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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

***PLEASURE SPORTIV TURISM IN CENTRAL GROUP OF EASTERN
CARPATHIANS***

- Rezume -

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Keywords: *tourism, leisure tourism, sports tourism, tourist potential, Central Group of the Eastern Carpathians, tourism evolution, lime relief, volcano relief, climate potential, hydrographic potential, National Park, infrastructure, ways of communication, lodgings units, tourist traffic, Summer Sports Tourism, Winter Sports Tourism, hiking, alpinism, climbing, speotourism, mountain-biking, canyoning, rafting, paragliding, Equestrian Tourism, skiing, snowboarding, economic aspects, ecologic aspects, tourism planning and land development models, touristic regional division*

Introduction

The Romanian Leisure and Sports Tourism along with the economic and social development went from strength to strength. An important aspect represents the demand and intention of the autochthon population, the certain need of the powerful public awareness, so every inhabitant should contribute to the „general cleanliness”, the preservation of the archtictonical and cultural traditions, the assurance of a congenial psychosocial climate, the politeness and the straight communication by means of foreign languages. The fundamental idea is that if a tourist arrives to a certain region it will consume and therefore there will always be repercussions on all social levels. The relief of this area presents all the necessary components for the Sports, Ecological, Cultural, Scientific Tourism (beeing in full growth).

This PhD-Thesis in Tourism Geography has been written according to a conceived original model that encloses an ample scientific approach structured in ten chapters.

The chapters of the present thesis are:

Introduction – The introductive chapter states the arguments for the choice of the thesis Topic, presents the localization of the region submitted in the problem statement and it defines accurately the Central Zone of the Eastern Carpathians, limits directed by Pop, Gr. P. (2006) „*Carpathians and Subcarpathians in Romania, Second Edition Revised and Enlarged.*”

Chapter I - Evolution of the Leisure and Sports Tourism in Romania – this chapter presents certain historical records concerning the evolution of the Leisure and Sports Tourism starting with the oldest known attestations of these activity practices in our country. The first registrations are from 130 A.D. that attest the early presence of the Balneal Toursim by reason of the thermal baths. As to the sports records, the Description of Sarmatian Europe (Sarmatiae

Europeae descriptio), a chronicle published by the Italian chronicler, Alexander Guagnini, in 1578 (in Cracow) must be emphasized. This “descriptio” informs about the skiing activity in the chapter - that describes the Carpathian lands with their forests and - that refers to the inhabitants of Ceremes. The “boundary stone” in the evolution of the Leisure Tourism represents certainly the establishment of the royal family’s summer residence in Sinaia. After the edification of the Castle Peleş in 1875 Sinaia became city in 1885 and therewith the first Carpathian Health Resort Center. Leaping forward in time another important record must also be adverted, namely the worldwide appearance of the extreme sports in the 1980’s and its attendance in our country after 1990.

Chapter II - *Tourist potential of the Central Group of the Eastern Carpathians* – the second chapter focuses on the term *Tourist Potential* and defines it – by quoting N. Ciangă (N. Ciangă, 2006) - as „a complex of natural and anthropic attraction factors exploited through the tourism planning and land development that engender tourist fluxes with destination areas where the tourist product (resulted by the given potential and its arrangement) is consumed in a particular manner”. Hereinafter the geologic, climate and bioclimatic potential is presented where the objective focuses on the temperature, precipitations, nebulosity, wind velocity, thermal comfort index, factors that influence the tourist flux in a specific period as the hydrographic potential with its rivers, lakes and mineral springs; vegetation potential and fauna potential. The National Parks and Natural Reservations of the studied geographical zone are also presented due to the fact that they have a defining impact on the Leisure and Sports Tourism in the mountains.

