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Educational aspects in mountain tourism – An old or a new paradigm?

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Abstract: The approach to mountain tourism from an institutional position by including this activity in the Education Plan of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, occurred many years ago (since 1965) and due to the impact of this activity on a growing number of people from more diverse categories, it was motivated by the multiplication of options in terms of professional inclusion but also the capitalization of possible educational effects. On the other hand, we believe that we must ask ourselves if the aims of the discipline "Internship in tourism activities" subscribe to the components of the instructional-educational process specific to the higher education of physical education and sports. The attempt to give an answer to this question represented the foundation of this study.

Keywords: education, mountain, tourism, paradigm

Introduction

Trying to define aspects of interest but also to emphasize the impact of this activity, we will start with some objective data, provided by the World Tourism and Travel Council:

- In 2022, the Travel & Tourism sector contributed 7.6% to global GDP; an increase of 22% from 2021 and only 23% below 2019 levels.

- In 2022, there were 22 million new jobs, representing a 7.9% increase on 2021, and only 11.4% below 2019.
- Domestic visitor spending increased by 20.4% in 2022, only 14.1% below 2019.
- International visitor spending rose by 81.9% in 2022, but still 40.4% behind 2019 numbers (Figure 1) (<https://wtcc.org/research/economic-impact>).

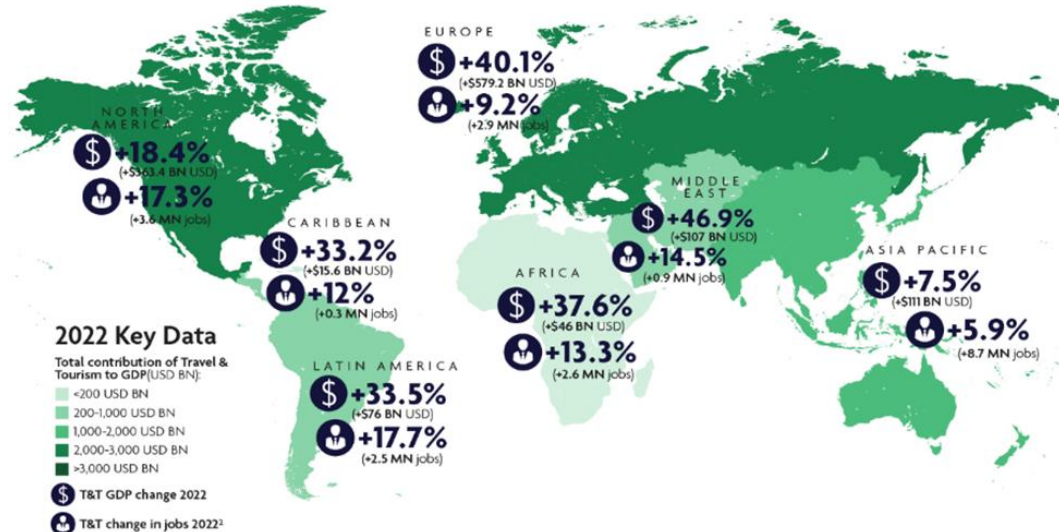


Figure 1. Regional overview 2022 (Source: <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-data/unwto-tourism-dashboard>)

The data underlines the opportunity that tourism offers for capitalizing on regional potential. UNWTO expects international tourist arrivals to reach 1.8 billion by 2030, if not before. A sector regularly outgrowing the world economy or international trade (Ilies et al., 2010; Herman et al., 2020a; Herman et al., 2021), the tourism sector is already facing the challenge of decoupling its growth from the use of natural resources. Advancing sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns is therefore essential if the sector is to contribute effectively to sustainable development (e-unwto.org). From this point of view, Romania - which offers countless points of interest from a geographical, cultural, religious, etc. point of view. - must enhance everything it can offer (Bran et al., 2000; Dehoorne et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2021). And mountain tourism represents an offer that can be generous (Ilies et al., 2017; Ilies et al., 2020; Safarov et al., 2022).

The same site previously mentioned, makes (based on its own studies) a "Top 10" of the attractions of 2021 (for young people from "Generation Z"):

1. Theme parks
2. Zoos
3. Museums
4. Aquariums
5. Botanical gardens

6. Mountains
7. City landmarks
8. Historical places/ancient towns
9. Lakes
10. Temples/Churches/Monasteries¹.

We can see the place in the middle of the ranking occupied by the destinations located in the mountain environment. At the same time, however, we can complete by emphasizing the complex nature of the mountain areas, which offer theme parks (Via ferrata, Adventure Parks etc.), zoos in the natural environment (Birdwatching), natural aquariums (sport fishing on mountain waters) but also real natural botanical gardens (spontaneous flora) (Herman et al., 2020b). Is another plea needed to support the economic component? We think not.

