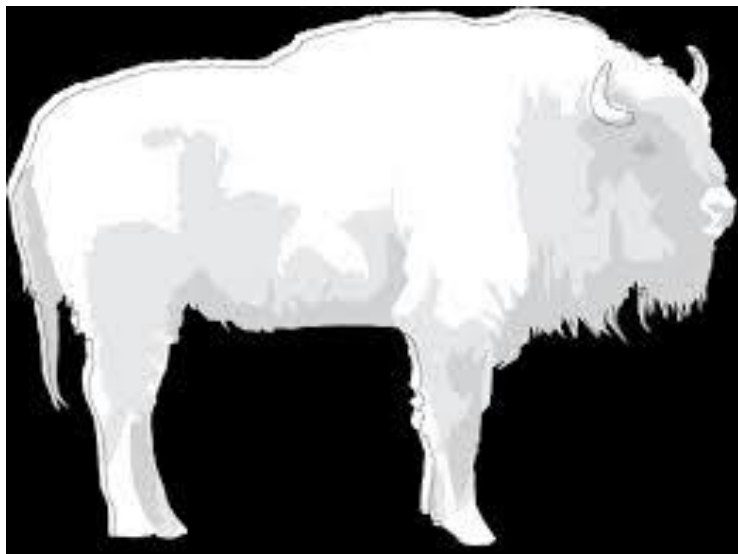


Ecotourism in Vanatori Neamt Natural Park: How can the “Vanatori Neamt” Natural Park ecotourism management plan, influence the sustainable tourism awareness among the locals and the community stakeholders



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Appendix

References

Abstract

Ecotourism is on one of the most important, and with the fastest growing rate branch of the tourism industry. Nowadays, nature-based destinations or protected areas like natural and national parks are growing in popularity and they quickly become a trend in the matters of sustainable development. In order for an area to be considered an ecotourism destination, there are several implications that need to be taken into consideration, implications like: has to have a base in sustainable\responsible development, minimum tourist impacts on the natural and cultural resources, and has to have a host community well-embedded and knowledgeable in specific ecotourism behaviors and practices and also an increased level of awareness towards the environmental issues that might appear in the area.

Furthermore, in this paper my aim is to assess the issue of how can the management of an natural park successfully create a higher level of sustainability awareness among its communities and interested actors (stakeholders). The case that I have chosen for this paper is Vanatori Neamt Natural Park, Romania.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Background

Tourism industry is one of the fastest growing nowadays, in the global economy. On the other hand, ecotourism is one of tourism's branches in search for sustainable development through the help of conservation of biodiversity and their natural and cultural resources. Although promoted by many, ecotourism development is not without gaps in achieving sustainability regarding economy, natural resources and culture. (Cusack and Dixon, 2006)

Part of the ecotourism branch, are the natural parks, which devote their time mainly for environmental and cultural conservation. According to West *et al.* (2006: 252) there are over 105.000 protected areas in the world, covering 20.3-21.5 million square kilometers. However, natural parks are also areas which develop community events and social functions. (Eagles and McCool, 2002) In other words, natural parks have evolved in time to integrate communities and actively involve them in the policies for which they stand for. Therefore, the question rises of how can a natural-park influence people's lives, behaviors and surroundings? (West *et al.* 2006)

The involvement and participation of the community, is an important element for a positive and sustainable tourism development. Many communities today are comfortable following an *unmanaged adaption policy* towards tourism and believe that individual and collective

planning of the tourism actors of the community is enough. (Haywood, 1988) Therefore, the sustainable aspect of a tourism area may suffer from community ignorance, and a lack of awareness measures from the management organizations.

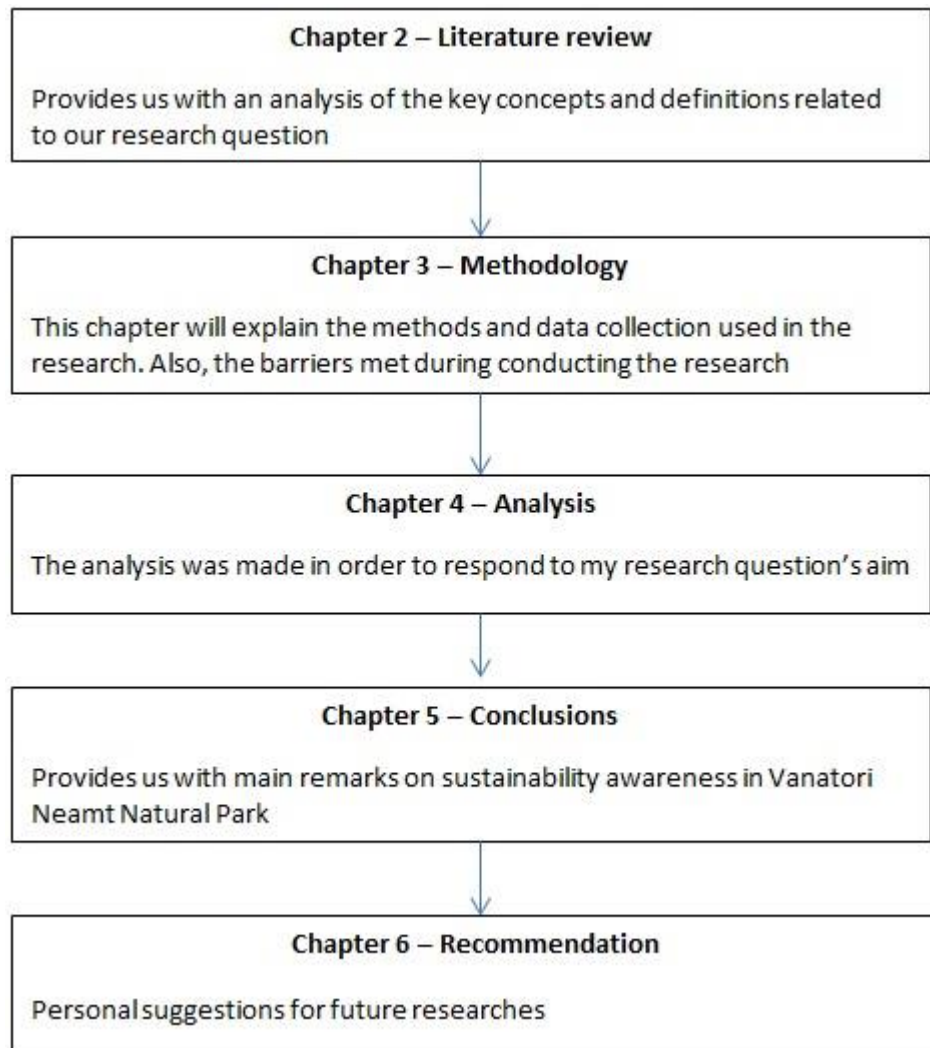
Such is the case with my researched area, Vanatori Neamt Natural Park. The tourism in the area is mainly based on the revenue coming from a classical form of tourism, where the locals are mainly concerned on providing basic tourist needs. As a consequence the number of tourists, I believe, is relatively low for a European region with a nature-based profile. According to the *National Institute of Statistics Neamt*, the number of tourists decreased in the region, from the historical maximum of 26.329 tourists in 2006, to 22.906 in 2012. Out of those numbers, more than 90% are internal visitors. The international visitors are close to non-existent in the area. This issue led me to believe that the lack of concern for tourism coming from the local community is influenced by the level of awareness that they have, towards the sustainable development trend that most of the modern natural-based sites are practicing. Besides the leadership of the communities surrounding the natural park, I believe that the most competent organization that could address this issue is the Vanatori Neamt Natural Park. As a result, I believe that actions and collaborations coming from the initiative of the park management could be a solution in shifting the attitudes and mentalities of the current and future generations, towards more sustainable practices of tourism related activities.

Furthermore, the aim of this paper is looking to provide solutions for this research question:

How can the “Vanatori Neamt” Natural Park ecotourism management plan, influence the sustainable tourism awareness among the locals and the community stakeholders?

1.2 Research structure

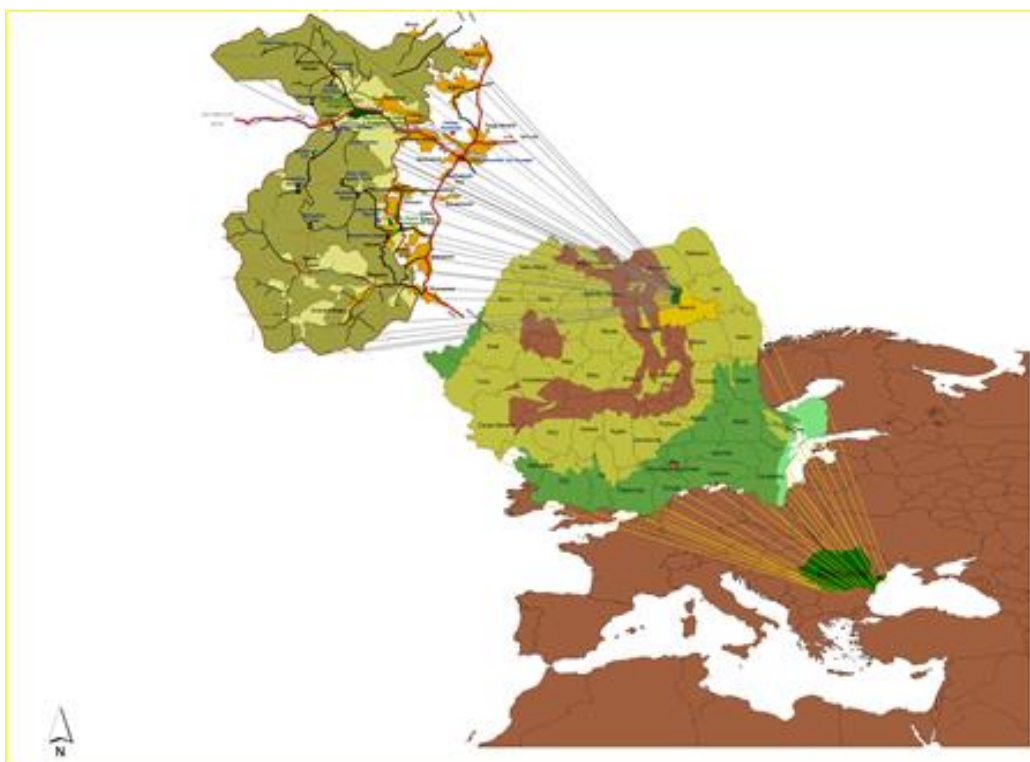
In order to provide a good background for answering my research question, the following chapters of this paper will be structured as follows:



1.3 *Vanatori Neamt Natural Park*

The Vanatori Neamt Natural Park is a protected area situated in the North-eastern part of Romania, in the Neamt County. From a geographical standpoint, the park is standing on the eastern side of Stanisoarei Mountains, in the Eastern Carpathian Mountains. It occupies a surface of 30.818 hectares, out of which 26.190 hectares of forest, on the Sub-Carpathians of Moldavia. (www.vanatoripark.ro)

The area includes a large variety of natural, cultural and historical values. As a consequence, the objectives of the park administration are diverse, and are tight to areas specificity and general principles of the management of a protected area.