Chapter III - *General infrastructure for the Leisure and Sports Tourism in the Central Group of the Eastern Carpathians* – this chapter presents the infrastructure of the communications and lodging units. The material basis and infrastructure embraces the entirety of the lodging-, therapeutic-, leisure-, public alimentation- and communication means in order to satisfy the tourist demand. The material basis sets the objective for the subjects that in a certain preset period exploit the components of the natural or anthropic tourist capital background. The communications infrastructure is developed but not well sustained. By reason of the regional population, the localities (municipalities, cities, communes, villages) are defined by a rich communications network. Hence the european-, national-, county-, commune-, intercommune-roads, logging roads, paths and trails surround the studied area. The lodging units structure is

divided into the following categories: hotels, pensions, motels, chalets, camps, villas, campings, hostels, shelters and refugees. These lodging units are included and studied in this thesis. The scientific work mentions 26930 lodging-places allocated in the lodging units of the Eastern Carpathians and defines them as follows:

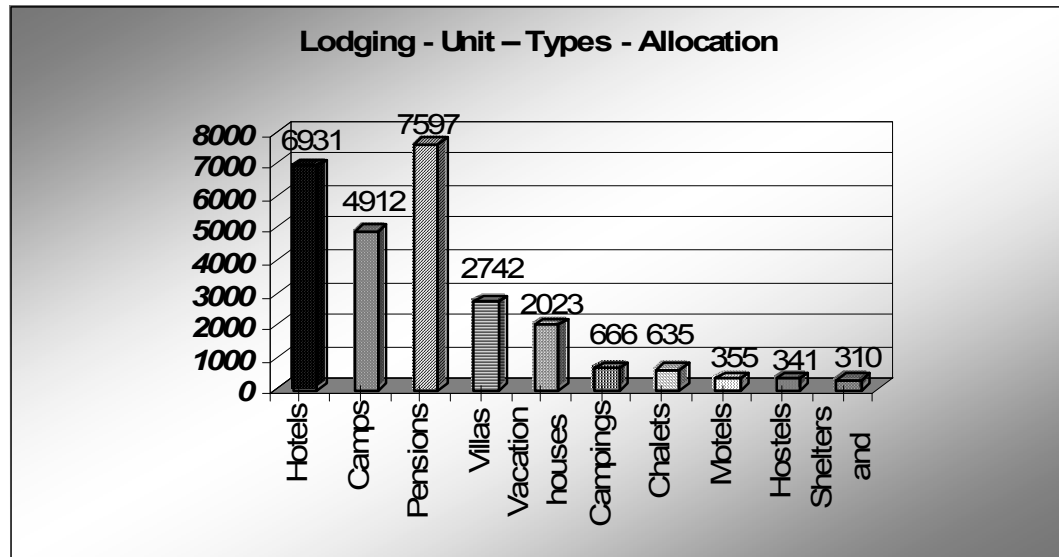


Fig. nr. 1 – Lodging - Unit – Types - Allocation

Whereby the territorial allocation of these units represents a research work, an important part of this thesis that attests the:

