

DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS OF TOURIST ACTIVITY IN RETEZAT NATIONAL PARK ADOPTING THE TOURISM AREA LIFE CYCLE MODEL

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Abstract: We present in this study an original assessment of the development of tourism activities in Retezat National Park using the tourism area life cycle model. Understanding the development stages is imposed by social, economic, but also taking into account the perspective of environmental management found in the rising stage. A significant part is devoted to estimate the internal and external factors, the social, economical and environmental motivations. Research was conducted in a long time and by direct experimentation, the author travelling several times to document directly in the region. The results of TALC model application reveal that currently the National Park through the development stage. The conclusive issues refers to the exhibition of some development scenarios and the implications of strategic decisions that need to take account of lifecycle factors interferences in Retezat's tourism development.

JEL classification: L83, D91, C41

Key words: Life Cycle, Environmental Management, Strategic Decision, Alpine Tourist Region

1. INTRODUCTION

In tourism areas, the promotion activities seeks to realise social objectives not only economic goals, the progress and the performance being measured in esthetical, environmental protection, social, cultural and obviously economical and monetary terms. Traditionally, performance analysis of tourist areas where focused strictly on visitors number and on their volume of expenditures.

Although they exists several studies in which the life cycle of tourism areas was applied and validate, very few of them focused on natural parks and protected areas, and regarding the alpine destinations not yet undertaken such analysis. Especially important is a study concerned the development of tourist activity in Romania, a country where tourism is wanted to become a development priority taking into account the existing potential.

In such research, confusion can arise concerning the entity under review: tourist region or change process itself. Since R. Butler, the first scientist who developed life-cycle model of tourist regions, inquiries were directed to those regions where tourism is considered one of the most important activities. Confusions may arise from the nature of things whereas the life cycle of a region is influenced by many trading, governmental, human factors or by other activities.

2. HIGHLIGHTS ON THE APPLICABILITY OF THE THEORETICAL LIFE CYCLE MODEL FOR TOURISM DESTINATIONS

Research Guidelines of tourist activities seek to offer answers to questions on the factors causing change of tourism destinations, how the tourist destinations market changes and what means, in fact, the tourist destination. From these intentions, many researchers have tried to seek some standardized rules of evolution which attempted to transpose in evolutionary models.

In essence, they tried to estimate and plan the development directions of these activities that filled in the twentieth century everyday life, in Europe and worldwide. Issues raised in planning as managerial function in tourism activity is not recent and was challenged by several studies. Taking Hall's taxonomy¹, the travel planning is judged by his form (referring to the infrastructure or to marketing), by structure (government sector or industry segment), by scale (national, regional, local, or for one physical-geographical unit) and by time (cycles and implementation periods). In essence, most experts consider that tourism planning is a strategic decision making targeting best allocation of resources and acquiring an economic, environmental and social optimum, translate in considerable benefits for tourist destinations and other stakeholders.

Butler's evolutionary model, also preceded by others, is based on the consideration that tourism activity is largely determined by ecological factors. Before Butler, Noronha² proposed a model in which there were three stages of tourism development: detection, local response and local initiatives and, ultimately, its institutionalization. Butler's model is also influenced by Cohen's studies regarding tourist's motivations, whose activities are considered as part of four steps, namely: *drifters*, *explorers*, *individual mass tourists* and *organized mass tourists* (E. Cohen, 1972).

Butler develops a simple evolutionary model of tourism entity synthesized by an asymptotical curve similar with product life cycle (Figure no. 1). In the following paragraph we present a very brief description regarding the development stages of the lifecycle.

Exploration stage is best explained using the situation of very unfavourable life areas from Arctic Canada and South America with their lack access routes and facilities and places are almost completely unknown. With the *involvement* stage, in broad lines are defined the initial market for visitors: primary features are promoted, increasing numbers of tourists. In the *development* stage, attractions are embodied in a specific market, and a stage of consolidation followed when the increasing number of visitors starts to fade.

Critical period began with the consolidation and continue through the stage of *stagnation* the sights are replaced with more artificial facilities, image of the region is breaking from geographical environment.

When the *decline* (D, E) of the region is arrived, tourist functionality is completely lost or reduced to a simple marginal rate. Decline may be replaced by a *rejuvenation* (A, B - man-made attractions such the casinos or exploitation of natural

¹ C. M. Hall - Introduction to Tourism in Australia: Impacts, Planning and Development (2nd edition), Longman, Melbourne, 1995.