Source: Vanatori Neamt Natural Park Administration – official website

The existence of *communities* in the natural park were heavily influenced by the establishment of the Neamt Fortress in the fourteenth century and followed by the foundations of religious establishments, such as monasteries. Today, the area of the park encompasses a big number of villages and communes (Vanatori Neamt, Agapia, Baltatesti, Cracaoani, Cracau, Mitocul Balan etc.) along with the biggest community (almost 20.000 people), the town of Targu Neamt . (www.vanatoripark.ro)

One of the most important objectives of the Natural Park is the reintroduction and protection of the European Bison (*Bison bonasus*). There are several projects and collaborations for this purpose, currently over 20 bison are released and monitored in the wilderness of the park forests.

From an *ecotourism* standpoint, the park has opened a series of trails through the ‘allowed’ part of the area, trails that offer a wide range of natural attractions (e.g. Reserve Forest of Arama etc.), cultural establishments, like monasteries and memorial houses, plus other tourism packages which offer the tourist accommodation and guidance through the permitted area.

Bison land is the designated area of the park, which stands mainly around the regions of Targu Neamt, Vanatori Neamt, Agapia and Cracaoani. Ecotourism is the main activity here. The area character is combining the rich natural landscapes with the cultural and spiritual values that are specific for this part of the country. (www.vanatoripark.ro)

A special attention is given to the environmental education in the area, where with the help of the Natural Park, a series of environmental NGO's were opened in the most important educational institutions in the communities surrounding the park. (www.vanatoripark.ro)

Today, the park is engaged into a series of projects, some of them being sponsored by the European Commission. The projects include conservation and protection of natural resources and fauna, non-formal environmental education projects, and projects that involve community interest in financial and biodiversity sustainable development. (www.vanatoripark.ro)

Chapter 2 – Literature review

After a thorough research on the specialty literature, a based background was set for this research. My next focus will be on providing an academic and theoretical frame of concepts, definitions and theories regarding my subject. Firstly, the following chapter will cover theory on defining ecotourism and sustainable development. Also, I will address the topic of how to achieve sustainable development, with a special interest in protected areas.

Secondly, theory on the implication, collaboration and role of the stakeholders (primary and secondary) in national parks tourism will be discussed, and finally, I will approach other examples of literature, that addresses solution strategies and models regarding the problem of my research question, and also the theoretical model that I believe, best addresses the conduct of my research.

2.1 Defining ecotourism

According to the intakes of Scheyvens, R. (1999), ecotourism is one of the elements in tourism with the fastest growth rate. Also, following the notes of Cebalos-Lascrain, (1996), the researcher defines ecotourism as *environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local population* (Scheyvens, R., 1999, p. 245).

According to the definition above, ecotourism offers the participants in the tourism activities the chance to experience both cultural and environmental tourism (Scheyvens, 1999). The researcher points out that ecotourism implies that in order to properly enjoy an ecotourism experience, a tourist needs to experience an undisturbed area, like a natural park with virgin forests, fauna reservations, or other natural spaces that imply limited contact from people, and in parallel, have a responsible attitude for the environment. At the same time, this sector of the tourism industry, offers the opportunity for the local community to

actively participate in the future of the socio-economic profile of their region by being aware and educated on the characteristics involved in ecotourism.

Butler (1989) describes ecotourism *as the type of tourism that is inherently sensitive to communication, awareness and environmental enhancement. These characteristics of ecotourism make it less likely to create social and environmental problems commonly associated with conventional tourism. Ecotourism attempts to give travelers a greater awareness of environmental systems and contribute positively to the destination's economic social and ecological conditions* (Butler, 1989, p. 9). Butler (1989) also agrees on the nature based type of tourism that comes with practicing ecotourism, but he believes that communication between the actors implicated (local community and tourists) is an essential part in defining ecotourism.

Another definition that shares the thoughts of the ones above is being provided by Miller, (1993) which states that ecotourism *has international currency as a concept grounded in preservation-conservation and sustainable development ideals. As the term has come to be employed, it evokes a host of near synonyms... equality tourism, ethnic tourism, cultural tourism, socio-ecological tourism, photo-safari tourism, drive tourism, and surfing tourism.* (Miller, 1993 cited in Sirakaya, *et al.* 1999: 170). In other words, Miller's (1993) definition agrees with the previous ones presented, in terms that ecotourism is engaged in environmental conservation and a sustainable development, and in addition he refers to ecotourism as identifiable with a set of practices that he suggests are specific to this type of tourism.

On analyzing the above definitions, we can identify some common aspects which the researchers shared in their view of this sub-branch of the tourism industry. According to the definitions discussed, ecotourism is an element of the tourism industry which focuses on enhancing the natural history of a region. In itself, it is a type of tourism that contrary to other conventional tourism practices is less harmful to environment or none at all. Also, ecotourism is helping to engage the local community in shaping the socio-economic profile of their region, by offering the opportunity to actively participate in the tourism actions. Finally, the common element, and probably the most important one we find in the above definitions is that, ecotourism is based on “educating” the tourists as well as the local community, on nature conservation, environmental awareness and sustainable development of tourism.

Furthermore, a definition which encompasses all three elements of the other discussed, and also applies on the theoretical framework of this paper, belongs to Andersen (1994, p. 32) and states that *ecotourism is a tourism experience infused with the spirit of conservation and cultural change that results in a net positive effect for the environment and local economy . . . may be part of an overall economic and environmental plan that includes sustainable agriculture, micro-industries and other activities... minimize the human intrusion on the ecosystem, to educate travelers and to enhance the spiritual experience in nature that fosters respect and stewardship.*

Based on the nature of this type of tourism, long debates were taken by tourism researchers, like Orams, 1997; Miller, 1993; Butler, 1989 in order to properly define “ecotourism” and go back to its roots, and also, special associations were created. For example, Ecotourism Association of Australia “Guidelines for ecotourism” or Ecotourism Society “The Ecotourism Society Document”, USA (1992), as suggested by the findings of Orams (1997). Orams (1997) argues that “*tourism operations, which are based on the natural environment and which claim the positive connotations associated with the prefix ‘eco’, should strive to be more than just that*”. He states that in order to do ecotourism operations, the initiator should use an education-based management strategy to “*prompt their customers to adopt more environmentally sensitive attitudes and, more importantly, change to more environmentally sound behavior*” (Orams, 1995: 3). In the same light, most of the stakeholders in a community find that in order to define ecotourism, two criteria need to be fulfilled, namely, education concerning the environment, as well as contribution to conservation and protection, according to the findings of Buckley (1994, 1998b) in Buckley (2000).

Visiting areas for the purpose of observing the nature and its elements and, experiencing the outside in its natural form is not something new, as reviewed by the Orams (1997). Activities such as hiking in the nature, adventure parks, fishing, boat riding on lakes and rivers etc. were *popular long before the term ‘ecotourism’ ever existed* (Orams, 1997: 4). Furthermore the author states that this new term appeared when people practiced this form of tourism more frequently and, as a form of reaction against the traditional forms of mass tourism, based on its finding in (Valentine 1992: 4-9 and, Moore & Carter 1992: 140-146).

However, according to Buckley, (1994) *there are environmental aspects to every major component of the tourism business: products and markets, management, money, and people*. On the other hand, the author states, based on his findings, that environmental organizations and institutions insisted on the term ‘ecotourism’ to be used only on forms of tourism that are *nature-based, sustainably managed, conservation-supporting, and environmentally-educated* (Buckley 1994: 661)

To summarize, this section of the chapter, discussed the term of ‘ecotourism’, based on different definitions given by Butler (1989), Miller (1993), Scheyvens (1999) or Andersen (1994), and tried to find its place in the tourism agenda by discussing the meanings given to the term *ecotourism* by these researchers. Based on the findings, we can conclude that ecotourism is a type of tourism that is based on nature conservation and environmental sustainability, as well as cultural awareness for the local community and the tourists. Also, ecotourism is responsible with informing tourists and the local community of the ethics that are being involved when practicing this form of tourism, practices which include environmental knowledge and sustainable growth inside their community. Furthermore, this type of tourism is not something new to tourism practitioners. Ecotourism came to be, because of its educational purposes which involve not only tourists but the local community where the tourism action takes place. The travelers and the local community learn how to “coexist” during the tourism actions, in a practical and sustainable way.

2.2 Defining sustainable development

After we had a view on ecotourism and we reached the conclusion that this type of tourism goes hand in hand with sustainability and sustainable development, our next objective will be on providing the reader with a background on what *sustainable development* is. Also, given our researched problem, we will give insights on how one can create *sustainable development awareness* among designated areas, in our case, protected natural park areas.

Sustainable development as a concept raised its head among the publishers, editors, researchers, students, policy makers, etc. shortly after the release of the Brundtland Commission's report on the environmental issues on the globe in 1987. The report was also an insight on the environmental development of societies, by taking into consideration elements like politics, economy and society. (Redclift, 2005)

According to Brundtland in the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987 chapter 2, pt. 1) more commonly known as the Brundtland Report, *Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*. When elaborating this definition, the Brundtland Report has had two key concepts that were to be revised in order to achieve a sustainable development: *needs* – which refer to the needs of the poor, which, in Brundtland's opinion, should be prioritized (Brundtland, 1987); and *limitations* – which are being imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities (Brundtland, 1987, chapter 2, pt. 1)

In other words, Brundtland's definition of sustainable development has shifted the older capitalist view, in which economic growth was seen as the main priority of humanity and where increasing production was the solution. (Hopwood *et al.*, 2005) Now, as Brundtland (1987) puts it, the main priority is to achieve development by attending to the present needs of humanity without putting to risk the chances of the future generations. This modern view of development came to be as “*a result of the growing awareness of the global links between mounting environmental problems, socio-economic issues to do with poverty and inequality and concerns about a healthy future for humanity.*”(Hopwood *et al.*, 2005: 39)

Nowadays, the concept of sustainable development, is very common in policy debates and discussions, in academic environments and tourism planners, and as Lele (1991: 607) puts it, sustainable development *has become the watch-word for international aid agencies, the jargon of development planners, the theme of conferences and learned papers and the slogan of developmental and environmental activists*. Given the widespread of the concept, inevitably, the tourism field has adopted it as-well, and now, according to Sharpley, (2000, p. 1), it has *achieved widespread acceptance as a desirable objective of tourism development policy and practice [...]* and so, giving birth to the concept of *sustainable tourism development*. As we can see in Hall (2011) this concept was used in multiple papers, articles, abstracts, titles present in important data bases of academic literature (See Hall, 2011: 650, *Table 1 Records of the term “sustainable tourism” in major academic*

data bases) as-well as in the headlines of tourism organizations like United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) or United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

As many researchers suggest (e.g. Butler 1999, Hunter 1997, Cole 2007, Hall 2011) sustainable tourism and sustainability, in particular, has been a subject of discuss and interpretation throughout the academia and policy makers since the Brundtland Report on sustainability was published.

