



SERVICES NATURE PROVIDES US

TOURISM RELATED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR DECISION MAKERS



MINISTERUL MEDIULUI





WHAT SERVICES DOES NATURE PROVIDE FOR TOURISM?

The term ecosystem services is an umbrella term for all those services that nature provides for society. The majority of these services - such as forest trees, grass as nutrition for animals, edible herbs, berries and mushrooms collected from forests and meadows, or nectare and honey collected by bees - constitute tangible material goods that contribute substantially to the physical and mental health and well-being of the local population as well as visitors. However, to realize a state of complete well-being it is necessary

to go beyond physical needs: inspiring and diverse natural environment that offers recreation and aesthetic experience. These services provided by the landscape are commonly known as "cultural services". The touristic value and attractiveness of a landscape is mostly determined by the existence of these cultural services or lack thereof. Unfortunately, we are losing them at an alarming rate, and their loss not only damages nature but represents a heavy economic burden, too.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF NATURE TO THE TOURISM OF THE NIRAJ-TÂRNAVA MICĂ REGION

Almost half of the region's landscapes received very high scores in terms of touristic attractiveness that constitutes important recreational opportunities for both tourists and local people and serves as a basis for emotional attachment. It is primarily villages, deciduous forests, wetlands, wood pastures and small-scale agricultural areas that are considered to represent cultural values. Based on the results of our

survey questionnaire conducted in nine settlements of the region, nature's indirect contribution to the revenues of the local tourism sector amounts to almost 17 million RON annually. The region, however, is presumed to have a significantly larger touristic potential as tourism in the hilly landscapes of the Niraj-Târnavă Mică region is still relatively underdeveloped compared to other parts of the region.



THE PRESENT STATE OF TOURISM

Despite the fact that Mureș County is visited by about 375000 visitors per year, the tourism sector employs only 6% of its population. At present, Sovata, Praid, and Sighișoara are three settlements on the border of the research area that utilize their tourism potential by attracting a great number of tourists. However, the rest of the region has not been able to capitalize on this. The region is interested in capitalizing on agricultural and rural tourism, however, no adequate tourism programs have been developed yet. Since the infrastructure of the key natural and cultural

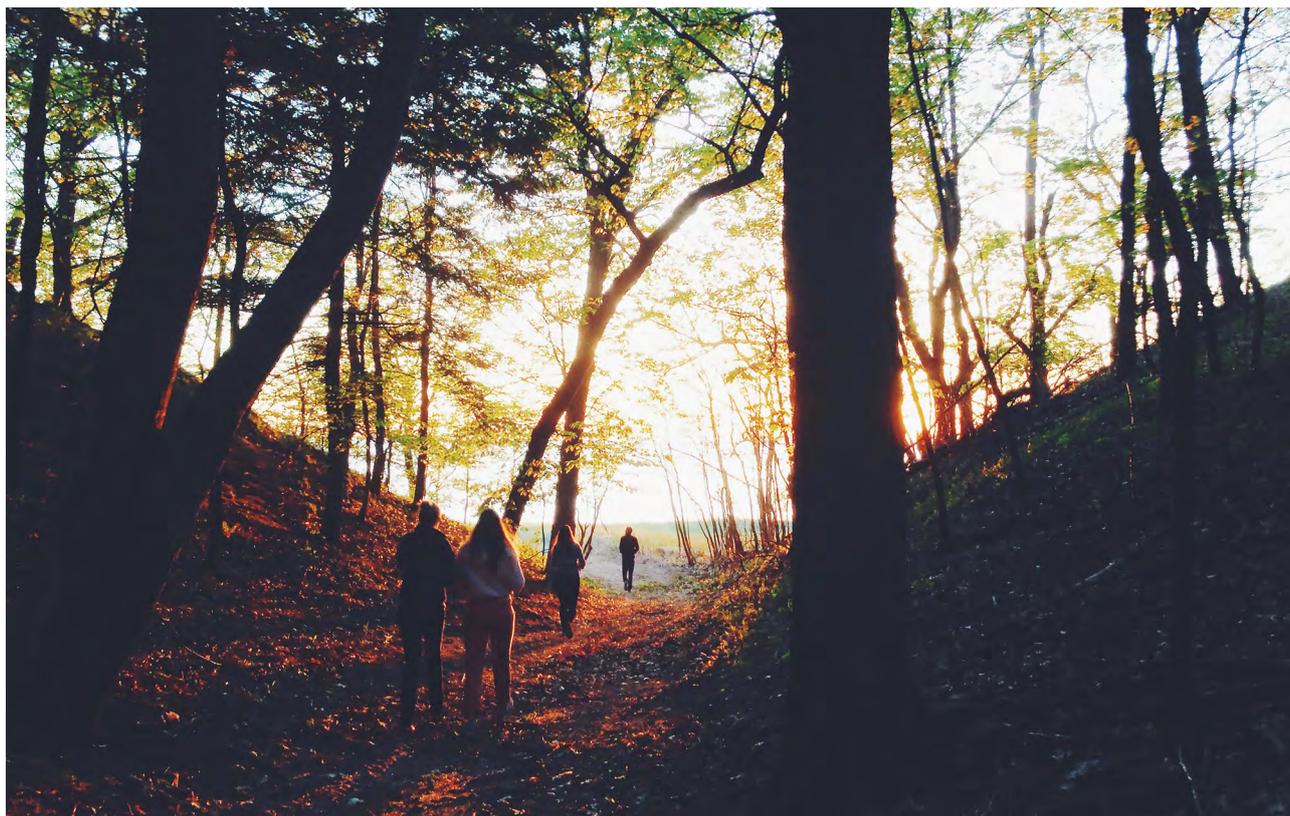
attractions is hardly developed yet, it is impossible, or at least difficult, to sell them on the tourism market. Lack of work opportunities, infrastructure (tourist trails, bicycle paths, hiking guidebooks, guided tours, sustainable festivals), and programs contributes to emigration among young people. Improving tourism could represent a breakout opportunity for them; however, at present there are no adequate tourism infrastructure, services (programs, tourist guides) or information.