In relation to the instructive component, we will not insist too much, the points of tangency, the connection between mountain tourism and the field of Physical Education and Sports Science, having already been highlighted by both reputable authors in the mentioned field (Cârstea, 1993; Dragnea and Mate-Teodorescu, 2002) as well as by the present authors in previous articles. At this moment, Mountain Tourism (through the characteristics of the motor content) is considered as a part of the means of physical education (Lucaciu, 2009; Caciora et al., 2021).

The connection between the sphere of education and the field of physical education is obvious with the statement of the two concepts, but with the opposite degree of subordination. To be more precise, we note that the notion of education is given the following meaning (DEXI, 2007): "Ensemble of methods and measures applied systematically (and in an organized framework), with the aim of intellectual, moral, physical, etc. training and development. of children, youth, etc.; (process of) systematic influencing (and in an organized framework) of the formation and development of intellectual, moral, physical etc. of children, youth, etc. through this set of methods and measures; the result of this (pedagogical) activity".

Man has lived and lives in a social environment, together with other people, and from time immemorial, the older ones have passed on their social experience to the younger ones, taught them how to work and how to behave (Hidvégi et al., 2020). In society, with the means made available by it, man assimilated knowledge, formed skills and developed his mental processes (Cristea, 1996). The young generation is prepared and guided by the adult generation to fit into social life, integration which is an objective necessity. Understanding the notion of education, as a specific social-human action, generating effects, presupposes the functional correlation of the subject with the object of education, in an institutional and psychosocial framework (social context) that allows the permanent development of the human personality. This assertion (Nicola et al., 1982) is translated into the following formula (Figure 2).

¹ https://wtcc.org/Portals/0/Documents/Reports/2021/Trending_In_Travel-Emerging_Consumer_Trends

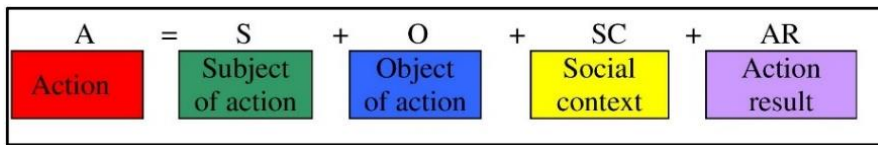


Figure 2. The functional correlation of the subject with the object of education

In the current social, economic and political context, in which it appeared and became increasingly present and necessary, the notion of permanent education outlined new concepts (formal education, informal education and non-formal education). To emphasize the significance of the three components and the certain involvement of mountain tourism in each of them, we consider important the intuitive/graphical presentation (Figure 3) made by prestigious specialists in the field of pedagogy (Jinga et al., 2006).

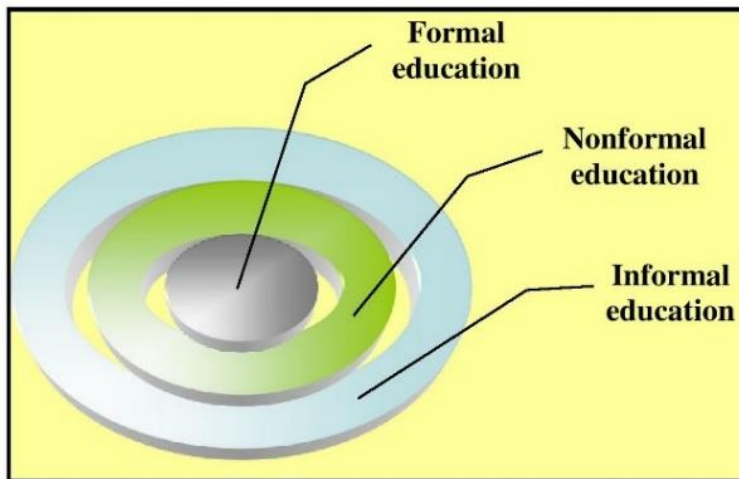


Figure 3. The relationship between forms of education

Tourists are attracted to the mountains for countless reasons, from the climate and clean air, to the beauty of the landscapes, the diversity of landforms and geological phenomena, local traditions and the simplicity of life or even the specific opportunities to practice different sports (Burton and Rogerson, 2023), which has led governments in many countries to be more and more interested in the development of tourism as a tool for the preservation of culture, biodiversity and sustainable development (Herman and Blaga, 2022), but also generating big question marks:

- Does tourism contribute to the sustainable development of mountain areas?
- Who benefits (in economic terms) from mountain tourism?
- Are the biophysical resources in the mountain areas degraded by carrying out actions specific to mountain tourism?
- Does mountain tourism positively or negatively affect society and local communities?