Following some personal discussions with his colleagues, Butler (1999:9) has pointed out that *definitions on sustainable development was not necessary, since its meaning was clear, and that what was more important was a focus on ways in which it could be applied*. In other words, Butler (1999) is suggesting that making a definition for sustainable development is useless, given the fact that sustainability implies a lot of rules, ethics and and as Ward&Butler (2002) argue, sustainability is determined also by the place in which it is applied, making it harder to actually create a universally applicable definition. Such is the matter with sustainable tourism. Many interpretations of the concept were elaborated until the point when *each individual has been able to claim that his or her use of the phrase is appropriate* (Wheeler 1993, in Butler 1999).

Butler (1999:10) has provided some examples of definitions extracted from different specialty literatures, some of which I selected and presented in the following:

Tourism which can sustain local economies without damaging the environment on which it depends (Contryside Comission 1995:2)

Sustainable tourism in parks (and other areas) must primarily be defined in terms of sustainable ecosystems (Woodley 1993:94)

Sustainable tourism is tourism which develops as quickly as possible, taking into account of [sic] current accommodation capacity, the local population and the environment [...]
Tourism that respects the environment and as a consequence does not aid its own disappearance. This is especially important in saturated areas [...] *Sustainable tourism is responsible tourism* (quoted from Bramwell *et al.* 1996a:10-11)

As we can see in the above definitions, there are multiple interpretations of the concept of sustainable tourism. However, by analyzing them we can observe that each of them, has something in common, namely the conservation of the environment in which tourism is applied. This raises the idea that during sustainable tourism development, there is the main common concern in not damaging the environment but also, that sustainable tourism does also depend on the place and on the circumstances it is applied (Ward&Butler 2002). Now, I believe, we can safely assume that one can create a different definition for sustainable tourism development in different places. This assumption is strengthen also by Ward&Butler (2002: 364) who believe that *a transition to STD has been hampered by the*

fact that despite more than a decade of research on the subject, there is still no consensus on the precise nature, objectives, applicability or feasibility of the concept.

Furthermore, having discussed some of the definitions for sustainable tourism as well as sustainable development I have chosen to select the original definition concerning sustainable tourism, elaborated by the Brundtland report. I have chosen this definition mainly for its more elaborated characteristics, which can be helpful in an analysis of tourism sustainability in the region I have chosen to research for this paper.

According to the characteristics of sustainable development in Brundtland's report, the UNWTO has defined sustainable tourism development as: *Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities*". (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005, p. 11-12) Simply put, this definition shares the concern of the long-term development which is a key objective in sustainability, and it addresses the needs of the tourists, the infrastructure, the local community and the environment in which tourism actions are taking place.

According to UEP and UNWTO (2005), in order to achieve sustainability, tourism development should address three objectives: 1. Optimizing the use of natural resources and protect the biodiversity and natural heritage; 2. Conservation of the social and cultural background of the local communities and promoting inter-cultural change; 3. Addressing the local stakeholder's needs, concerning social and economic stability, as-well as contributing to eradicating poverty.

Having a critique view on the definition presented above, which encompasses more or less the ideal set of objectives in order to achieve sustainable tourism, and given the problematic of this paper, I could add a fourth objective which addresses the issue of *sustainability awareness* among host communities as-well as tourists. Furthermore, the 4'th objective that I propose for achieving sustainable tourism would be for the tourism policy makers or other tourism planning organizations present in an designated area, to engage into an educational policy making process that would help create a general awareness towards a sustainable way of thinking and a code of ethics and regulations of a proper sustainable tourism. However, this topic will be addressed more thoroughly in the next section of this chapter.

2.3 Achieving Sustainable Development

On the previous section of this chapter, we have presented and discussed some of the definitions given along the way, on specialty literature, for sustainable development as-well as sustainable tourism. In the end, I have chosen to go with Brundtland Report definition of

sustainable tourism as it is the definition that most of the specialty researchers agree upon and of course, I also found it more suitable for the nature of my research.

As stated previously in this chapter, I have proposed a fourth objective on Brundtland Report definition, of sustainable tourism, that I believe would be a good addition for achieving sustainable tourism.

Furthermore, in this section of the chapter we will discuss the matter of achieving sustainability awareness among the host communities and tourists, this being one of the major issues that I believe exists, after conducting my research in the area of the Natural Park and the surrounding communities. By consulting different researches and specialty literature I will try to present and discuss some key points of achieving sustainability and sustainable tourism awareness.

After conducting my research in the area of the Natural Park, I have concluded, in big part, also because I lived in the proximity of the park for almost 20 years having contact with the locals, that the type of behavior and the attitude of both the locals and the tourists, is essential in order to create a sustainability-driven general mind-set.

This led me to analyze Dobson's (2007) two approaches on how to manage to make people change their behavior and their attitudes.

The first approach would be the *structuralist* approach where, according to Dobson (2007), the attitudes and behavior of locals can be changed only if the structures inside their community changes. In other words, the behaviors and attitudes of the people are strictly related to the structures inside their community hence, the people's mind-set will change only if the structures that inform them will change. A good example provided by Dobson (2007), are economic structures. According to him, *the idea is that if economic structures are of a type that encourages competitive behavior, for example, and we want people to be more co-operative, there is no point in simply asking people to be more co-operative, because this will be undermined by the competitive structures that ultimately determine our behavior* (Dobson, 2007:276).

The second approach analyzed, is the *voluntarist* approach. According to Dobson (2007: 277), *Voluntarists take a different view. They argue that, while of course we live our lives in a context, this context is determined in part by how we live our lives. In other words, our attitudes and behavior are 'relatively independent' of the structures that inform them.*

Having presented Dobson's (2007) two approaches I can personally comment on the fact that both approaches can be used according to the space you are trying to create sustainable awareness and sustainable tourism. This idea was shared earlier in the chapter regarding the territorial subjectivity of sustainable tourism, by quoting Ward&Butler (2002).

Although I believe tourism structures inside a community are important in informing locals on issues concerning sustainability, I argue also, that the change needs to come from inside the mind-set of the locals. For example, a well-developed ecotourism region, like natural parks in the North America or Australia, already known for the well-embedded pro-environmental tourism policies, can, more easily make new changes on the local attitudes and behaviors, because probably they have more “experience” in this sustainable mind-set.

In the case of our researched area, the Vanatori Neamt Natural Park and its surroundings, being not quite fully developed tourism regions, I believe that by simply informing the locals with common information on sustainability is not enough. This is why I would tend on choosing the *voluntarist* approach, as Dobson (2007:277) puts it *voluntarists they are [...] part of the complex web of influences that causes us to behave one way rather than another*. Simply put, the voluntarist approach will address the education of the locals towards sustainable tourism from a more complex point of view, where the locals will learn to behave accordingly throughout time, and reach a conclusion on how sustainable tourism works by themselves, rather than being informed from external sources without having a “base” of the attitudes and behaviors needed for achieving sustainability and sustainable tourism.

However, in order to achieve this change of attitudes and behavior, the structures inside a community still have an important role, and are partially responsible for creating a set of planning processes in order to achieve that goal, a matter that I will try to discuss and analyze in the following sections.

In order to reach a goal and complete objectives that concern sustainable tourism, and sustainability awareness, a criterion that is generally accepted, is the participation of the locals in the planning process. (Cole 2007) According to Cole (2007:2) *community participation is considered necessary to obtain community support and acceptance of tourism development projects and to ensure that the benefits relate to the local community needs*. This also applies when trying to create awareness of sustainable tourism development. The community needs to feel involved in the planning process and thus, sharing its part by acting in accordance to the new policies and improve on them throughout the time as *the concept of sustainable tourism is still evolving* (Clarke 1997:224).

As mentioned earlier, the idea of sustainable tourism is still evolving (Clarke 1997). There are no clear indicators to measure how sustainable the tourism practiced in a certain area is. These indicators serve as an “observatory” with the purpose of monitoring the strategies and policies that are applied in that area, also, identify the most effective ones and raise attention to eventual problems that may appear, and find the most suitable solutions. (Ward&Butler 2002) In our case, getting to change the behavior and attitudes of the locals towards sustainability is a problem, at least for the time being. By having a clear strategy on analyzing sustainable tourism, based on clear sustainable development indicators, could be a solution for a better management in dealing with changing the locals views and making them more aware of a sustainable development of tourism.

Sirakaya *et al.* (2001:418, cited in Ward&Butler 2002) agree that *indicators of sustainability differ from traditional development indicators because they take into consideration the web of complex interrelationships and interdependencies of resources and stakeholders in the tourism systems*. In other words, according to Ward&Butler (2002) the old and the most common indicators (e.g. arrival numbers, period of accommodation and money expenditure) used for monitoring tourism development are proven to be useless for measuring a destination's tourism development, just as the GDP is not a definitive factor in measuring welfare. Sirakaya *et al.* (2001) believes that indicators for measuring sustainability are more complex than the conventional ones because they target the interconnectivity between the stakeholders (which aren't only the ones that gain financial value from tourism, but also the locals) and the resources which he believes that are dependent to each other.

Given the nature of our researched region, which is a Natural Park, special indicators need to be developed during the planning and monitoring. According to Eagles *et al.* (2002) indicators need to be established at the beginning of the planning process of a protected area. By monitoring the area, the ones responsible with it obtain valuable information concerning the protection of the values that the natural park conserves, and also the indicators need to be carefully developed, because they are subject to change in time and also subject to financial and personnel resources (Eagles *et al.* 2002)

Eagles *et al.* (2002) is providing a great deal of information concerning the process of monitoring in protected areas and its advantages in identifying issues and also helping implementing programs and policies that can solve those issues. Eagles *et al.* (2002) argues that it is very important *why, what, where* and *when* the monitoring is occurring, and most important, *who* should do the process of monitoring. What is important is that the process of monitoring and developing indicators is a subject to the place and the issue identified. Eagles *et al.* (2002) also provides us with an example of how a monitoring process takes place and where multiple actors got involved:

Box 11.2 A protected area monitoring programme. Noel Kempff Mercado National Park, Bolivia: A collaboration of efforts

At this national park, an ecotourism site, simple biological monitoring occurs between a Nature Conservancy partner, Fundacion Amigos de la Naturaleza (FAN) and the Bolivian national park system.

What? They monitored megafauna and endangered species for some years. There is no monitoring of cultural and socio-economic impacts because there are no communities in the park.

Who? Park guards and FAN staff are responsible. Nature guides have been involved recently.