² Noronha, R. (1976) - Review of the Sociological Literature on Tourism, cited by R. Butler (2006, p. 4).

resources previously undiscovered such the caves or others beauties) occasioned by the combined efforts of private and government initiative, exemplified with an emerging market for winter sports promoted in areas without such tradition.

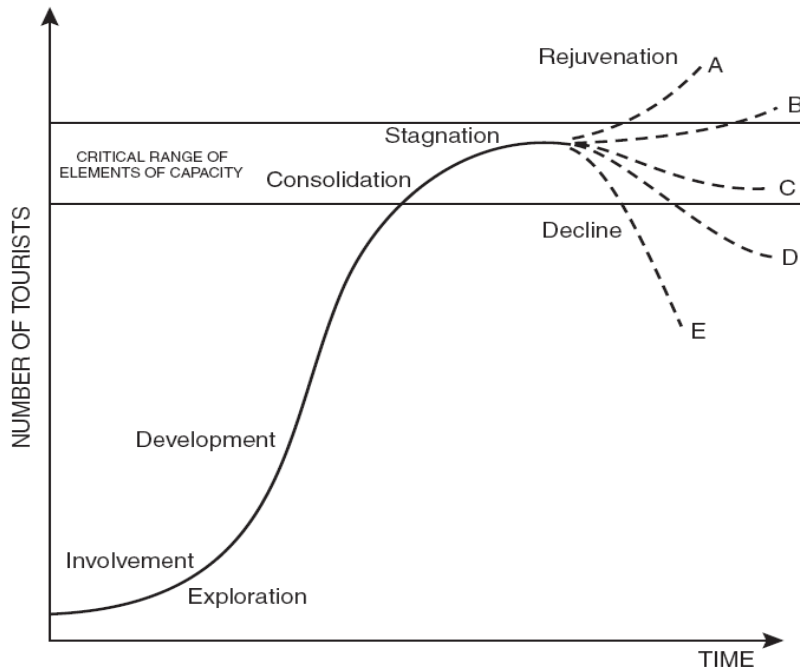


Figure no. 1 – Hypothetical development of evolutionary cycle of tourist region
(Butler, 2006, p. 5)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data exploited in this study were difficult to obtain but we used both primary and secondary sources. The most reliable information was collected directly by interviewing several actors operating in the domain and located in the subject study area. We talk about the staff of National Forest Authority – Romsilva represented by the Retezat National Park Administration - subunit of Deva Forestry Directorate, local authorities and forestry managers from nearby localities: Hațeg, Pui, Râu de Mori, Uricani.

Also highly significant are the informations kindly offered by the private owners of chalets and tourist complexes and by the members of tourism clubs Floarea Reginei, Concordia and Clubul Turistic Român. A thorough research regarding the motivations and tourism intrinsic factors we use the same technique of interviewing a representative sample of more than 50 all ages visitors of Retezat National Park (RNP) who crossed the region. In summary, the interlocutors who knew the RNP since before 1970 represent the following categories: teachers and researchers, geologists, hydrologists, local guides, many nearby residents, students and other visitors.

Among the biggest problems faced in conducting this study we note the absence of synthetic information regarding the number of visitors, travel costs actually incurred by them or the benefit of exploiting the region. While in any park the access is restricted by recording all entries and awarding the access ticket, this rule is rarely

applied in the RNP region. The author of this article himself was in the situation to declare the visit and to buy the access ticket only once in ten visits undertaken after 1999. Also a brief interviewing of 50 RNP visitors over the past decade, the percentage was confirmed: only 15% of visits were recorded and were formalized through the purchasing of access ticket. This situation shows on the one hand, the lack of effective organization that actually exists in many other fields and, secondly, the breaking of operating rules of the protected areas (lack of enforcement in this area), issue more seriously than the actual bad measurement of tourist flows.

To balance the lack of official information (data used were only estimates of some researchers and institutions), we proceeded to collect data from chalets owners and national park managers through some interviews taken over the last 6-7 years.

Insufficiency of relevant data in the interest region leads to impossibility of such study confirming the validity of the TALC model. In this situation, we looked at internal and external forces that shape the development of tourism in the RNP and adjacent regions, and tried to configure those economical, social and environmental changes for each phase of the model. For this, we have exploited insofar this was possible the existing documents, we used previous models applications for many tourism areas from worldwide by combining this with the direct interview of people who live and work in national park, spot observations and direct experimentation.