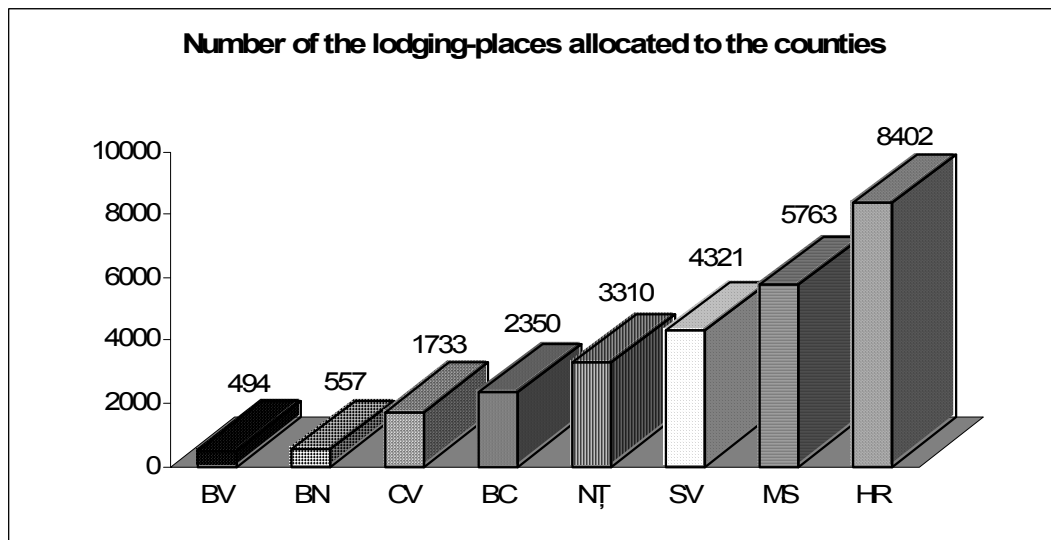


Fig. nr. 2 – Number of the lodging-places allocated to the counties

This research shows that the most lodging places are found in Harghita County -hereby the fact must be mentioned that the whole area of the Harghita County is part of the studied

Eastern Carpathians. The counties Mureş and Neamţ are also included in this thesis because of their health and balneary stations and municipalities that represent in important tourist starting point for the studied region.

Chapter IV – *Tourist Traffic* – the fourth chapter presents the results of a research work based on a special questionnaire that was applied to the tourists in two different tourist attraction zones. The first attraction point is the Red Lake (Lacul Roşu), a station of international interest and the second one is the Şugău Cave, a tourist objective of local interest. The results were compared considering the following factors: age, provenance, scholar education, professional situation, objective-media, conveyance, lodging units etc.

Analyzing the results the conclusion came out that the two tourist objective points are visited by the same tourist group, travelling by personal means of conveyance. Interestingly the most common factor of the mentioned comparison proved to be the cheap lodging unit. In some cases tourists appeal to their acquaintance and relatives in order to reduce their lodging costs.

This study proves that the lodging units do not offer enough attractive activities, programmes for the tourists that want to spend their leisure time. But besides that there is also a need for organising hiking activities with informational, scientific or even sports purposes for the younger generations. This way the need for lodgings would grow and this would finally have a positive impact on the economic and social level.

Chapter V – *Exploitation forms defined by the Leisure and Sports Tourism* – this chapter is the principal chapter of the present Phd Thesis. It focuses on all the possibilities of leisure and sports, especially Extreme Sports in the Central Zone of the Eastern Carpathians. The moto-sports (motocross, atv's, motor boats etc.) play an important role in the Sports Tourism, they are however excluded from this research work due to the fact that they represent a dangerous air and ear pollution factor for the fauna especially in the protected zones.

Out of all tourism forms the Mountain Tourism is one's best way to recreate its physical and psichical resources after the exhausting every day activities. The Mountain Tourism defines an important tourism-element that combines through its certain activity-profile the two station categories including the diversification tendency of the station activities and their poli-functionality but also the mountain with its special morpho-landscape (altitude, morpho-elements, energy, slope etc.) defines the tourist circuit.

The Mountain Tourism is divided in several categories: Winter Sports Tourism, Itinerary Mountain Tourism, Trekking, Hiking, Sports Tourism, Alpinism Tourism etc.

In the Central Zone of the Eastern Carpathians multiple Sports Tourism activities can be practiced under optimal circumstances being grouped - depending on the certain season- in Winter Sports Tourism activities or in Summer Sports Tourism activities whereby the possibility of the not very old Extreme Sports branch must also be mentioned.

Two models are hereby presented that illustrate the forms of Summer and Winter Sports Tourism:

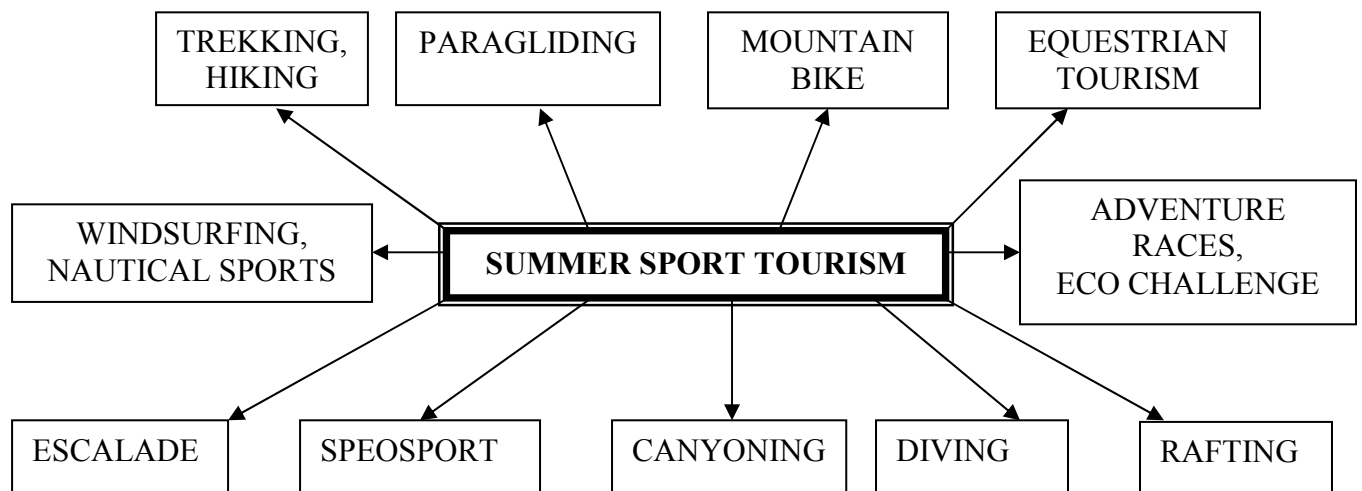


Fig. nr. 3 - *Forms of Summer Sports Tourism*
(Model by Drăgoi, C. 2004 completed by the author)

Trekking, Hiking - representing important forms of Summer Sports Tourism - can be easily practiced in this zone by reason of the logging roads network, clear paths and traces defining a distance of 5347,3 km. These are allocated along the mountain massives, where the fewest marked routes are found in the Tarcău-Goşmanu Mountains(6) while the most in the Călimani Mountains(29) and their total number rises to 205 routes with 423 variants.

The thesis presents in a detailed manner the most important routes marked adequately defined by the starting and finishing point.

The next subject to present is the **Alpinism Tourism**. According to the performed research the Central Zone of the Eastern Carpathians presents an enormous potential for alpinism and escalade. The most escalade routes are found in the Hăghimaş Mountains, the zone

of Cheile Bicazului and Cheile Șugăului, in the Rarău Mountains with defined routes on the Pietrele Doamnei, Piatra Șoimului, Piatra Mare and finally in the Perșani Mountains the Cheile Vârghișului with 10 defined routes also well arranged for speo-alpine techniques schools (organising SAT courses and courses for advanced -life-guards).

Tabel no. 1. – *Number of escalade and alpinism routes in the zone of the Eastern Carpathians*

N ^o	Mountains	Location	Nr. of routes
1.	Hăghimaș Mountain	Bicaz Gorge Șugău Gorge	199
2.	Rarău Mountain	Doamnei Stones Șoimului Stones Piatra Mare	50
3.	Perșani Mountain	Vârghiș Gorge	10
		TOTAL	259

Speotourism is also an important branch. Just in the Central Zone there are catalogued more than 200 cavities. The important ones are to find in the Cheile Vârghișului and the most presentive is the Big Cave (Peștera Mare) in Merești that defines a longituide of 1527m. Besides the mentioned ones there are catalogued 125 underground holes.

The only cave open for the public with specialized guides is the Șugău Cave in Voșlobeni. It attracts an annual flux of more than 5000 tourists in spite of being only defined by a local interest objective.

The thesis presents the Caves in the Rarău Mountains, the zone of Borsec and the volcano or pseudo carst in the Călimani Mountains.

Mountain biking – is an Extreme Sports branch that can be practiced on the logging roads and the marked tourist paths.

Rafting – is a nautic sport activity of riding on a raft over rough, dangerous parts of a fast-flowing river and is also categorized as an Extreme-Sports form. The thesis names three important rivers on that rafting can be practiced: Mureș, Olt and Bistrița. In the spring time when the snow melts and the rivers are defined by an encreased river debit this sport can be practiced also on the river’s extended parts.