How? They use data collection procedures recommended by visiting scientists. The nature guides collect information on bird and animal sightings.

Results? Information collected helped staff to plan and manage more effectively. They now know better when river turtles are nesting, when they hatch, when they are in most demand by locals, when fish are migrating, etc. Also, they have baseline data from which to assess future impacts, particularly if ecotourism should grow more.

Source: Rome, 1999

Web site: <http://nature.org/aboutus/travel/ecotourism/resources/>

Figure 1

Source: retrieved from Eagles et al. (2002, p. 154)

Eagles *et al.* (2002)'s above example shows us how a monitoring process is taking place in a protected area, such as our researched area, as a response-action to a biological issue. To be noted is the fact that the monitoring process was taking place through a collaboration of forces displayed in the area of the natural park. As we can see in *Figure 1*, Noel Kempff Mercado National Park has used in their monitoring process their available staff, as-well as the nature guides, with whom they have managed to identify a "problem" (megafauna and endangered species), collect data and then using the data collected to manage the "problem" more efficiently.

However, unlike the Bolivia's Natural Park offered as example above which has no communities in its perimeter, Vanatori Neamt Natural Park has the social component included. Thus, the monitoring process would be slightly different. As Eagles *et al.* (2002) puts it, the monitoring process is subject to territory and according to the researchers, besides specialized staff, other groups can be involved in the process, such as: *field staff and rangers, the local community, local schools and universities, special tourist programs, visitors and tourism operators.* (Eagles *et al.*, 2002:154) Groups also present in our research area.

Other researchers have discussed monitoring and creating sustainable development indicators, as effective tools for policy makers and managers. Miller and Ward (2005:23) agree that *monitoring enables system managers to learn more about the behavior of the system they are managing by measuring progress, defining challenges and sounding alarm*

bells. Also, Sausmarez (2007:700-701) believes that by using indicators *a destination may prepare for a possible crisis, which will help sustain tourism and benefit all stakeholders*. In the same matter, Busch and Trexler (2002:xxi) believe that *monitoring information forms the basis of new and novel approaches to management*. To put it simply, by monitoring a certain area, through the use of sustainable development indicators, the managing systems can more easily identify issues, adapt to new management policies that provide solutions in advance for solving those issues, and get closer to achieving sustainable development, as Moldan and Bilharz (1997:5 quoted in Miller 2001:7) agree, *the very process of developing indicators contributes to the creation of a better definition of SD*.

However, the process of monitoring can present some challenges for whoever initializes it, depending on the area, Busch and Trexler (2002:412) believe that *challenges to establishing eco-regional monitoring program include vague objectives, inconsistent or absent methods to assess indicators, and a lack of existing knowledge about system variability at relevant temporal or spatial scales*. As a response to those challenges, Miller (2001) notes that when creating indicators for sustainable development, a special attention needs to be given to how relevant the indicators are for the policies established in the area. Moreover, the operating managers need to have a precise understanding of the issue they want to monitor and find solutions for.

In order to conclude, this chapter was intended to discuss and analyze based on consulting specialty literature and relevant researches, one of the issues identified in the area that this paper examines, namely, how can one, create sustainability awareness among host communities and tourists.

After discussing Dobson's (2007) two views (*structuralist* and *voluntarist*) on how to manage and change attitudes and behaviors of locals and tourists, and settled upon the fact that the *voluntarist* approach is more suitable for a positive change in a general mind-set. I have tried to analyze and find a potential instrument that could assess our identified issue. As a result, I believe that creating sustainable development indicators followed by constant monitoring of those indicators in the "field", by the operating system as-well as the locals and visitors, could initiate a positive change towards sustainable tourism in the mind-set of the locals and the tourists.

In the case of Vanatori Neamt Natural Park and its surroundings, I believe that initializing a process of monitoring with well-established indicators, and where the locals and visitors have an active role in collecting data, would significantly raise the perception towards a more sustainable mind-set, which in my opinion is the core of a successful sustainable tourism plan.

2.4 Current issues in ecotourism

In the above section, ecotourism was analyzed and multiple definitions from different researchers were discussed. In the following section, current issues existing today in “the world of ecotourism” will be addressed and discussed by consulting various specialty literature.

Lack of consensus

As we acknowledged in the previous chapters of this paper, multiple definitions were generated along the development of ecotourism. Many definitions that were given to ecotourism along the way had different approaches but, at one point, they united under the perspectives of sustainability and sustainable development. A statement which Bjork, P., (2007) in Higham, J., (2007) also agreed with: *the ideal balance of preserving and developing at the same time is described in most ecotourism definitions. This paradox is not a unique one for ecotourism, but can be found in related concepts as for example, sustainability and sustainable tourism development, on which ecotourism is built.*

The definitions discussed in the previous sections, created an image of how ecotourism behaves, and has given basic information concerning the differentiation of ecotourism from other forms of mass tourism. However, some of the most common criticisms that have surrounded ecotourism is the high amount of definitions that were used to describe the phenomenon (Fennell, 1998, 1999, 2001 in Higham, 2007), which led to a confusion between the researchers.

According to Higham (2007), these kinds of practices that are commonly seen in ecotourism literature, are mostly dissipated academic energy which creates a lack of consensus. Also, *this is a situation that hinders the effective and sustainable development of ecotourism due to the uncertain policy, planning and development foundations that underpin the sector.* (Higham and Carr, 2003b, in Higham, 2007: 4). The fact that there is a big amount of definitions given to ecotourism consist an important issue. As stated above, this created a lack of consensus between the academics and furthermore, a lack of criteria that could help in an ecotourism better management. On the other hand, Weaver and Lawton (2007) argue that today, there is a *near-consensus* for defining ecotourism, by quoting Blamey’s (1997, 2001) three-core criteria that ecotourism should address: *(1) attractions should predominantly be nature based, (2) visitor interactions with those attractions should be focused on learning and education, and (3) experience and product management should follow principles and practices associated with ecological, socio-cultural and economic sustainability.* Also, according to Weaver and Lawton (2007: 1170), this “*attainment of something resembling a consensus or definition* was associated with a new theme in the specialty literature that expanded the barriers of the initial definitions in mid-1980’s, a theme that mainly characterizes ecotourism as a *nature-based form of alternative tourism.* This was mainly in response for the *consumptive/captive exclusion principle* present in most of the ecotourism definitions. Examples of this kind of definitions were given by Weaver and Lawton (2007) in their paper *The State of Contemporary*

Ecotourism Research by quoting Holland, Ditton and Graeffe (1998) and Zwirn, Pinsky and Rahr's (2005), who argue, for a type of ecotourism seen from a recreational perspective, as well as Novelli, Barnes, and Humavindu (2006) who do the same, but introducing "*trophy hunting*" as new form of ecotourism. According to Weaver and Lawton (2007), these authors base their opinions on the eventual contributions of these forms of ecotourism on "*revenue generation and as-well as their obvious nature-based focus*".

Because of the high variety of tourism forms, *ecotourism* as a concept was highly praised, as-well as compared to those forms. By linking the prefix 'eco' with 'tourism', discussions and view disparities were created. (Higham, 2007) *The term eco- in ecotourism has generally been linked to the ecological concept in allusion to ecologically sustainable*" (Higham 2007: 24). It is obvious that ecotourism managed to be conceptualized quite hard, given that specialists tried to individualize ecotourism as a new form of tourism or something very specific, rather than a characteristic of tourism activities and tourist behavior, that needs to be implemented. However, according to Higham (2007), in the last 10 years, specialists and practitioners have tried to introduce ecotourism as an alternative for the mass tourism. This way, ecotourism has gained new dimensions. Now, *the sustainable dimension of ecotourism promises more than just preserving* (Higham, 2007:24) areas and landscapes, and the term 'eco-', in ecotourism, receives also an economic dimension which involves economic and social development, as-well as relations with private businesses or stakeholders.

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that was massively discussed. Definitions for it are countless and each have something in common, but still, they are different. The conclusion that we can withdraw from all of the above is that ecotourism has to be able to provide what the local community and the tourists need, and in the same time, keep a safe way for the future opportunities that may appear. (<http://old.planeta.com/ecotravel/tour/definitions.html>) Also each destination brings upon new policies and interpretations of the term ecotourism, so, for example, you cannot create a clear definition of ecotourism based on one destination, because the concept of ecotourism is subject to territory. Thus, the ecotourism practiced there can be defined based on the territory's specific policies, a statement which Higham, (2007:30), also shares: (a) *general definitions need specifying criteria* and (b) *it is not enough just to analyze the definitions in use (in an area) in order to understand how the ecotourism concept is interpreted and used, but the appending policy documents do also have to be included*.

Having discussed upon the general lack of consensus when it comes to clearly define ecotourism, and concluding that ecotourism as a concept is subject to change according to the territory that practices it, we can address now, some key limitations and issues that ecotourism areas and practitioners can stumble upon. Furthermore, in the next chapter, some general limiting factors of practicing tourism will be addressed, and also, key issues of ecotourism in nature-based areas will be analyzed in order to share light on the matter and to better understand how ecotourism plays its role in any given area.

Challenges and limitations of ecotourism

As we know, tourism is an industry that throughout the modern times has evolved and has spread its roots across the Globe. Although for some countries tourism is a way to develop and reach prosperity, these advantages depend on a number of factors that aren't always in total control of the tourism providers and operators. While the rest of the industry is taking minimum damage from these factors, tourism industry and implicitly ecotourism, is affected. (Brandon, 1996)

According to Brandon (1996:5) the key factors that are proven to be limitations to the tourism industry are spreading from *political* and *social*, to *environmental*, *economic* and *technological*. In the following, we will try to briefly discuss and analyze some of these key factors.