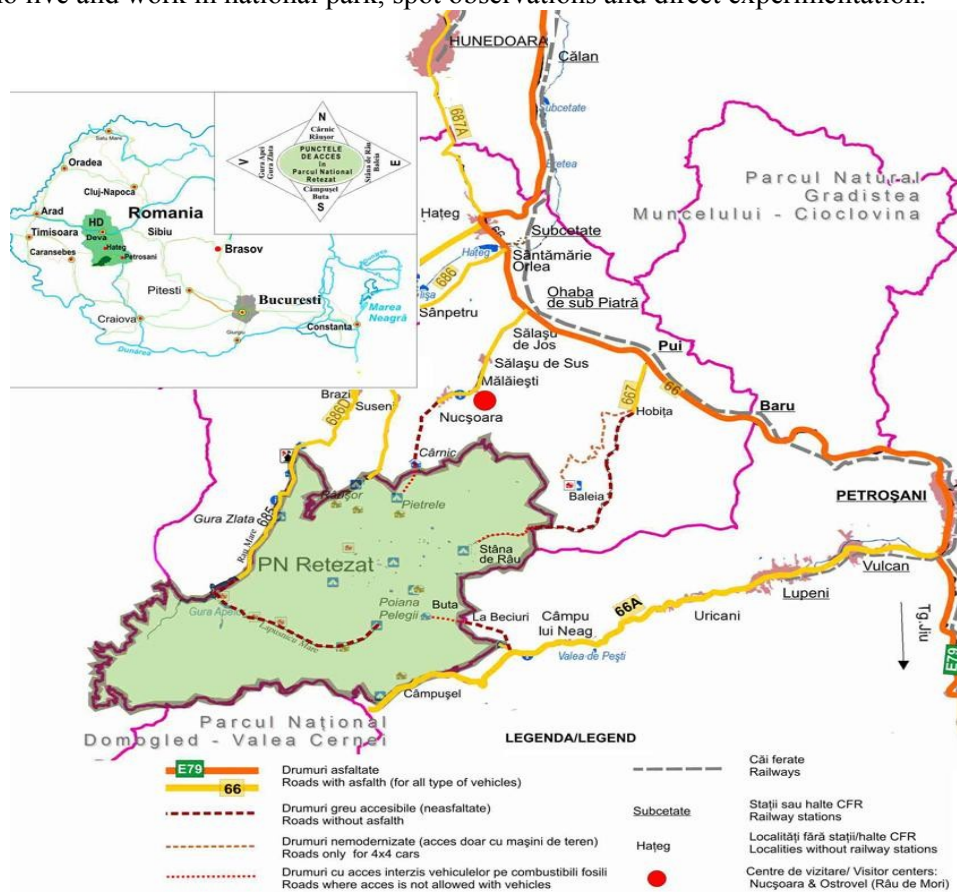


Figure no. 2 – Location and map of Retezat National Park

Source: RNP Administration's site, <http://retezat.ro/turism/27-acces-parc.html>

Secondary sources of documentation cover more than 40 years, consisting of Alpine clubs publications and books, travel guides, National Park Administration statistical documents and environmental reports. Also were used the records of the chalets employees and tour guides who work on Retezat region in the last 40 years. To take a more relevant research three maps were used – the RNP access map (processed in no. 2 Figure), the topographic maps on a scale of 1:100.000 = L-34-94 and L-34-106 printed in 1996 and the tourist map of Retezat mountain, realised by Dănuț Călin in 2000.

4. STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE ALPINE TOURIST CONSUMPTION

Tourism development process in less developed regions but having an underexploited potential must be assessed in conjunction with macroeconomic changes at regional and especially at national levels. We will specify in that direction the strategic guidelines for tourism future development and manager's options for investment, infrastructure, partnership opportunities with the private sector etc

A. General aspects of alpine tourism

Talking about tourism activities undertake strictly in the alpine National Park area type such also is the Retezat Mountain, the most common are the recreational holidays, mountain crossing, climbing slopes, ski touring, travel for scientific and research interest or, sometimes, deployments of troops for its training and instruction of mountaineering hunters. Exclusive landscapes, alpine landforms, the untouched nature by anthropogenic intervention, wild fauna and flora, the mystery surrounding the legends about this mountain, millenary tradition of sheep grazing are only a few attractions that bring an undeserved small number of visitors in the Retezat National Park.

