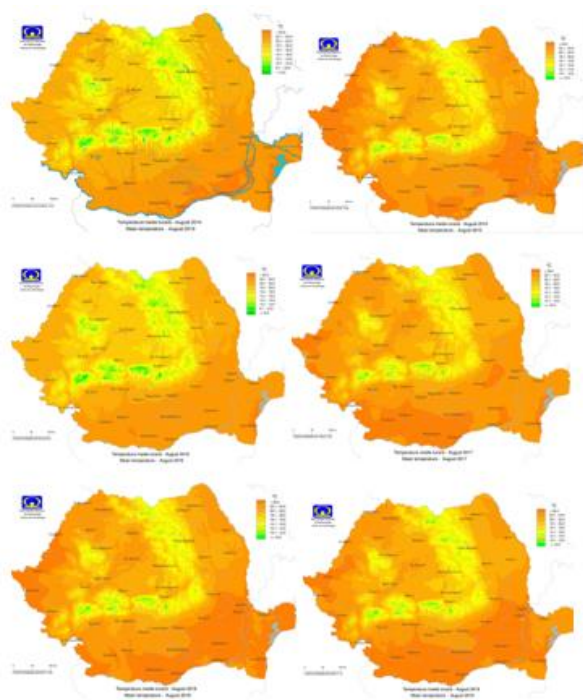


Fig. 6. Mean Monthly Temperature in August 2014-2019

Source: <http://www.meteoromania.ro/clima> [1].

Despite the comfort that they find here with regards to the temperature, they can visit unbelievable places, see the nature as it is, recharge themselves after an entire year of hardworking and city life.

The fact that the infrastructure is in a continuing development, that the investments in the accommodation units are growing constantly is part of their decision to travel to the mountain side.

Museums, castles, monasteries, memorial houses, landscapes, hiking, waterfalls and cages can be visited better by the Romanian tourists in the summertime. They can admire the green meadows, full of grass and flowers

and can admire the diverse fauna, or can even go fishing or hunting in the rural tourism.

CONCLUSIONS

Even though, most of the people chooses the summertime and its beauty, we should not forget about the wintertime in the Carpathians.

Full of customs and traditions, in winter, the Romanian village becomes a corner of heaven. The Romanian winter holidays begin with St. Nicholas on the 06th of December, and ends on the 24th of February, with Dragobetele, which marks the beginning of spring and the agricultural year.

The winter holidays spent in the middle of Romanian villages represents a unique experience, full of joy, drama, irony and poetry. An entire amalgam of contrasts that only Romania and its people can harmonize so well. Plenty of meals, sad stories and carols, cheerful songs, warmth and hospitality of the hosts takes you out of your everyday routine. It is very difficult to choose a specific area. Whether you are in Eastern, Southern or Western Carpathian, winter has a certain and specific taste and aroma. There is no family in the countryside – rural area – who is not preparing for Christmas or for New Year's Eve. The traditions and customs of the Carpathians differ from one area to another, but their beauty, uniqueness and originality cannot be described in any words or stories. Most of the traditions and customs surrounding the winter holidays are strictly observed in the rural areas from Bucovina and Maramures – part of the Eastern Carpathians. We determined the total number of the tourists that travelled in the winter months in Romanian Carpathians from 2014 until 2019 (Fig. 7).

In Eastern Carpathians, from 2014 up until 2019 111,437 tourists travelled in total, in the month of December. As can be seen it's the highest number of tourists from all the Carpathians, from all the winter months. This can only makes us believe that there is interest for traditions in the rural area.

At a slightly difference from Eastern Carpathians we can see the Southern Carpathians with a total number of 113,016 tourists in from 2014 to 2019.

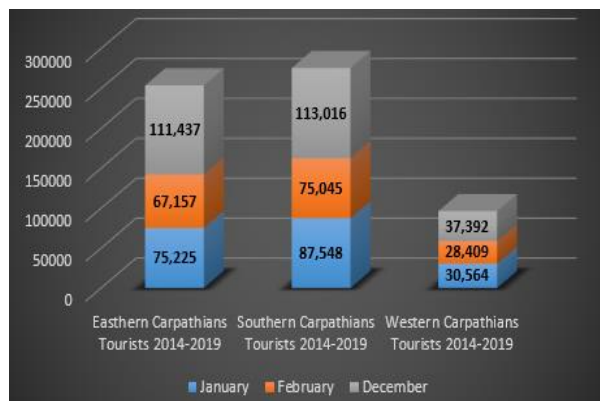


Fig. 7. Tourists in Winter Time in 2014-2019

Source: Own source.

Southern Carpathians are well known for their slopes. Whether you choose skiing or snowboarding, Southern Carpathians offers you the possibility to practice your favourite sport safely on big and modern slopes.

The study shows us that tourism was rising within the last years. People were coming to visit different places, the accommodations were more and more occupied. All the investments and all the healthy business plan were working. Everything was ok and good until February 2020. SARS-COV2 virus infection appeared in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. At that time no one knew what is really coming. At first the disease was spread to most Chinese provinces. Not too late it begun to spread all over Europe, all over the world.

The World Health Organization declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern in January 2020 and a pandemic in March 2020 [11]. The virus was confirmed to have reached Romania on 26th of February 2020, when the first case in Gorj County was confirmed. That was the moment when safety measurements have been taken. At the beginning, in February, Romanian government announced several preventive measures such as designation of hospitals as isolation centres for new cases, purchase and placement of thermal scanners in international airports and specially designated lines for

passengers coming from areas affected by COVID-19 outbreak [11].

In march there were banned all the gatherings, school and border closure. Not too late, the state of emergency was announced. It followed a national lockdown. As a result of the pandemic, Romania imposed quarantines, bans, or other restrictions for the Romanian citizens (and not only). Movement outside the home and household was prohibited with some exceptions such as work, buying food, or medicine. People over 65 were allowed to leave their home only at certain time intervals. The SARS-COV2 spread all around the country very fast. This is the moment when the tourism started to fall off. Facing exceptional circumstances, the tourism industry has reached a point of interruption of normal activity never seen before, as more and more travel restrictions are imposed. Uncertainties and restrictions on holiday plans were growing day by day in an attempt to stop the spread of the disease. Lockdowns and social distancing measures led to strong declines in otherwise stable services consumption.

Many accommodations had to close their doors for tourists, for employees. Some of them only for the lockdown period, some of them forever. Even though the national lockdown lasted only 2 months, the people were still afraid to start travelling. All the accommodations had to comply with certain conditions to open their doors for their tourists. Many of them were not able to accommodate, hence they never opened their doors.

We could say that the SARS-COV2 pandemic did two things: created people's fear to travel, but in the same time made the people to choose wild places, unheard by anyone up until now. Made them approach even more by the nature. Searching constantly for fresh air, for places that would make them forget about everything bad that happened. To forget about the all the economic problems, the health problems. It also made them supportive with our rural tourism entrepreneurs.

They understood that they really need each other to survive this pandemic, this unbelievable situation. Solidarity became one

of the most important qualities of our citizens. The mountains are still there, with the same beauty, with the same will to receive our frightened, exhausted tourists. To offer them beautiful stories in a world where you feel nothing good is happening, at least for the moment.

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