Political factors may affect the ecotourism practiced in certain areas through different implications, such as: political unrest, race and ethnicity or social-economic class; implications that regard the local community as-well as the visitors. (Stark 2002)

As many researchers suggest (see Brandon 1996, Nelson 2011, Block 2010) some of the African countries such as Tanzania, Madagascar, Zambia etc. suffer, or have suffered from these political movements that manage to continuously sustain these conflicts (Nelson 2011), getting to the point where issues like corruption, ethnic wars and discrepancy between social classes, are generally identifiable with Sub-Saharan Africa. (Nelson 2011)

Although tourism development is hindered in African countries following issues that have to do with political unrest, in other parts of the world, tourism is being restricted due to governmental laws, despite having a relatively stable political organism. Prideaux (2005:786) notes that today, in some countries *without government approval, citizens may not be entitled to visit other countries as a matter of right*". Countries like People's Republic of China or North Korea still imply restrictions for travelling, either if it's leaving or coming into the country, unless it is government approved. (Prideaux 2005) Fortunately, these restrictions are being systematically erased by the development of the Approved Destination Scheme (Zhou, King and Turner 1998, in Prideaux 2005)

In today's Europe, thanks to alliances like the European Union and the relatively free travelling that comes with it, tourism has been one of the motors of economy for the countries that are part of such collaborations. *The European Union (EU) encompasses a vast area of both tourist-generating and tourist-receiving countries, and the involvement of EU member states in tourism, as well as their approaches to a common tourism policy at the EU level, varies a great deal.* (Moufakkir and Burns, 2012:23)

Following the intakes from Hall (1998) and Ivy and Copp (1999), we can acknowledge that issues coming from political factors, appeared mostly around Central and South-Eastern

Europe following the communist, relatively recent history. According to OECD (1991), cited in Ivy and Copp (1999), despite the fact that a big part of Central and Eastern Europe provided satisfactory tourism conditions, it was not playing a big role in the economy when compared with the Western World. Although after 1989 the governments of the ex-communist block started to recognize the role of tourism and its financial and social contributions, it *has started to enjoy scant attention in texts concerned with post-socialist economic and political development* (Hall 1998). In other words, creating a new structure for tourism in the post-socialist era of the Central and South-Eastern Europe has been ignored. Moreover, as Ivy and Copp (1999) note, following the mentality of the USSR, *the planning and management of tourism throughout the region was given low priority, and was typically assigned to a state planning office that delegated the organization of such activity to a national tourist agency [...]* (Ivy and Copp, 1999:426)

Despite the fact that Central and South-eastern Europe still face some problems when it comes to tourism planning and prioritizing, these problems come from an “old” set of views that had to do more or less with the *buildup of heavy industrial infrastructure that was favoured in their centrally-planned economy of the past* (Ivy and Copp 1999:425). Today, Central and South-eastern Europe face the situation in which they need to reinvent themselves as a tourism destination, (Zimmerman 1991; Formica and Uysal 1996, in Ivy and Copp 1999) but this doesn't necessarily mean it's an issue.

Based only on my research around the area chosen for this paper's subject, and on simple observations, I believe political problems like corruption, big social-class discrepancies or racial issues, may pose a threat to the development of tourism, but only locally. Unlike the same issues that unfortunately are common with some of the African countries and not only, which demand urgent solutions, and where they pose a threat at a national level. Technological and environmental issues however, may consist in a bigger threat when it comes to tourism and especially ecotourism, and they can easily appear in countries such as the ones in Central and South-eastern Europe, where according to Hall (1998:430) they [...] *presents us with a veritable laboratory within which to test new conceptual frameworks and to evaluate organizational practices.*

Social factors are a very important part in forming a destination's tourism. They can either be an advantage for the destination or it can pose an issue. Social issues may appear when questions and concerns about health, level of security or the destination's general image is being put into doubt by visitors. (Brandon 1996) According to Ingram and Durst (1989:12) bad press and lack of knowledge of a destination country, may lead tourists not to choose it as the place for their vacation. Also, employment and income gained by the host country from tourism activities, is a factor that could make a difference for the visitor when choosing his destination for travel. (Ingram and Durst, 1989:13)

The concern for diseases and other forms of health-endangering factors can reduce tourism significantly. (Brandon 1996). For example, Thailand and the Kenyan coast have seen a

decrease in tourism because of AIDS, and certain destinations of Africa are being avoided by visitors because of malaria. (Anon., 1992c:22, cited in Brandon 1996)

Another limitation for the tourism development, especially in nature-based destinations, is the lack of awareness of the local communities to participate in tourism activities. According to Karmas (2014) cited in Bola (2015:318), ecotourism barriers which in many cases revolve in the lives of the host communities can lead to this lack of interest to engage in the destination tourism activities. He further stated that the reason for this is emerging from low social statuses, weak economy, poor education and poor transportation systems, all of them evolving around the lack of motivation to participate in ecotourism activities.

The social factors mentioned above, act as limitations for the future development of any destination that encounters them. Although issues like diseases and security threats are mainly common in developing countries, matters such as lack of awareness and disinterest of the host population in tourism activities may appear in developed countries such as the ones in Central and South-eastern Europe. As mentioned earlier, by Ivy and Copp, (1999) countries that were part of the ex-communist bloc, still have loopholes in their post-socialist policies that tend to de-prioritize tourism planning, thus, leading to population losing interest in tourism and tourism practices.

Environmental factors as we know are an important element when it comes to practicing tourism. Seasonality, natural disasters and pollutions are some key elements that may limit tourism development.

Brandon (1996:6) notes that when you consider seasonality, two factors need to be taken into account: *that in the origin country of tourists (eg. school summer vacation) and that of the destination country (eg. monsoon season)*. Natural disasters such as cyclons, hurricanes earthquakes, volcanos erupting or unfriendly climate are all factors that limit the potential of a tourist destination.

Depending on the nature of the destination, the environment can play a key role in limiting the development of tourism projects, particularly, nature-based destinations, which are more or less defined by sensitive environments. Any plans in building infrastructure, transport routes and other landscape modifications must be done so carefully and sustainable, as the excessive land usage may increase risks of tourism decreasing

Following a program designed to fund scientific researches is Kamchatka, Zwirn *et al.* (2005) notes that the project included an *energy-intensive mode of travel* due to the accessibility of the destination. Also, because of the high costs of creating renewable sources of energy, electricity and heating was produced by diesel generators.

Technological factors can influence the potential growth of tourism through the form of communications. As stated earlier in this section, a bad destination image may reduce the flow of tourists. In the present days, a destination image is being formed mainly from ways

of communication like Internet and media, thus, a tourism destination may suffer from negative images and marketing.

However, the absence of ways to communicate may be a definitive factor for choosing a destination by the visitor. Brandon (1996:6) states that *operators and tourists are more likely to go where communications are possible to help with trip planning and last minute changes*. Given the case of ecotourism destinations, he further states that *communications are often poor or non-existent*, given the remote characteristic, specific for some ecotourism locations.

General issues and impacts of ecotourism in protected areas

Ecotourism and sustainable development in tourism are quickly becoming a trend in the general mind-set of the tourism developers. As we know, ecotourism is generally attributed to nature-based destinations and protected areas which are becoming more attractive and interesting for the tourism sector in Europe and other tourist-generating countries.

According to Balteanu *et al.* (2008:3), *The number of ecotourists keen to experience an unspoilt natural and cultural setting, rural tourism, outdoor activities, or well-being programmes is on the increase as policies and programmes of environmental protection are more active and* tourism-developing programmes focus on impact issues.

Given the sensitive nature of ecotourism, in the sense that it promotes conservation of natural and cultural resources, tourism developers and the beneficiaries from tourism activities are bound to meet some challenges along the way. Furthermore, in this section of the paper we will discuss and analyze some of the general issues resulting from the impacts of ecotourism in protected areas, with the help of other examples found in the selected literature.

Infrastructure issues

According to Tisdell (1997), tourism developers and policy makers in developing countries are sometimes explaining the reduced tourism growth by the lack of specialized infrastructure present in the area, such as transport, telecommunications and accommodation.

Following Tisdell's (1997) research in the Sunderbans, a protected forested area shared by Bangladesh and India, infrastructure was presented to be one of the leading impediments for tourism growth. Furthermore, the solution was standing in more investment in infrastructure for tourism. Tisdell (1997:27) further comments that *While provision of tourism infrastructure is sometimes essential for developing economically worthwhile tourism, supply of such infrastructure need not result in a substantial rise in tourism or the costs involved in supplying.-the infrastructure may exceed the (social) economic benefits obtained*. In other words, given the nature of ecotourism that is based on strong environmental protection, investing a lot in infrastructure will not necessary lead to tourism

growth if the costs exceed the revenue coming from ecotourism activities. Building infrastructure in protected areas must be done-so with care and responsibility for the future sustainable growth of the ecotourism practiced in the area. The “responsible” characteristic of ecotourism being present in many principles of ecotourism.(see, Higham 2007: 27)

Although in the tourism industry infrastructure is generally characterized by mass accommodation buildings and big-scale transport and communication facilities, in ecotourism, the infrastructure, because of the sustainable aspect of the tourism, is at a smaller-scale and more driven to efficiency and environmental protection. However, infrastructure and especially facilities for tourist accommodation are needed, in order to achieve the necessary revenue for sustainability. According to Stubelj and Bohanec (2010: 2555), *the new philosophy of European parks encourages development with an intense note of nature conservation instead of forbidding development in order to maintain the pristine conditions of an area*. What Subelj and Bohanec (2010) suggest is, although being concentrated on nature conservation, ecotourism must also benefit from infrastructure that allows and facilitates reaching this objective, and infrastructure development must not necessarily be reduced or disallowed. Many worthy examples for this kind of philosophy come from ecotourism being practiced in nature-based destinations like Germany, Italy, Austria, France and UK. (Subelj and Bohanec, 2010)

On the other hand, there is the issue of the increasing number of ecotourists that have the same infrastructural demands as conventional tourists. This issue was highlighted by Cater (1993) and he believes that some ecotourism destinations are in the position where they have to adapt to westerners’ tastes and needs. *In the Nepalese Himalayas, trekking lodges offer almost impossibly extensive menus, placing excessive pressure on wood fuel as the cook attempts to juggle demands for dishes as diverse as pizza and rosti. [...] In Belize coastal development involves the clearance of mangrove swampland and consequent drainage and infilling using topsoil literally shaved of the wetland savannah a few miles inland*. (Cater, 1993:89) Although infrastructure for tourism is an essential element, Cater’s (1993) examples offered earlier, illustrate the visitor’s needs that are still dependent on natural resources in order for their leisure to be complete. In the process, environmental ethics of natural resource utilization are being disregarded or unknowingly ignored. However, this issue will be discussed later in this chapter.

According to Balteanu’s *et al.* (2008:8) paper on Ecotourism and Environmental Change in the Romanian Carpathians, *the most important elements in tourism infrastructure are the accommodation units which meet the tourists’ vital need for rest and leisure*. The importance is residing in the capacity of accommodation of the units which determines the volume of tourists. (Balteanu *et al.* 2008).

In the case of protected areas in the Romanian Carpathians, the number and the type of the accommodation varies from *boarding-houses, camping sites and bungalows, to villas, hotels, motels, hostels and rooms for rent in private houses*. Some, inside the protected areas, and some in the near proximity.(Balteanu *et al.*, 2008:8). Table 1 shows us the

number and types of accommodation units in the Romanian Carpathians by the year 2007, certified by the Tourism Department of the Ministry for Small and Medium Enterprises, Trade, Tourism and Liberal Professions:

Table 1 *Type of accommodation in the Romanian Carpathians protected areas, Jan. 2007*

No.	Accommodation type	No. of units	No. of rooms	No. of bed-places
1.	Hotels, hostels, renting rooms	102	4,493	8,957
2.	Motels	8	98	194
3.	Villas	38	406	796
4.	Boarding-houses	485	8,014	16,218
5.	Chalets	9	117	275
6.	Bungalows	3	20	46
7.	Camping-sites	4	124	350
	Total	649	13,272	26,830

Source: Ministry for Medium and Small Enterprises, Trade, Tourism and Liberal professions, Tourism Departament, retrieved from Balteanu *et al.* 2008:8)

Also, according to the same source, our researched area Vanatori-Neamt Natural Park, has a total of 10 units, which have 289 rooms and 581 bed places. Worth mentioning is that from 2007 the number of units is likely to have increased, especially when it comes to villas, private housing or more recently, rooms in monastery private accommodations.