The answers, beyond rhetoric, must be found in acquired knowledge, attitude or behaviors, supported by content elements aimed at professional training - with an obvious interdisciplinary character - specific to those who will be active in this field (Cârstea, 1993; Dragnea, 2006).

Materials and methods

Through the present approach, we make an attempt to highlight the relationship that can be created between the practice of physical exercise on the one hand and mountain tourism, the natural environment and the educational system on the other (Popescu-Neveanu et al., 1990), a current concept in other geographical areas but whose theoretical and practical aspects require an adequate foundation that allows its advancement around specific curricular areas of the Romanian physical education and sports education and that could connect physical activity with ecotourism, agrotourism, cultural tourism, etc., respectively with current forms practicing active tourism (mountain tourism, water tourism, adventure tourism etc.), all of which meet the needs of the structure and content of active tourism (Lucaci, 2009).

In the last 20 years (2004-2023) with 2 exceptions due to the Covid 19 pandemic (2020 and 2021), the activity within the study discipline "Internship in tourism activities" was carried out generally between 25.05 - 20.06 of each year (depending on the structure of the academic year and weather conditions), in 2 content contexts:

- Mountain tourism in the Padiș area of the Apuseni Mountains, for 5 days (Figure 4);
- Sports orientation in the Stâna de Vale area, for 2 days.

In the context of this study, the first component is of interest.

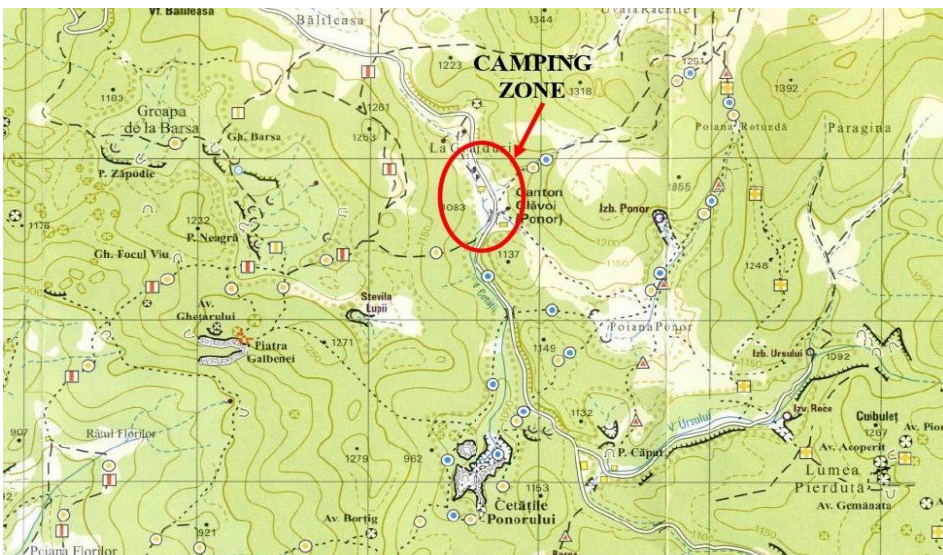


Figure 4. Padiș area from Apuseni natural park (Source: <https://www.plecatideparte.ro/excursie-cortul-parcul-natural-apuseni>)

Every year, a questionnaire was applied with closed questions (for reasons of standardization) regarding the previous experience, aspects of group integration, the relationship with the teaching staff, the degree of satisfaction regarding one's own possibilities, the appreciation of the spectacular nature of the environment, the informational content provided, etc.