In the following tabel the optimal rafting rivers are presented:

Tabel no. 2 – *Rafting practice potential on the rivers of the Eastern Carpathians*

No.	River	Between locations	Length
1	Olt	Tușnadu Nou – Băile Tușnad – Bixad	12,6 km
2	Mureș	Toplița – Stânceni – Lunca Bradului – Răstolița – Deda	42 km
3	Bistrița	Dorna Arini – Sunători – Chirili – Crucea – Holda - Broșteni	45 km

Canyoning – represents the sports and leisure activities. This particular branch is by some authors defined as an aquatic sports-form while others consider it as an individual sports-form. It is a new discipline that appeared in the 80's and invented by a group of french speleologists. In the beginning - seen from the technique angle - it was divided into escalade and speleology defining it as „getting-over” and „climbing-down” the stream and creek defined canyons.

In contrast with speleology the getting-down in the cave presupposes also the climbing-up to the surface while by canyoning there is just one direction, namely the course defined by the downstream.

There are several „Canyoning Paradises” in Cheile Bicazului and its precincts, Cheile Lapoșului, Bicăjelului, Cupașului, Pârâul Oii, Pârâul Sec, Pârâul Ecem etc., and in Ceahlău (Duruitoarea Cascade).

Windsurfing – this sport is involving over water travel on a small board powered by aeolian acting on a single sail. It is necessary to have a special training and balance skills in order to practice the windsurfing.

The Central Zone of the Eastern Carpathians presents ideal places to practice this sport as the Izvorul Muntelui Lake, Sfânta Ana Lake, Poiana Uzului Lake, the Frumoasa Lake and the Colibița Lake (barrier lake) in Bălan.

Diving – the Diving Tourism is relatively poor in the Carpathian zone. This activity is practiced in the sea, however there are more and more diving activities to notice in the mountain lakes. Attracted to an entire new world being rich in colours and its harmless inhabitant

population one can find peace and seize the sensation of imponderability known by the astronauts.

Besides the Saint Ana Lake where diving is officially practised there are the Izvorul Muntelui Lake, the barrier lake Colibița (Bălan), Frumoasa Lake and the Poiana Uzului Lake.

Equestrian Tourism – is a popular form of Leisure Tourism with a reduced impact on the environment, similar to the cyclotourism, representing a mean of transportation passing long distances. Equestrian Tourism is also very popular on the international level defining a gigantic national potential considering that the horse represents a traditional mean of transportation in Romania being used in all the rural localities.

There are many offers presented by different pensions from Vatra Dornei, the Harghita Mountains, the Ilvelor zone where 5 day - trips (lodging included) are organized.

Paragliding – some newly appeared activities in the mountain zone such as the paragliding that presents a reduced activity by reason of a relative restrained public. This activity shows however a slow development. Certainly there are certain risk, cost and time barriers that need to be beaten and mostly there has to be an optimal practice space that are hard to find. Such places can be found in Bălan, Șumuleu Ciuc, Lunca de Jos, Ozun.

The following table presents the Winter Sports Forms:

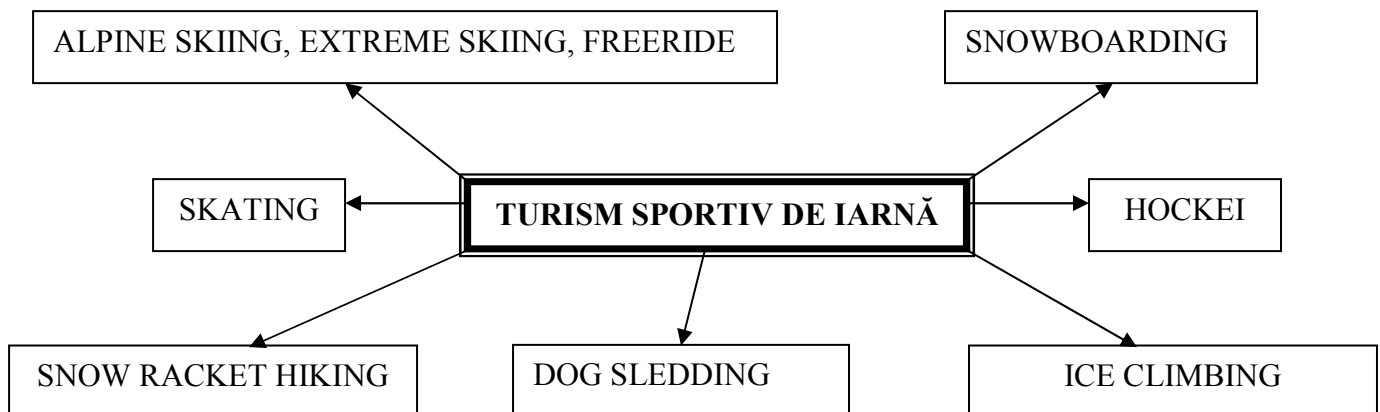


Fig. nr.4 - *Winter Sports Forms*
(Model by Drăgoi, C. 2004 completed by the author)

Alpine Skiing and Snowboarding – represents the principal form of the romanian mountain tourism. Romanian tourists but also international ones practice this sports discipline in the mountain routs or near the chalets and altitude hotels that offer proper skiing conditions.

These routes are properly indicated, secure and assisted by rescue-teams. The routes are modern and fitted with cable transport installations. Seven out of thirtyfive are defined by nocturne lighting. The total route longitude is 23.728 m. long.

Skiing Tourism defines also Ski de Fond, Nordic Skiing (practiced on the marked snow-bound paths and traces) and Extreme Skiing - also called Freeride – whereby skiing is practiced in unconventional, more dangerous abrupted zones representing a higher risc for the participants.

Snow Racket Hiking – the ampleness of this very activity is intensively confirmed from year to year. Its success and its popularity is defined by the interest in feeling the freedom on the snow-bound paths. It represents a direct competition for the Ski de Fond due to the fact that it does not require any particular technique hence ther is no need for a certain training. Snow Racket Hiking is the best hiking option in the mountains in snowy winter days. It is considered that its success will compete with the success of the Summer Hiking.

Ice Climbing – is an alpinism alike activity. It defines ascensions on ice flanks but also extreme difficult technical ascensions. The new popular form of ice climbing presupposes ascensions on frozen falls, ice stalactites and snow-bound cliffs.

The perfect places for such activity are fair in zones with waterfalls defined by adequate water debits that freeze in winter-time when the temperature gets low, so the best places are in the freezing mountain zones and zones above a certain altitude.

Dog Sledding – this sport appeared in Romania in the last millenium - especially - in the central zones of the country. The central zones are Miercurea Ciuc, Odorheiu Secuiesc, Bălan. The first organized sledding competitions started in these centers dating back to the last millenium. The most important zones where this sport is practiced today are Borsec, Miercurea Ciuc, Bălan, Sânmartin and Odorheiu Secuiesc.

Chapter VI – *Economic Aspects of the Leisure and Sports Tourism*

The sixth chapter presents the necessary equipment for practicing the Mountain Leisure and Sports Tourism (including the Extreme Sports due to its potential). Hereinafter the thesis presents the costs of the certain equipments but also the sports practicing costs considering their forms, particular-practicing, alone-practicing and practicing with friends or considering the existence of special offers from Mountain Organisations or Sports Associations, Sports Clubs or

other sources that would assign such services to the tourists co-working with the lodging units in order to offer them advertising programmes and recreation in the nature.

Tabel no. 3 – *Mountain Sport Practice Costs*

Sport	Individual practice price	Tourist offers
Trekking	800 RON	15 – 20 RON
EscaladE	3400 RON	400 – 900 RON
Speosport	4500 RON	8 – 20 RON
Mountain bike (MTB)	2600 RON	-
Rafting	1200 - 16000 RON	30 – 100 RON
Canyoning	4000 RON	100 RON
Windsurfing	900 – 2000 RON	-
Diving	12000 RON	227 RON
Equestrian tourism	-	50 – 800 RON 1500 €
Paragliding	1200 – 4000 RON	80 – 200 RON
Adventrue race		3800 RON
Ski, snowboard	2000 RON	-

Chapter VII – Ecological and Legislative Aspects of the Leisure and Sports Tourism –

The thesis started with the statement that the relationship tourism-environment plays an important role by the environment protection and conservation representing the primar condition of the the tourism progress and development. This bound is complex and progresses in two opponant directions. The natural environment with its components represents the basic resources of the tourism but on the other the fact must be mentioned that the tourist activity has a positive and also a negative influence on the ecological environment by modifying its compound elements.