Although the number of accommodations seems small, Balteanu *et al.* (2008) notes that according to *Romsilva National Forest Administration* there are no issues with the accommodation and with the environment being damaged, even in the case of higher numbers of unanticipated visitors. However, he further suggests that accommodation owners, national and natural park administrations along with handicraftmen, local, regional and national associations (e.g. Romanian Association for Ecotourism, National Association for Rural, Cultural Tourism and Ecotourism) are few in numbers and their experience in ecotourism practices and products is not attracting tourists.

Other infrastructure issues, if I may add, could relate to transportation and roads. Accessibility is an important factor of attracting tourists. Although the national roads in the Romanian Carpathians has a good coverage and are in relatively good conditions, there are no modern roads, such as highways, that can shorten the time spent in the vehicle, getting to the destinations. A good road infrastructure leads to a better international connectivity and a more eased access towards ecotourism destinations.

Environmental issues

Analyzing environmental issues is of great importance for ecotourism. Given that the environment is the main “product” that ecotourism offers, its alteration and degradation can lead to future socio-economic issues, as-well as a tourism decrease.

According to Alemu (2015:1) environmental destruction and degradation can block future development in two ways: *Firstly, it diminishes the wellbeing of a community by draining the natural resources and decreasing the value of the environment in various ways. Secondly, it decreases longer term productivity and thereby the forthcoming earnings of a given society.*

Although environmental changes can occur naturally from different natural disasters (e.g. hurricanes, earthquakes, tornados etc.) or climate change (ice caps melting, global warming), most of the environmental degradation is made by human interaction. One of the most important issues coming from human interaction with the environment stays in land and natural resources overutilization.

For a long time communities and organizations have been in constant struggle to control and utilize more natural resources, even on the limits of protected areas. Annis (1992) perfectly illustrates this issue happening in Guatemala’s last standing forest, where land and natural resources seekers use the land for agriculture and besides that, there are others like: *licensed commercial loggers who seek to export the fine hardwoods, Mexican lumber poachers who make extractive forays from across the Sarstun Rivers, wildlife poachers who bring out macaws, ocelots, and guacaymayas* and many others who want access to the territory. (Annis, 1992:589) *This overuse of natural resources aggravates the degradation of the environment and declining of productivity which continues to keep poverty increasing.* (World Development Report 1992, in Alemu 2015: 1)

Creating protected areas in order to minimize human interaction could be a good solution. However, it does not stop humans permanently from taking advantages of the natural resources present in the area, which according to Alemu (2015) are *deple* or non-renewable or renewable natural resources. Such is the case of Costa Rica, where the creation of natural parks and protected areas has not stopped some of the fastest rates of deforestation in the world. (Minca and Linda 2000, in Buchsbaum, 2004) Also, Wallace and Pierce (1996:845) note that without proper management from the protected areas in the Amazon Basin in Brazil, *[...] locals, who are often subsistence users of the area’s resources, continue to pressure protected areas with resource utilization that is not managed and often not sustainable.*

The Romanian Carpathians make no exception when it comes to environmental issues. Balteanu, *et al.* (2008) notes that biodiversity loss is one of the big issues that protected areas are trying to resolve (e.g. vegetal and animal endemic species are dangerously under the limit of extinction because of climate change, hunting, poaching and inappropriate tourism management). Deforestation is an issue that grew in short periods of time due to the political transition, where the new laws *sanctioned private propriety and unfortunately*

paved the way to deforestations (Balteanu, *et al.*, 2008). Even before the transition period started, the communist regime made no exception when it came to maximum utilization of the woodlands. According to Bennet (2000:11 cited in Turnock 2002:51), *The forests were clearly overexploited under communism with annual production of the timber – as much as 38.0 million tonnes – considered by the WWF to be unsustainable.*

In Vanatori-Neamt Natural Park the issues of biodiversity loss are being closely monitored. The Carpathian Bison reintroduction programs are very efficient as-well as the ones that monitor vegetation and other endemic species of plants. Deforestation seems to be a general problem in the Romanian Carpathians, this making the case of Vanatori-Neamt Natural Park also. Although in the area of the park tree-cutting is closely monitored, and has to be approved by the park administration, massive parcels of forest are disappearing in the nearby regions due to bad government management, corruption and illegal wood businesses. For example, today the well-known private company IKEA owns 0.5% of the Romanian forests, which they gained after some contested, supposedly corrupt processes, with the Romanian parts. (See <http://realbusiness.co.uk/business-growth/2015/07/31/ikea-becomes-first-company-to-have-its-very-own-forest/> , <https://www.occrp.org/en/investigations/4990-ikea-s-forest-recall>)

The overutilization of natural resources is an issue that has worried environmental organizations for a long time now. Although protected areas have the power to some extent to counter this issue, many times the problems stands at a much higher organizational level or in illegal and unexpected processes, where protected area managements can't reach and thus, minimize the impacts on the environment. The problem also lies within the local communities, present inside or outside the protected area. The lack of awareness towards the responsibility that comes with ecotourism can have a substantial impact on the utilization of the natural resources. Such is the case with Romanian rural local communities, which, according to Nistoreanu (2005), don't contribute enough to the development of ecotourism activities.

Visitor impacts on the environment

As stated above, protected areas have to manage a series of negative impacts coming from human interaction, some of which getting out of hand, or out of reach. However, one of the general issues protected areas have to deal with is controlling visitor impacts on the environment and on the local community. As stated by the *National Park Service* (2001) *Ongoing activities that might have led or might be leading to an impairment must be investigated and, if there is or will be an impairment, the impairment must be eliminated as soon as reasonably possible.*

According to Logan *et al.* (2008), concerns over impairment of the environment in protected areas and other similar regions, is an important issue that grows exponentially. He further notes, that the importance of this issue comes from the two essential criteria that parks and related areas need to fulfill, namely that parks are to be enjoyed as-well as

protected. *Visitors [...] impact the natural environment and the tourism experience, while the quality of the experience is affected by the management actions necessary to ameliorate those impacts.* (Chin *et al.* 2000: 21)

Several researchers have discussed the issue of visitor impacts on the environment and in what ways do the visitors manage to create impairment while engaging in tourism activities. (see, Marrion and Farrel, 2002; Curry and Moutinho 1992; Clow *et al.* 2011;)

As suggested by a report of the English Tourist Board (ETB, 1991), Fyall *et al.* (2003: 127) notes that the types of visitor impacts on touristic attractions gravitate under these categories:

Overcrowding – although a subjective, issue given that it depends on the destination carrying capacity, overcrowding can occur in many tourism situations. Overcrowding can inflict damage on certain attractions, like museums or art exhibits etc., it can damage visitor pathways or natural protected areas. Also, the issue of overcrowding can be decisive on the visitor satisfaction for a certain attraction.

Wear and tear – given the nature of the visitor intention, either willingly or accidentally, these impacts can include trampling or walking on sensitive or forbidden areas of the sites, either stepping on a flora reservation area, or on a natural monument etc. Humidity and temperature created unintentionally by the visitors can damage art pieces. As noted by the researchers, the presence of visitors in the tombs of the Queen Nefertari, in Egypt, damaged the paintings on the walls due to the high humidity, this resulting in reducing the time that visitors are allowed to stay in the tomb. Pilfering and graffiti are intentional actions taken by the visitors such as, stealing from the gift-shop, cafeteria, or valuable exhibits, and compromising the surroundings of the site by painting on surfaces.

Traffic-related issues – are issues that actually speak from themselves. They range from traffic congestions and pollution from vehicle exhausts, to accidents and land deterioration etc.

Impacts on the local community – these issues can impact the local community in the moment when visitors practice *thoughtless and anti-social behavior* such as: trespassing, rudeness towards the locals and other forms of negative behaviours (e.g. too much alcohol, disregard to environment integrity and on tourist sites etc.) Fyall *et al.* (2003) also notes that these issues can go the opposite way too. The local communities might impact the visitors through a negative behavior.

Impacts of visitor management on the authenticity of the attraction - according to the ETB report, in Fyall *et al.* (2003:129), there is *the potential of visitor management itself, to have damaging impacts on the authenticity of the visitor attraction and the experience it offers.* These impacts can be: *the provision of visitor facilities* which can affect the ambience of the

attraction, modifications to the destination sites to receive a bigger flow of tourists, or facilities that require the use of inappropriate materials

The above impacts provided by Fyall *et al.* (2003), mostly characterize the dangers of impairment of certain individual tourist attractions, like museums, inner-city or outer-city attractions, castles, palaces, zoo's and botanical gardens etc. However, some of those impacts can be applied to natural-based areas, which can also have different tourist attractions, such as natural monuments in the form of aged trees, caves or other natural exhibits that are under the protection of national\natural parks rules and conservation policies.

Visitor impacts are especially significant when it comes to protected areas. With the increased levels of popularity of natural protected areas nowadays, the level of visitors has also grown, due to an increase in mobility and accessibility. (Wearing and Neil, 2009) *In most park systems in most countries tourism use of parks and protected areas increased robustly over the last 100 years. Further increase can be expected in the current century.* (Eagles, 2004:18) As such, the high numbers of visitors in natural protected areas impacts and inflicts significant pressure on those environments that the protected areas management is trying to preserve.

Following a qualitative research assessing visitor impacts, on eight protected areas situated in Costa Rica and Belize, Farrell and Marion (2001) identified several types of impacts on: trail, recreation site, attraction feature, wildlife, water etc. However, the research showed that the most common impacts that concerned the protected areas management were trail impacts and recreation site impacts. Some of the more commonly reported trail impacts identified by Farrell and Marion (2001:218) were *excessive erosion, exposed roots, muddy soil and visitor-created trails*. Marion and Reid (2007:5) also argue that *visitors to protected areas inevitably leave an imprint, from vegetation trampling, trail erosion and degraded cultural resources to visitor crowding and recreation conflict*.

For a nature-based destination or a protected area, visitors can be the greatest impairment factor to the environment on which they travel, but at the same time there is the necessity of visitors so that the destination has a source of revenue. Natural\national parks managers need to take into account the fact that *the fundamental purpose of all parks also includes providing for the enjoyment of park resources and values* (NPS, 2000: 339)

Therefore, identifying the impacts that the visitors have on the environment becomes a necessary operation that falls under the responsibility of the ecotourism operators or the protected area manager. *Ongoing activities that might have led or might be leading to an impairment must be investigated and, if there is or will be an impairment, the impairment must be eliminated as soon as reasonably possible.* (NPS, 2000: 339)

Anderson (1998) notes that in the case of visitor impacts, one must decide if the impacts that are made on the environment are acceptable or unacceptable. The decision that whether an impact is acceptable or not on the environment, is left for the protected area service manager.(NPS, 2000). Furthermore, following Anderson's (1998: 8) intakes on the unacceptable impacts of visitors on a protected area, we can divide those in two ways, namely, *resource impacts*, and *impacts on the experience of the visitor*.