B. Tourism Development in Retezat and development drivers for that activity

As part of Romania's tourism product, the alpine tourism takes an insignificant share, despite the considerable attractiveness exercised on foreign tourists. According to our own observations and documents recorded by chalets owners from Retezat area, we can say that persistent targets are the foreign tourists than domestic ones. Retezat is the mountain of all ages and all seasons who leaves a lasting impression on visitors with his grandeur and colour.

Discharging the development of civilization in this part of the Continent, the Carpathians have been living for millennia. Anthropologists consider the Retezat region was inhabited by about 3-4 millennia. Until the nineteenth century, the subject study area was exploited as protection zone in times of war and as preferred region for grazing and wood industry activities. Although Retezat Mountain was crossed and attended for various purposes until 150-200 years ago we cannot be said that tourism has been practiced here.

Subsequently, the motivation of trips in the Carpathians is attributed to the development of sport climbing as ambition: in the nineteenth century increased the recreational climbing towards the high peaks and in the twentieth century this practice becomes a mass activity. Since the alpine infrastructure acquired new proportions and sports equipment has improved considerably, hiking and mountain tours were extended from sports niche status to the usual tourist occupation. Afterwards, in the 1920-1930 years, have been established clubs and associations for mountain lovers (in nearby cities

like Deva, Sibiu, Petroșani) whose objectives were intensified and contributed to the development of the Carpathians as tourist attraction, by stabilizing and marking of trails, camping and protection areas for climbers and hikers. In the period preceding the World War I are recorded first hut type buildings whose capacity was quite low, up to 10-20 seats.

The expansion of transport infrastructure after the Second World War underlie a new impulsion of Retezat tourism, making the natural attractions and points of interest more accessible and comfortable. We mention here the road and rail what penetrates from Petroșani city toward Lupeni, roads from the north that make the transition to Transylvania and Banat regions as well as the strengthening of forest roads for access to certain industrial objectives (hydropower plants, dams for water supply springs etc.). Thus, in the years following the Second World War reinforced a new form of tourism in Romanian West Carpathians also (in Bucegi-Făgăraș area onset occurred two decades earlier through tradition and its greater accessibility). Technical innovations have entered also in Retezat but still in poor shape, thanks to the prohibitions caused by declaration of the Reservation and further of the National Park, in 1935 (small funicular railway, forest roads unmaintained and with preferential access).

Various landforms with ice, periglacial, karsts, structural ore other origins attract many residents of nearby settlements and also researchers, teachers, students interested for mountain, in general. Mountain activity is intense, mentioning here the Romanian Mountain Club represented in major cities of the country Floarea Reginei – Valea Jiului Club, Concordia Club and so on.

Table no. 1 - Accommodation assets in Retezat National Park

Reception units	Location	Capacity	Owners	Observations
<i>Shelters:</i> Gențiana, Condor, Ștevia, Buta, Salvamont Zănoaga, Bucura and Poiana Pelegii	Central Zone of RNP	130-150 seats	Co-ownership RNPA with mountain clubs Floarea Reginei, Concordia,	Ștevia shelter (25 seats) offered the best conditions but burned in 2000.
App. 10 <i>hostels</i> (Belvedere, Gura Zlata Dumbrăvița, Anița, etc.)	National Park buffer zone	about 150 seats	Privates	
- Baleia Hut - Buta Hut - Rotunda Hut - Complex of Pietrele - Complex of Cârnic - Complex of Râușor	The points of entry to the park	100 seats + 65 seats + 30 seats + 120 seats + ~100 seats + 100 seats	Privates	Buta and Pietrele huts were burned after 2000.
* Authorized tourist cottages (Codrin, Sarmis, Dora etc.); * Tourist complexes: Doruleț, Cheile Buții; * Local housing	Adjacent areas	more than 500 seats	Privates	
Campings	outside and inside the RNP	-	Supervise by the RNP Admin.	

Source: field research of the author

After 1990, there is a rising share of foreign visitors. Currently, the material assets (table no. 1) support the development of rural tourism, cultural and ecological offers, but the travelling is largely developed by the tourists on their own.

The park has three parts: a scientific reservation named Gemenele - 1.630 ha where the construction of any buildings is prohibited, the central zone - 10.386 ha, located entirely in the Retezat Mountain where few shelters and Rescues establishments are and also a Buffer area.