In 2023, the group of participants in the "Internship in tourism activities" was 48 students (out of a total of 52 enrolled students) respectively 37 boys and 11 girls from the second year, the Physical and Sports Education study program. The other 4 students were absent for various reasons. A summary of the "inventory" of educational themes pursued throughout the activities is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Own curriculum for internship in tourism activities

Illustration	Content elements
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choosing the place for the location of the camp; the orientation of the tents; - Arrangement of storm drains and arrangement of grass furrows; - Site restoration.
	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Respect for the natural environment; the movement of the groups is done in column, so as not to affect the meadows; - The breaks for the recovery of the effort capacity are done on the side of the access roads; - The consumption of own food resources is done by collecting the packaging, which is transported back to the camp; - Behavior rules during hiking.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rules of behavior in the camp; - Types of camp activities (meal preparation, sports activities, group evenings); - Waste management (selective collection); - Management of water resources (use of water for drinking and cooking, use of water for personal hygiene, use of water for sanitizing cutlery).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management of wood resources (no trees are cut "by the foot", only felled wood is used). - Management of collective activities in the camp (sporting, socializing and cultural activities).

The applied questionnaire contained 29 questions structured on several levels: previous mountain experience, aspects of group sociology (leadership, homogeneity, etc.), physical effort potential, sustainability, support and motivation. We will choose only those questions that we consider relevant in the given context.

Results and discussions

One of the problems that occupies an important place in the modern world, which is also the object of education - and in the context of permanent education, even at the academic level - is the problem of ecology (Herman, 2009; Nakphin et al., 2023), greening and protecting the natural environment. In this sense, even without a theoretical approach contained in the Education Plan, our students were trained in relation to the organization of the camp, the location and relocation of the tent, the incineration of combustible remains, the storage of non-combustible ones in bags and their transport in the most nearby storage area (Boga).

The efficiency of the training tasks relative to this subject was revealed both by the answers to the questionnaire but more than that, by their reaction in concrete terms, to the dismantling of the camp, the landscape and the environment not being majorly affected. As we stated before, 6 of the items of the questionnaire were related to the topic of the study and we present and comment on the results.

To formally assess students' initial potential, the first two items addressed their previous experience on mountain trails (Figure 5). The answers show that more than 60% of the subjects have no experience at all and the others have little experience. Given their origin (most come from Bihor county) and the fact that our geographical area is very "generous in offer", the explanation must be sought elsewhere. One of the reasons could be the impact that the Covid 19 pandemic had on all aspects of young people's lives (attitudes, habits, anxieties etc.), more and more of them replacing real life with virtual life for a long time (Margvelashvili, 2021).

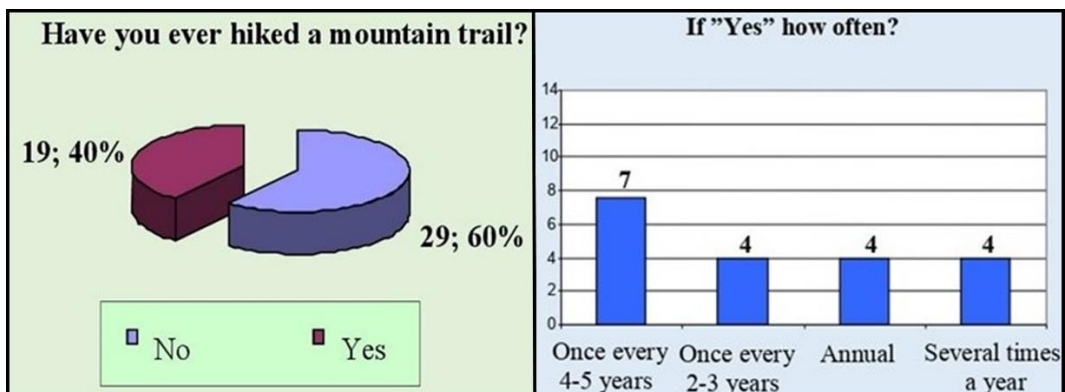


Figure 5. Items about mountain experience

On the other hand, another possible explanation consists in the low level of income of the families from which the subjects come (Figure 6), thus supporting specific activities being difficult. In addition, we do not know the level of

involvement of family members in activities specific to mountain tourism (values are transmitted between generations) nor the involvement of educational factors (teachers or other educational vectors).



Figure 6. Income / family member

Motivation is most often the "motor" of any action, a fact that can also be exploited in the case of mountain tourism, highlighting those aspects that bring added value (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The most appreciated aspects

The four aspects highlighted by the subjects' responses are just as many reasons that can make them return to the mountain trails. Complementarily, we can

connect the last aspect (the satisfaction of overcoming obstacles) with the following answers, given that sometimes we are tempted to believe that young people get scared easily and that they abandon (out of convenience) the more difficult actions (Figure 8). From the highlighted answers it is clear that the most beautiful and appreciated routes by the majority of those who have traveled them are at the same time the most complex, difficult and demanding, the difficulty thus becoming not only a factor of motivation but also one of education.