Resource impacts – refer to the impacts that the tourist/visitor makes on the environmental resources that the destination offers for his enjoyment.

One of the most common impacts is *trail deterioration, trail erosion, excessive trail muddiness, excessive trail width etc.* (Anderson, 1998: 8) Trails are an important facility in a natural park, because it eases the way for tourists into uncharted areas, it serves for a recreational use, and it helps protecting the resources by offering tourists a pre-set path, determined by the park management. (Leung&Marion, 1999; Marion and Leung, 2001) Therefore, the trail deterioration in any form can also lead to the deterioration of the environment through erosion, vegetation damage and also, as noted by Symmonds *et al.* (2000, cited in Lynn and Brown, 2003: 84), *[...] conditions related to improper or poor trail drainage detracted slightly from the quality of biking experience.* So, in addition to resource negative impacts, trail deterioration may lead to a loss of quality in the tourist experience.

Campsite deterioration occurs when visitors excessively use the land when, for example, setting a camp to rest or to spend the night. Anderson (1998) notes that with high use of campsites, impacts like soil erosion, vegetal loss, or depletion of dead wood for fire can appear. Washburne and Cole (1983, cited in Martin *et al.*, 1989: 623), found that natural park service managers in over 70% of all national forest wilderness, consider the impacts made at campsites to be an issue. Martin *et al.* (1989: 623) further notes that the most common campsite impacts are *bare ground* and *tree damage*. However, *while these impacts may not threaten the ecological integrity of an entire area, they may result in serious localized resource damage and certainly have the potential to affect the quality of visitor experiences.* (ibid)

Water pollution is one of the main concerns of impacts of the visitors on a protected area. Water pollution consists in contamination of water with fecal material, food and animal remains or chemical substances resulting from the use of visitors. (Anderson, 1998) Assessing the visitor-use impacts on water quality in Yosemite National Park, California, Clow *et al.* (2011:197) notes that *there is concern that visitor-use associated activities, such as bathing, dish washing, wastewater production, and stock animal use near lakes and streams, could cause degradation of water quality [...].*

Other visitor impacts on natural-based destinations, may consist in *cultural resource deterioration* (e.g. compromising or stealing cultural resources), littering and leaving marks of human interaction, *soil compaction*, vegetation damaging and *wildlife and fishery*

impacts such as: destruction or loss of habitat, introduction of alien species of plants and animals into the environment, illegal recreational sports (e.g. fishing and hunting), etc.

Visitor experience impacts – are impacts that manage to deter in any way the quality of the visitors experience at the destination site. Anderson's (1998) intakes of visitor experience impacts, don't differ much from what was provided earlier in this section, namely the English Tourist Board's (ETB, 1991) report, on visitor impacts on tourist attractions. As such, Anderson (1998) notes that *crowding* in high levels, unacceptable traffic conditions, unacceptable encounters on the trail-way, visitor centers and in campsites, small number of parking spots, all can influence negatively the quality of the visitor experience. Also, *visitor safety* is a concern that can lead to *noncompliant and resource destructive behavior*. Finally, *inadequate or inappropriate levels of access* to different facilities, or to natural areas or cultural resources appealing to the visitors (e.g. poor facilities management that fails to address the basic needs of the visitors) could negatively affect the quality of the experience.

Conclusions

This chapter, *Current issues in ecotourism*, was intended to discuss and analyze the current challenges that ecotourism and sustainable tourism development is facing today. In the first section, *Lack of consensus*, I tried to highlight the issue that ecotourism researchers meet, when trying to proper define ecotourism. This issue gravitates on the fact that, (Ross and Wall, 1999: 123) *ecotourism is defined in many ways in the tourism and environmental literatures and it is being advocated in the absence of widespread recognition of the practical conditions under which it may be best promoted, managed and evaluated*. In other words, there are many existent definitions of tourism, but there is a lack of consensus when it comes to differentiate ecotourism from other forms of tourism. Furthermore, I have concluded this section with the idea that defining ecotourism is subject to territory, in the sense that ecotourism is better defined by the destination itself, and the environmental policies that constitute that destination.

The second section of this chapter, *Challenges and limitations of ecotourism*, tried to encompass and discuss some of the general factors that can act as an impediment for tourism development in general, and ecotourism. In that sense, I took into consideration political factors that can block tourism development through issues like political unrest, race and gender issues etc. Also social and economic factors were addressed, where the development of tourism can be blocked by the type of the destination image, or the level of safety and also the level of employment rate coming from tourism actions. Finally, environmental and technological factors were discussed. Given the more sensitive environments in ecotourism areas, seasonality, along with natural disasters and pollution were discussed as issues that can counter the future development of tourism activities. Technological factors were addressed under the form of communications that can interfere

with the development of a tourist destination. In that sense, the level of access to Internet and media coverage can be detrimental in forming a destination image.

Finally, the third section was more specific to the issues that address protected areas and the impacts of ecotourism in these areas. I have taken into account issues that relate to infrastructure. In that matter, I have discussed the challenging implications and the specificity of infrastructure in natural protected areas, and also the necessity of a responsible development of infrastructure in those types of environments. Environmental issues were also a topic of discussion, where, *climate change, caused by the cumulative effect of disparate activities such as pollutant emissions and deforestation, may ultimately be the most pervasive and persistent human-induced impact on wilderness*. (Peters and Lovejoy, 1992, cited in Cole and Landres 1996: 169) Towards the end of this chapter, the last topic addressed was the visitor impacts on the environment. As suggested by the English Tourist Board report, found in Fyall *et al.* (2003), I have discussed issues that relate with visitor behavior impacting tourist attractions, such as, overcrowding, traffic issues, thievery etc. and also visitor impacts on the natural resources and impacts on quality of the visitor experience in nature-based areas.

2.4 Stakeholders in ecotourism

This chapter is intended to share some views on the existing theory on what are the stakeholders and what role do they play in tourism and more specific, in an ecotourism background. Thus, before advancing to discuss and analyze the role of stakeholders, we will briefly take a look on some of the existing definitions of stakeholders, proposed in the literature.

For a better comprehension of what a stakeholder is, the definitions for this concept *range from narrow views, where stakeholders are seen as actors of organizations, to broad views that include virtually any actor*. (Zehrer and Hallmann, 2015: 121)

In the same matter, Freeman (1984), who believes that a group that can affect a corporation should be called a ‘stakeholder’, proposed one of the most commonly shared definitions in stakeholder theory: *A stakeholder in an organization is (by definition) any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives*. (Freeman, 1984: 46)

Following more recent studies, Mitchell *et al.* (1997: 855) defines stakeholders as *persons, groups, neighborhoods, organizations, institutions, societies, and even the natural environment are generally thought to qualify as actual or potential stakeholders*. In defining the stakeholders, Mitchell *et al.* (1997) called upon answering two questions, namely, *who is a stakeholder and what is a stake?* Mitchell *et al.* (1997: 855-856) found that *it is the view taken about the existence and nature of the stake that presents an area of argument, because it is upon the basis of "stake" that "what counts" is ultimately decided*.

Today, stakeholders play a very important role, and are a part of the management processes and the achievements of many business organizations. *Each of these groups plays a vital role in the success of the business enterprise in today's environment.* (Freeman, 1984: 25)

Theories defining stakeholders are found in several research papers and articles. Many of the researchers have used definitions that have a base of understanding on Freeman's (1984) work on the stakeholder concept. Some of them were also consulted here before settling on Freeman's classic definition. (see, Mitchell *et al.* 1997; Harrison and Freeman, 1999; Sautter and Leisen, 1999;) In addition, Donaldson and Preston (1995) offer examples of significant books following Freeman (1984) stakeholder theory, such as: Alkhafaji (1989), Anderson (1989) and Brummer (1991).

According to Anderson *et al.* (2013) there are two types of stakeholders: primary and secondary stakeholders. Anderson *et al.* (2013) further offers examples where primary stakeholders can be employees, suppliers, customers, financiers and communities; and secondary stakeholders go under the forms of competitors, consumer advocate, groups, special interest groups, media and the government.

An interesting example that can help understand better the roles of the stakeholders is provided by Mccold and Wachtel (2003) in their paper A Theory of Restorative Justice, where primary stakeholders are perceived by them as being victims or offenders involved in a criminal act, as well as their relatives. On the other hand, the secondary stakeholders *include those who live nearby or those who belong to educational, religious, social or business organizations whose area of responsibility or participation includes the place or people affected by the incident.* (Mccold and Wachtel, 2003: 2)

Now, having discussed the examples above, going back to Zehrer and Hallmann's (2015) *narrow to broad* view of stakeholders, we can understand the range of stakeholders under a development plan, where stakeholders start from small managerial groups (e.g. the town hall and the destination management organization – DMO, of a community) and end with bigger groups of individuals and organizations with beneficial roles in the area where the managerial groups activate. (e.g. culture houses, touristic destinations and attractions, shop and accommodation owners, cultural and religious establishments etc.)

From a tourism standpoint, Sautter and Leisen (1999: 312) argue that *debate continues as to whether or not tourism truly benefits all entities involved in its system.* Furthermore, the role of stakeholders in the development of a community is perceived by Sautter and Leisen (1999) from two angles. Firstly, *the political economic view* which sets tourism in a role where it gains wealth by using an exploited community, and second, *the functional view*, in which tourism seeks to maximize the profits for the community benefit, with minimal cost impact to the natural and cultural resources of the community. As noted by Sautter and Leisen (1999), in the first angle-set, the outside groups or the managerial groups have maximal decisional power in the detriment of the community. On the other hand, the functional view involves all parties and groups that are interested in, or are affected by the

tourism businesses and sets them working together at the same level, and with the same decisional power. It is important to mention that in each approach view the managerial organizations and the destination planners choose to follow, the power of decision and the interrelationships between the stakeholders change. Sautter and Leisen (1999) further acknowledged that in earlier tourism studies, the need of collaboration between stakeholders in the planning processes, was much needed. In the same sense, but when it comes to ecotourism, Garrod (2003: 3) also mentions that there is *a small body of literature that seeks to highlight the critical importance of local participation in the planning and management of ecotourism*.