WHAT DO WE INTEND TO ACHIEVE IN THE NIRAJ-TÂRNAVA MICĂ REGION BY 2040?

In our research, we have outlined an ideal scenario where the ecosystem services are all preserved and properly used. However, in order to achieve this, we need to act in the present.

According to this ideal scenario, both the population and its living standards will have increased by 2040. There will be a busy community life, a strong community which will concentrate and actively guide local

life, which, in turn, will contribute to the recovery of tourism. Traditional professionals will gain in importance again. Tourism built on local, natural assets is one of the most important forms of livelihood, which could also lead to an increase in the number of businesses. Tourism is seen as a major economic factor in the future. Small-scale, soft tourism will be driven by local companies.



WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ENHANCE TOURISM?

Improvement of tourism is also beneficial for boosting living standards, formation of a strong community, and increasing the population. To achieve this, adequate infrastructure and programs (sports communities, choirs, and groups preserving traditions) are necessary as are investing in community life and creating adequately attractive local fairs. Traditional trades have great potential for touristic attractiveness; to revive and preserve them, adequate expertise and training as well as demand need to be secured.

The region's tourism potential is not sufficiently exploited but in the future, through relevant investments, it can grow into a leading sector. Local enterprises need to be encouraged to become small-scale and environmentally friendly, building on local natural and cultural assets and preserving them.

For prosperous tourism adequate infrastructure needs

to be developed (good quality, small catering establishments, nature trails, bicycle paths, renovated community spaces, drinking water wells, toilets), village fairs created and financing secured. Equally important is implementing spatial planning regulation, which will ensure the preservation of traditional villages and disallow building establishments that are alien to the region and its culture. To increase touristic attractiveness, it is important to take stock, in addition to infrastructure, of natural assets, adequately promote the region, create attractive programs, and create relevant expertise. In order for all this to materialize, financing of regional and local tourism organizations is indispensable. It is important to secure EU and state subsidies to help create such enterprises. Furthermore, introduction of a special tourism tax is possible whose revenue would serve the development of tourism.

TO ACHIEVE THIS WE RECOMMEND:

- Highlighting the importance of small-scale environmentally friendly tourism in the National Tourism Development Master Plan,
- Supporting small-scale environmentally friendly tourism (supporting job creation, developing local tourism infrastructure, as well as compiling and disseminating relevant information) in the framework of the Operational Programmes targeting competitiveness and regional development,
- Launching educational programmes of high quality for the region's tourism enterprises and entrepreneurs
- Developing a financing mechanism e.g. in the form of a special tax whose revenue only serves the development of tourism infrastructure development
- Establishing local, small-region, county or regional level tourism associations that perform primarily promotional, advocacy and human resource development tasks

For further information, see publications „*What is the way forward? - Scenarios for the Niraj and Târnava-Mică region with relation to ecosystem services*”, and “*How much are nature's gifts worth? - The summary study of mapping and assessment of ecosystem services in the Niraj-Târnava Mică region's Natura 2000 sites*”.

Available at: www.milvus.ro/ecoservices.

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