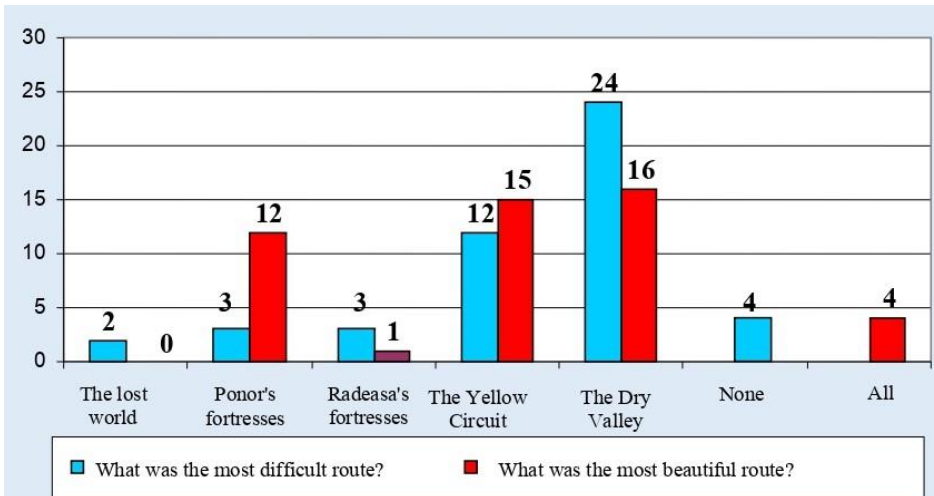


Figure 8. The most difficult and most beautiful route

To support with one more argument the educational role and at the same time the impact that mountain tourism can have on a psycho-behavioral level, we reproduce the opinions of the subjects in relation to what they think has changed in their own character and personality profile (Figure 9).

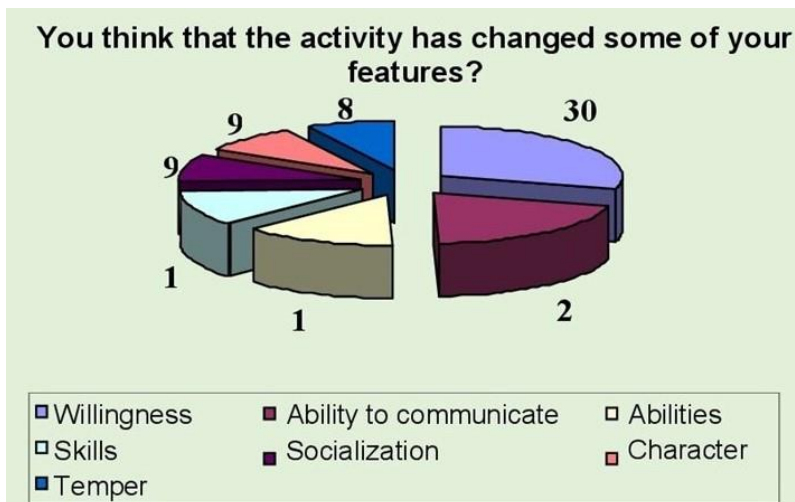


Figure 9. Personal characteristics that mountain tourism has changed

Most options refer to willingness, temper, communication skills, socialization i.e. exactly those traits most influenced by the consequences of the Covid 19 pandemic (Margvelashvili, 2021).

Conclusions

In the last 20-30 years increasingly, most human activities have started to be about material gain: of course the economy, but also politics, sports, tourism etc. Besides the economic consequences, tourism has a deep educational and socio-human significance. Its action is exercised both on tourists and on the population of the target areas (Kinczel and Müller, 2023), reflecting in terms of consumption, training and education, the use of free time, the quality of the environment, and inter-ethnic cultural ties.

Through its content, tourism has a comforting, recuperative role, contributing to the restoration of physical capacity, both through the general forms of rest, recreation, movement, and through the specific forms of balneal-medical therapy. At the same time, it manifests itself as an active mean of education raising the level of training, culture or civilization of people (Frazzei, 2004); tourism facilitates access to cultural values, favors the exchange of ideas and information, stimulating the broadening of the cultural horizon, with an effect on intellectual formation (Radu et al., 1991). Consequently, tourism is of particular importance in satisfying people's spiritual and material needs, positively influencing the dimensions and structure of consumption and at the same time being a possible powerful factor of education (Vodă and Vodă, 2001).

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