The thesis approaches legislative aspects considering the leisure activities and the environment protection respectively the subject mountain environment protection. So in the following there are some remarked consequences of the wealth absence:

- a) visible erosions in the high zones of the mountains platforms due to the acces of the ski-tracks, mechanical installations (cable transport), to intensive despaturage etc.
- b) forest degradation through uncontrolled clearence
- c) natural landscape degradation due to economical exploitations (mines, construction rocks, forest area works)
- d) presence of tourist waste

- e) the multitude of the fire places on hills and valleys
- f) irrational wood (deal and other) and forest felling
- g) inappropriate maintenance of the paths and tourist routes, phenomenon with direct aspects on the surrounding environment
- h) control-lack of the tourist activities and environment protection norms
- i) absence of a proper culture and education concerning the Mountain Tourism (considering the youth).

Chapter VIII – *Tourism planning and land development models for the Leisure and Sports Tourism*

This chapter presents a tourism planning and land development model for the Leisure and Sports Tourism for the Zone of Cheile Bicazului because this region structures the necessary potential in order to define it as a model that can be applied in other climatic or balneoclimatic stations considering the planning and development possibilities.

Chapter IX – *Regional division of the Central Zone of the Eastern Carpathians for the Leisure and Sports Tourism*

The regional touristic division of Romania is the result of the governmental decision and plans to implement a new Direct Tourism Development and Financing Strategy on behalf of a programme made on the basis of the needs of the regional decision factors.

This chapter presents a touristic regional division important for the Leisure and Sports Tourism, hence the following regions must be mentioned: zone of the volcano mountains, the Perșani Mountains, Baraolt Mountains, Bodoc Mountains, the zone of Giumalău-Rarău, Bistricioarei, Giurgeului, Stânișoarei and Ceahlău; the Hăghimaș Mountains; Ciuc Mountains, the zone of Nemira, Tarcăulu, Goșmanu; zone of volcano barrier depressions and from the sports angle the karst zone – speotourism potential; the zone with Extreme Sports Tourism potential and the National Park zones.

Chapter X – *Conclusions and development perspectives*

The present Phd Thesis with the title „Sports and Leisure Tourism in the Central Group of the Eastern Carpathians” results a scientific research work on the leisure and sports potential of the studied area. The main goal is to analyze the the current structures that define all the possibilities that the tourists have in order to practice the mentioned activities elevating the communications and lodging infrastructure but also involving the current economical aspects.

A SWOT Analyses is presented whereat the most important featuring points of the studied region are accentuated. These are the following:

Strength points:

- Diversified relief, great nature's potential
- Easy territory access
- Density of the localities
- Tourism possibilitiesPosibilități etc.

Weaknesses points:

- Excessive water pollution
- Tourist zone pollution
- Precarious state of the roads and communications infrastructure
- Dissolution of lodging units
- Wrong tourist attitude (misinterpretation of the tourism phenomenon)

Opportunities:

- Extreme Sports potential exploitation
- Interaction between the lodging units and leisure services
- New sport disciplines planning
- Running European Development Programmes

This chapter presents new mountain tourism development possibilities for the Leisure and Extreme Sports with reduced costs and minimal nature implication. New practices and sports attractions can be obtained in order to attract the tourists that long for adventures in the nature. As a conclusion the fact must be mentioned that the studied area presents an important sports (also Extreme Sports) and leisure potential. The objective and the given task is to find the adequate partners as the authority representatives, sports asociations, lodging units leaders in order to exploit this nature given potential maximally with a low budget and gaining not just economical profit but also resulting a higher level of health factors, increasing the general culture by the obtained guide-infos and finally consolidating the love for nature and its beauty that actually increases our human value.

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