5. TALC MODEL APPLICATION ON THE RETEZAT NATIONAL PARK ENTITY

Modern business, the tourism is a sure development way toward the industries convergence and reproduction of leisure activities away from home, the relationships between tourism, culture, education, history, recreation and other activities being extremely diversified. Pine and Gilmore (1999) believed that it is a fusion of industries but also a “fusion of groups of customers and markets looking for new experiences”.

This model application’s utility is hard to observe because development decisions are taken by several different organizations and entities each being responsible for own development (their own life cycle). More specifically, the alpine tourism is based on conventional activities but the influence of other factors can be decisive and difficult to quantify: tourism fashion, the industries producing climbing and mountain sports equipment, government policies promoting or restraining the access in tourist areas. Basically, the tourism is determined by the places of attraction, the natural factors for alpine mountain tourism and the performance throughout the life cycle phases must be determined taking into account the sustainability measures. In this case when the essence of tourism activity is given by its attractiveness, beauty of the landscape, the natural and cultural heritage, these attributes will be considered for estimating the tourism performance.

A. External and internal factors that affect the Tourism Area Life Cycle

Even when the TALC model was developed, in 1980, R. Butler warned that there can be no general formula with applicability to all categories of tourist region and, therefore, trends description of tourism development is subject of many doubts and disputes: „The curve evolution shape can vary greatly from one region to another being influenced by many factors like the growth rate, the local particularities, ... , the government policies, the evolutionary trends of similar regions” (R. Butler, 1980, p. 11). Agarwal (1997) believes that these set of factors determine the life cycle shape can be decomposed into two categories, namely internal factors and external factors.

Thereby, particularly for the Retezat National Park, the *internal factors* refers on the one hand to the unique attractions and tourism resources, the park’s organizing and advertising, the access infrastructure elements, bordered population and its attitude towards tourist movements, the attractions conservation degree and, secondly, to quality service offer and destination’s environment, generally speaking. Evolution of all these factors is difficult to predict and their impact on tourism development is crucial.

The realised studies count in the *external factors* category the travel agencies, the consumers and the state authorities. Typically, operators have a major impact, increasing the attractiveness elements but the Romanian socio-economic conditions does not encourage the entrepreneurship and operating RNP rules also limited the development of network operators. Changes in visitor preferences, their expectations and demands are factors that have increased their needs. RNP administrators declare

that the structure of visitor categories has changed in recent decades, social emancipated process removed tourists among young and students, rich and medium populations. Paradoxically, although at the global level the natural parks ongoing nature intact and preserve landscapes contribute to the emergence of interest in certain tourism categories, in Romania, mountain tourism and especially alpine tourism are slightly decreasing. State intervention has a negative impact, support private initiative by subsidizing tourism being until now underestimated.

B. Interferences of social, economic and environmental change

In any specific domain of human life, these issues cannot remain petrified like a photographic snapshot, being subject of evolution trends. It appears that the flows of visitors toward the tourist destinations usually evolve proportionally with the authenticity degree of the local culture and customs and inversely to the amplified decline of environmental quality. If for the first stages of the Butler's life cycle (exploring and involvement) the impact on nature is insignificant, with the increasing of tourist's number spawn new services and facilities related claims, pressure elements on the ecological conservation and on natural security which gradually transform even a protected park into a more or less urbanized area.

Many studies draw a warning on environmental issues associated with the tourism transformation into a mass activity in natural parks (pollution, deforestation, stress on flora and fauna, etc.), followed by urbanization and landscape change - only mention here the analysis developed by Ansson (1998) on Yellowstone Park.

Regarding the impact of social transformations, G.V. Doxey (1976, p. 26) studied the residents behaviour faced with the developing of tourism activities and noting that the attitude of residents go from euphoria and acceptance to apathy and annoyance as the number of visitors and tourism pressure increased.

Interdependent trajectory between the tourist transformations and economical dynamic in the evolutionary TALC pattern has already proven: with the reaching of the consolidation stage, local economy is dependent on tourism and local suppliers and tour operators are the most important existing actors.

C. Interpretation of tourism development in the RNP area based on the tourist activity life cycle model

This study represents the first attempt to apply the famous model realised by R. Butler in 1980 and we choose a Romanian tourist entity; also, is one of few research oriented on a tourist region mostly devoted to alpine tourism.

