

DISCONTINUITIES AND INADVERTENCES IN MOUNTAIN TOURISM

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Abstract:

For some, mountain outings represent hikes; for some – rock climbing, and for others they consist of staying in a pension or hotel, while enjoying a pool in addition to the comfort of their home. This paper considers hiking enthusiasts, especially those who set off from their camp in the morning and return to their tent or non-luxurious accommodation in the evening.

Key words: *tourism, tracks, clubs, hikes, trail blazes*

JEL classification: M3

Sporting a length of over 900 kilometers, the area that the Carpathian Mountains occupy in Romania represents 27.7% of the country's territory, according to the Encyclopedia of Romania. In the '90s, a trip to the mountains organized by a medium university (800-1000 students) could gather over 30 students eager to hike on the mountain trails. Year by year this number has decreased.

I have reached this conclusion by keeping trace of the condition of cabins situated in various tourist points, the condition of rest areas once built along the paths. Of course, we are all inclined to blame the lack of funding, the expensiveness of lodging places and food, but we must also consider the lack of interest of pre-university teachers regarding trip organizing. This statement is also a consequence of the fact that during the past years it has become increasingly difficult to notice groups of school students on a trip accompanied by at least one teacher, that teacher with a passion for mountaineering and desire to share this love with their students. To support this statement there is a study of the high school websites in our country, through which we have obtained an unexpected result: trips are not a part of the leisure time activities or are not deemed worthy of a special page, even if they are part of the extracurricular activities (according to the 5.25% high school forums where trips are discussed). However, 12.28% of high schools mention organized trips and 8.77% even have images or photo albums, with the observation that these percentages also include cultural trips outside the country or in different cities. Forum search (where it was allowed) was performed in succession with the key words „trip”, „hike”, „camp”, „mountain” (both singular and plural). If a search tool was unavailable, the topics were browsed individually. Apparently this work is difficult and inefficient, but, in general, forums attached to high school websites are not large in size. This also denotes the fact that high schools do not constitute a liaison for their own students.

The above result is disappointing because Romania is full of associations, tourism clubs which advocate a touristic Romanian and proper legislation which tends to needs such as hiking, mountaineering, and extreme mountain sports. Some of these clubs and associations are:

- **Alpinet**, a club with over 28,000 members, club which started with a simple forum and newsletter and which now supports editing specialty magazines. Members benefit from various collaboration tools such as: the tour planner,

photo album management and photographic competitions on different topics, hike journals, information about cabins, tourist attractions, maps etc.

- **Asociația Montană Carpați (Montana Association Carpathians)** - operating since 2008, built by members of the carpati.org portal. Their activities range from marking and cleaning of paths, to mountain education for students and preschoolers. They are also the organizers of protests against destruction through deforestation, construction of hydropower and excessive hunting.
- **Veniți cu noi! (Come with Us!)** – from the city of Arad, active since 1985; although it is a club specializing in trips around Arad, it is admirable due to its longevity and preservation of its specific.
- **Clubul Montan Carpați 29 (The Mountain Club Carpathians 29)** – the club of the Cluj-Napoca city, aimed especially at high scholars and university students.
- **Clubul Montan Apuseni (The Mountain Club Apuseni)** – from the same city, custodian of three reservations between 2005-2010: Piatra Ceții, Cheile Tecșetilor and Poienile cu Narcise from Tecșești.

Clubs generally own well developed websites, with maps, track descriptions, weather information, advice on mountain equipment and representative contact information.

Amongst many club activities a frequent one is trail blazing. This constitutes not only painting trees or rocks but also building poles with explicative panels. Despite this, on the field, meaning in the mountains, the situation is many times disastrous. In 2004 I have described a first tourist track in the Mehedinți Mountains, from the Spring of Vârzob, situated on the road which connects the Valley of Cerna to Baia de Aramă, and the Peak of Stan and Plains of Beletina (the article, în Romanian language, is posted on the Alpinet site). The track is accessible and easy.

My findings then were: most of the tourist markings were completely deteriorated, no longer visible or missing in important orientation points. The ascent to the Peak of Stan was made with the help of tree scratches made by kind tourists. I have considered it an accident but this determined me to pay attention to other markings as well. From 2004 until now, the situation has not improved although we almost weekly hear of improperly equipped tourists getting lost and, most often, this happens in the tourist areas with the most traffic: the valleys of the Bucegi Massif.