The region was part of a controversial historical territory at the intersection of several empires (Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian / Habsburg Empires with fleeting interest even from the Russian one), the property current territory belonging long-time to Hungarian noble families. Currently, the area is divided by many owners, some of them heirs of Hungarian noblemen Owners who do not show interest to exploit their priceless tourism possession – some of them for the reason that authorities imposed impediments and others because of lack of interest and investment funds.

By reference to the model proposed by Butler and validated in many studies, can say with certainty that the development of tourism in Retezat yet overlapping stages of exploration and involvement, and today we can be considered an early period of development stage.

While beauty places was mentioned even in some chronicles of the gone centuries, even if some representatives of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cultural elite (poets, painters) were attracted to the region, this area was frequented under organized tourist activities only in the twentieth century with the proliferation of recreational activities in Romania, with the propaganda of the first bodies to support tourism and development stages of transforming the region into a national park, then protected areas and UNESCO objective.

Exploration stage. We can identify the first organized forms of tourism only between the two world wars in the years 1930 - 1940 when, thanks to the Romanian Touring-Club, a rudimentary access routes were arranged, was built the first hut inside the RNP (Pietrele Cottage, 1936-1937) and was extensively promoted the visit of forest and glacial areas. After 1919, the whole RNP territory belongs to Romania. The authorities realize the value of Carpathian unity and begin to initiate their organization, with the declaration of the first national park in Romania, in 1935. Under the jurisdiction of Environment and Development Ministries, the park start to attract the public attention thanks to researchers in various fields (geographers, sociologists, anthropologists) who trying to make known the value of these lands by presenting their studies. There were no roads, railways or other establishments with facilities although mountain attractions have millenary tradition: researchers, journalists, photographers, athletes and other adventurers and explorers often crossing the alpine region. We revealed the emergence of several national tourism clubs but also were interested for this corner of nature: Bucharest, Cluj, Sibiu, Timișoara Clubs and their nearest branches. To note as the most influential organization the Retezat Department of Rumanian Touring Club established in Deva city that assumed the most intensive procedures of declare the mountain as National Park.

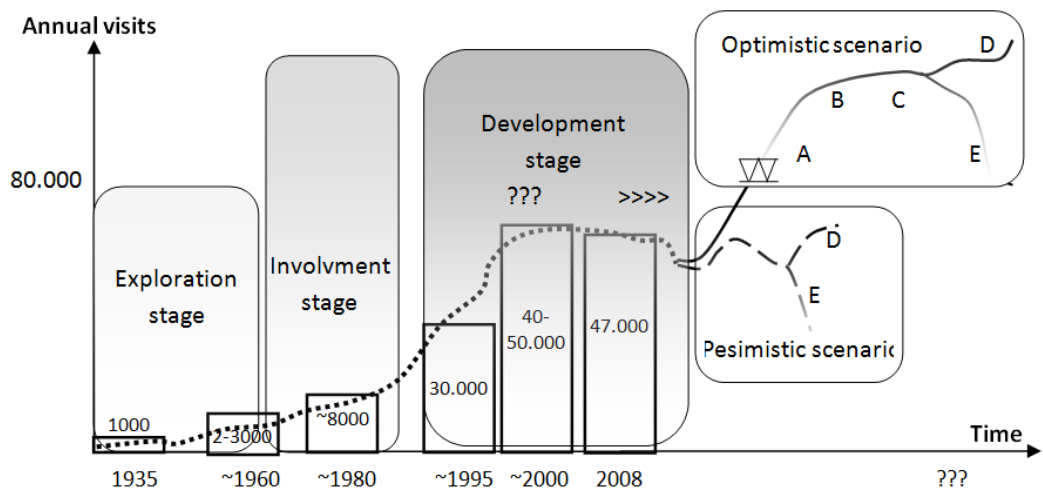


Figure no. 3 – Representing the development cycle of the Retezat National Park tourism area (Observations: A signify the development stage, B – consolidation, C – stagnation, D – rejuvenation, E – decline)

Source: author's synthesis using data directly collected.

After the troubled period of Second World War extended for several years in which the Retezat Mountain was suspected to protect some of the new system's

combatants, tourist activities were resumed that due to the development of industrial infrastructure in the region (high mining operations in the Jiu Valley). Although the number of tourists is not so big (Travel Club records for the period 1940-1960 considering only a few hundred visitors per month), we highlight the increasing frequency of organized students groups come here from many parts of the country for study and leisure. Later most visits come from Jiu Valley and Hațeg Basin workers - point out that numerous visits are focused only on certain days - august 23- National Day, may 1 - Labour Day or in weekends, when recreational activities were permitted by political system.