Problems brought on by unfit markings can be synthesized in the following categories:

- Many times the new marking differs from the previously used one, which is also used in the few maps available on the Internet or in bookshops; the chosen markings may not only differ, but can intersect the path of another track using the same marking, situation which leads to getting lost.
- Marking is done (especially out of funds obtained from European programs) only in a few places, for example both ends of the track and the easily accessible parts, where the „rusty” office authorities are assumed to be brave enough to venture for work inspections.
- The marking does not follow any tourist logics, it seems to be made only to use the paint, confusing tourists, it is frequent in the obvious portions of the track and completely missing in intersections or areas with unclear paths.

The last of these situations presented is one of the most dangerous or can convince a novice to trips to give up in favor of sitting on their couch. For instance:

- Somewhere in the mountains I have come across the markings of a track which I have followed several times but still have been unable to discover where it begins or where it ends, even more so the indications were at one point towards an abandoned road, which was steep and highly dangerous.
- A track abundantly marked through SAPARD funding was designed so that a stream had to be crossed every other minute. Of course, if the markings were made during a very dry summer, in August, the crossings were easy, however, the same path becomes tormenting during spring or autumn, driving tourists away; of course, the path circulated by locals did not present these issues.
- Sometimes the old tourist paths are interrupted by fences because the owners have had their lands returned to them, or these lands are now owned by people who do not care that the path has been always used not only by tourists, but also by local residents; the law does not tend to these situations.

The current status quo of the markings also reveals a lack of interest on part of the authorities in encouraging correct markings, thus attracting tourists to the paths. After talking to various hotel and pension owners, I have concluded that these owners perceive mountaineers as weak potential consumers: they do not take up rooms (as most prefer camping) and usually do not spend too much time in restaurants because they are traveling.

If we come to the conclusion that we would better buy a map or a tourist guide, we will discover that the published guides are, many times, republished editions of the old guides, perhaps of the well-known Our Mountains collections, and are not up to date with the inherent field changes. Creating new maps constitutes a lot of work, which we know is not compensated or supported.

Another phenomenon appeared on the book market in Romania: the fanciful mountain guides. These are books written by enthusiasts which cross the mountain trails on foot and then they describe them. The text can be filled by lyrics not yet put in a poem, legends, stories, comments that do not add value. "Interesting" experiences can be found squeezed in descriptions (for example, how someone lost his binoculars, how someone take pictures, or how inscription's corner is broken). These books have their role: they are easy to read, and they can attract new tourists on the mountain paths. Unfortunately, on the spot, traveler can find with no delight that descriptions are not accurate, or a path declared as difficulty two, in fact is extremely unfriendly after a short rain.

As in other areas, there is feverish activity of mountain lovers. Unfortunately, the media in Romania has little concern in promoting positive information about the constructive aspects of the mountain trips. The news often refers to as a wolf / bear attacked a person or a domestic animal, or how some tourists get lost on a mountain path. Most often such tourists are called "unsuitably equipped" without taking into question the lack of marks, marking ineffective or even harmful. In the Romanian media, the dilettante news producers often harm human relationships with the natural environment.

Guide schools, which restarted their tradition in 1997, following a preparation that includes geography, are a sort of preparation that, when completed, is rewarded with a diploma unacknowledged by the Ministry of Education. This is in contradiction with the statements that say the school will orient itself towards market needs. At the present moment approximately 50 guide schools are in function, for which accreditation is difficult and perhaps hopeless.

The Mountain Law which was published in the Official Monitor has amongst its mountain policy objectives the protection and preservation of protected natural areas.

Unfortunately, many media signals, from the mountain lover forums, reveal abuses to which our country's nature is subjected, by the building of a high number of vacation homes, hotels, motels and pensions which cause imbalances and ruin the scenery. Although these take place on the outskirts of reservations, the human pressure to which the protected area is subjected is high and damaging especially through garbage and construction waste deposited randomly.

As with every other domain, the mountain gives birth to passions, controversy. It is true that the media has the custom to only present the positive aspects, the negative ones restricted to the mess left behind by partying groups at their barbeque spots. Mountain tourism is not summarized only by presenting intensely circulated areas, but also by presenting negative aspects and discussion of causes, authorities' indifference or inability, legislation insufficiency. This cannot only be carried out on forums, by a handful of people, but should become a factual preoccupation of the Romanian education system, of the political class and even the Romanian active churches.

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