The park becomes important for high authorities who come here in official visits with propaganda and control purpose of industrial activities. However, note the presence of several ministers and officials after 1960 visiting the Park and attracting the interest by their mere presence.

In the *involvement stage* the tourism is increasing, the region development combining the Mountain Club actions to conserve the natural beauties and the expansion of communication by extending the forestry roads network and provide the auto routes. Notably is also the expansion of industrialization affecting the ecological security threat - major objectives are established such as Gura Râului hydropower, big sources for population's water supply, large forestry companies. Adjacent to such activities, the tourism activity of course is also developing both in establishments for hosting workers but also in new buildings and cottages with tourist functionality. The destination is promoted in press and literature trough a considerable number of appearances with "traveling in Retezat" theme. Despite the inaccessibility that attracted few artists and other social categories, noted in 70-80 years the presence of many Hungarian researchers and hikers. From now, the participation in Retezat tourism become traditional for the passionate mountain neighbours, knowing that there are no mountains in Hungary.

We considered that the development stage started after 1990 with the increasing number of foreign tourists, many hut owners saying: "we provide shelter for many Hungarians, Czechs, Poles, Germans, Dutch, Ukrainians but also French, Swedish or English. Their weight is usually balanced with that of domestic tourists".

Park Administration has no houses and hostels in Retezat area. Inside the park there are several shelters and old cottages, providing only refuge for resting and no other services. In the buffer zone of the National Park has developed a series of hostels, also private: Anița, Dumbrăvița, Gura Zlata, Belvedere.

According to a 2001 Metromedia survey, a rate of only 6% of families located in the park area were involved in tourism activities. Although this percentage has seen an upward trend, seems not to have exceeded 20% in 2009. This involvement rate is relatively low considering the attractiveness of the oldest and most famous national park in Romania. However, the same survey from 2001 indicate that 50% of total local residents planning to engage in the tourism sector which leads us to conclude that the local suppliers of tourism services dynamics can certainly increase.

However, the development stage is currently emerging even noting a slight visitors decrease in the last 2-3 years. It should be noted that increase tourists after 1990 is due to greater attraction for foreign than domestic visitors.

The category of factors that will continue to support the development we mentioned the media events (we remember here to exemplify only the National Park selection to represent Romania in the prodigious campaign The New Seventh World

Wonders which had a remarkable ranking), the increasing number of symposiums, conferences, screenings and, of course, the rise of ecotourism worldwide. Although Retezat tourism market is changing, there exist the risk of curbing growth and direct transition to the decline stage. Although it is unlikely, this pessimistic scenario is illustrated in the figure no. 3 and can be improved through tourism rejuvenation (in support of this possibility, we mention the option of developing the industrial type tourism taking into account the existing lake and rockfill dam of Gura Apelor, unique in Europe, and many other industrial projects in the area).

The optimistic alternative scenario implied the advance of current development stage by attracting more tourists through eco-attractions, the development of new tourist complexes, the acceleration of facilities projects, like the Râușor one in the North of the Park, where they can make a slopes complex for winter sports (also in West region, at Gura Zlata, was proposed such development projects which are also expected to be implemented). Surely these factors could lead to a long development and to a long-term perpetual consolidation.

In fact, other projects cover an ongoing process recalling in this regard the Project of Biodiversity Management, the projects of Ministry of Regional Development which has considerable funds which intends to allocate to Retezat National Park area initiatives.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The main management objectives in Retezat National Park are the conservation of biodiversity and the environmental education. In the recent years, several NGOs have carried out control and monitoring of tourism activities, environmental education and sanitation activities of campsites and walking trails. The park administration will organize such activities in the future and will maintain the cooperation with the NGOs working in the area for the development of sustainable tourism.

The experiences shown in this study confirmed the attending of first two Butler's model stages and the current progress of development stage. Working with environmental, socio-cultural and economic factors, we even proposed two scenarios that continue these three stages, the optimistic one who state that development will be longer evolve and will be further sustained through strengthened but also a pessimistic one which provides a regression in the following period due to change of fashion tourism and public disinterest which is totally focused on other ways to time spending.

To revive and continue the positive tourism activities evolutions in Retezat area we pointed out the need of conducting mediated events, exemplified by the impact it had declaration of Sibiu as European cultural capital or the publicity enjoyed by Retezat with their participation at global campaign The New 7th Wonders.

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