Garrod (2003) following Cater's (1994) intakes, highlights the importance of community *involvement* in organizing and planning ecotourism activities, with a particular importance for developing countries. However, Garrod (2003) notes the differentiation between 'involvement' and 'participation' is important to be clear. According to him, in the first, the meaning could mean only gaining co-operation from the community in making the planning implementation go smoother. In the second, the meaning implies a bigger collaboration between the community and the planning groups in decision-making processes, or, as Garrod (2003) notes, a *participatory* approach view, for tourism development.

Having discussed on some of the definitions given to the stakeholders, and their important role in community development, we can conclude that stakeholders in any planning or business development represent any group or individual that is affected or has beneficial gains from that business or planning development. From the intakes of Sautter and Leisen (1999) and Garrod (2003), we acknowledged that the role of stakeholders in an tourism or ecotourism development is highly needed. Therefore, a more *functional* or *participatory* approach from tourism/ecotourism development, where primary and secondary stakeholders have collaborative planning decisions, is the most recommended approach in order to satisfy the benefits expectation of both parties. Furthermore, under, I will approach the concept of stakeholder roles in sustainable development, from a natural park (protected area) perspective.

The role of stakeholders in a protected area

According to Eagles *et al.* (2002: 47) there is a wide range of stakeholders in a protected area which *make constant demands upon park management*, and they could be as follows: park planners and managers, park visitors and employees, local community, environmental groups, hospitality industry, tour operators, DMO's, educational institutions, among many others. However, Eagles *et al.* (2002: 48) further notes that there are four groups on which a protected area management has most interest in: : (1) *society in general, including local communities*, (2) *park managers*, (3) *tourism operators*, and (4) *visitors and users*. Eagles *et al.* (2002) further notes, that each of the groups has a different perspective in viewing park tourism.

Moreover, Eagles *et al.* (2002) argues the importance of stakeholder involvement in a successful planning. *Successful planning generally involves all groups in such a way that each can contribute constructively to the various components of the process, and thus feel “ownership” of the plan.* (Eagles *et al.* 2003) He further argues that during development planning, stakeholders must be involved from the very beginning, and not after the decision has been taken. In the contrary case, when the community stakeholders are being set aside the decision-process by the protected area management, conflicts between the local community and the protected area may arise. (Liu *et al.* 2010)

On a more interesting fact, there are several researchers that have argued the need for counting the natural environment as a stakeholder. Starik (1995) was one of the first researchers that have argued that the stakeholder theory has yet to take into account the natural environment as a stakeholder, and contrary, *the stakeholder status has been restricted to humans.* (Starik, 1995: 207-208) One of the arguments for addressing this topic was the fact that for a time now, the natural environment and issues related to it have been *thought to be within the domain of business*, thus, the question comes of why haven't many businesses, managers and societies approached the natural environment as a *relevant business environment*. Later on, Philips and Reichart (2000) have approached the topic of natural environment as a stakeholder. However, they argument their approach based on Starik's (1995) intakes on this matter. More recently, Driscoll and Starik (2004) have continued to debate on the stakeholder theory of whether the natural environment can be considered a stakeholder of a business plan. In their article, Advancing the Conceptual Consideration of Stakeholder Status for the Natural Environment, the researchers *distinguish between environmental institutions (groups, organizations, associations, or networks) as stakeholders and the natural environment as one or more stakeholders.* (Driscoll and Starik, 2004: 56) Finally, Laine's (2010) relatively more recent study, highlighted some perspectives that include the natural environment as a stakeholder as-well as arguments of why it shouldn't be considered a stakeholder.

Raising from the issue of my research question, which follows to find solutions for increasing sustainability awareness among the locals, I believe that an important role of stakeholders in this situation, is to assume the role of a promoter, either if it's for promoting the destination touristic image, or raising awareness of the community concerning ethics and behaviors of sustainable development. The importance of the stakeholders in being informers for the people is highlighted by Morgan *et al.* (2003: 289), who states that, *while the provision of direction for development is implicit in ‘visioning’, what is important is the emphasis in formulating the destination vision through a publicly-driven process based on stakeholder values and consensus [...].* In this matter, Sacchettini *et al.* (2012), believes that the process of awareness-raising is conducted through a movement like *“a broadly organized effort to inform and educate people about a topic or issue with the intention of influencing their attitudes, behaviors and beliefs towards the achievement of a defined purpose or goal.* (Sayers, 2006, cited by Sacchettini *et al.* 2012: 279)

Additionally, Eagles *et al.* (2002) suggests a guideline for a successful planning of a protected area. In this guideline *public participation* has a key role in a successfully implemented plan, where their objectives are *learning* and *consensus-building amongst: visitors, private sector operators, society at large and local communities*. (Eagles *et al.* 2002: 49, Figure 4.2) What Eagles *et al.* (2002) is suggesting, is that the secondary stakeholders (represented by the visitors, private sector and local community) in any protected area plan, have to firstly learn the potential behaviors and ethics suggested by the plan and also, in a collaborative way, raise awareness of this plan in order to gain consensus among them. This, as stated earlier, highlights the fact that stakeholders need to play the role of the promoters and also the role of consumers of the product they are creating awareness for.

It is important for stakeholders to achieve a common interest in creating sustainable awareness, even if their businesses interests inside a community don't match, the need for a sustainable development inside an ecotourism community is imperative, as suggested by the definitions given in ecotourism literature. Sacchettini *et al.* (2012) note that awareness-raising in any development plan should be the responsibility of trained operators and groups that are capable to offer valuable information in this matter. Thus, for example, stakeholders such as accommodation owners in an ecotourism or protected area should be well informed on protected area policies and ecotourism ethics, in order to share the knowledge and achieve community awareness.

In order to conclude, we can say that stakeholders play a critical role in a protected area or nature-based destinations. Stakeholders can vary a lot depending on the profile of the destination. Protected areas offer a wide range of stakeholders. Using Zehrer and Hallmann (2015) narrow to broad view, protected areas include primary stakeholders such as park management, park employees and other planning groups working inside the park, and secondary stakeholders that constitute the entire communities present in the area of the park, such as: accommodation owners, touristic attractions managers, cultural venues managers, visitors/tourists, local population, private establishments and many others.

Stakeholder involvement and participation is strictly important for a development plan that would benefit every party interested, as regarded by Sautter and Leisen's (1999) *functional* approach to tourism. Also, regarding our research problem, stakeholder role in any tourism development should also be able to create awareness of the policies and behaviors that the development requires. Such being the case of natural parks, and not only, where there is a need of achieving consensus between stakeholders, due to the fact that they have their [...] *own motivations and perspectives on the benefits of tourism in protected areas [...]* (Eagles *et al.* 2002: 51) and to get involved in the planning processes which is imperative for a good collaboration towards achieving awareness.

In the next chapter, we will discuss more on the theories present in today's specialty literature, related to the phenomenon of creating awareness, theories which will help us

understand better this concept, and also offer us possible solutions for a good development plan towards this matter.

2.5 Theoretical framework

The purpose of this chapter is to present the theories taken into consideration during the research and the writing of this paper. The theories selected have the objective of offering suitable solutions that will help answering the main research question of this paper, namely: *How can the “Vanatori Neamt” Natural Park ecotourism management plan, improve on the sustainability awareness among the locals and the community stakeholders?*

In the following, we will briefly discuss some suggested strategies of creating sustainability awareness, present in the selected literature, and finally, I will present the theoretical framework selected for helping with the analysis of my research results.

Strategies for creating awareness

When it comes for sustainable development, Garbie (2015: 64) believes that *industrialists (e.g., practitioners) understand the term of sustainability very well, this term itself proved to be difficult when used in society*. Furthermore, Garbie (2015:64) highlights the idea that this situation has created confusion towards the concept of sustainability and *therefore, there is a big gap of awareness between public and industry and the application of sustainable development needs participation of everyone in the community*. Hereby, sustainability is not possible without community participation who are aware of their tasks and duties and applying them with a sustainable mentality. (Garbie, 2015) Thus, the issue rises of how can the management of a protected area succeed to ‘educate’ the community towards a better collaboration and more conscious attitude towards sustainability.

There is a good variation of ways of increasing awareness towards sustainability yet most of the literature has approached this topic mainly to *justify a business case for large enterprises engaging in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*. (Font *et al.* 2014) However, under, I will shortly discuss some suggested strategies of creating awareness for protected areas, found in the specialty literature and also a theoretical framework that I believe is most suitable for framing my analysis of my research findings.

Furthermore, one of the first suggestions of increasing sustainability awareness is coming from Font *et al.* (2014) who propose three frameworks which tourism small and medium enterprises (SME), and European protected areas, could adopt in order to create more local collaboration and sustainability driven mentalities.

The first framework implies *cost reduction competitiveness* (CSR) in which according to Font *et al.* (2014: 1440) SME’s adopt a resource-based approach and will *undertake sustainability actions that can provide a competitive advantage, because competitors cannot (or will not) quickly imitate them*. Although these individual actions cannot be considered valuable, due to the fact that it cannot be imitated by others that do not have the

resources for this, Font. *et al.* (2014) argue that one can explain sustainability in this form, because most SME's present in the same market, will not see this as a strategy to compete but more, if I may add, as a morale value duty. Font *et al.* (2014: 1440) further noted that *it is possible for successful enterprises to be copied by other more commercial enterprises in a way that would suggest the resource-based view of the enterprise applies to sustainable tourism.*

The second framework suggested by Font *et al.* (2014) is **societal legitimization**. As the researcher notes, this framework seeks to explain the *engagement in sustainability* through a *search for societal legitimization in the eyes of stakeholders*. (Font *et al.* 2014: 1440)

In this case, the SME's are driven by the core values of the owner, such as responsibility towards sustainability, and engage into actions like: creating reliability of the SME, pay taxes and bills on time, collaborating with the competitors and generally the stakeholders. (Font *et al.* 2014) As such, the researcher concludes that *industry associations or destination-wide efforts to introduce sustainability values may encourage SMEs to realize the salience of sustainability activities as part of this social capital*. (Font *et al.* 2014: 1441)

Worth mentioning is that in this case, the idea of sustainability is shared through the relations between SME's and community, as the expected result of being socially responsible is more probable when the success-perception of the community on the enterprise is increased. (Font *et al.* 2014)

The third, and last framework, is approaching sustainability by explaining it through the idea of **life-style choices** which are supported by *values* and not *conscious actions*. (Font *et al.* 2014) In other words, SME's in this case, have to maintain a certain level of quality in their environment that has to come from choosing a sustainable life-style based on values, which Font *et al.* (2014:1441) calls *utility maximization*, in the detriment of *profit maximization* (ibid.)

Protected areas, the researcher notes, appeal to entrepreneurs that chose lifestyles based on *alternative values* rather than growing their profits. Furthermore, Font *et al.* (2014) concludes that there are examples in the literature of successful entrepreneurs that chose lifestyles based on sustainability, community support or family support, while ignoring making profits. On the other hand, *there is evidence of SMEs underestimating the skills necessary to run a tourism enterprise and so influencing the practices they could implement*. (Font *et al.* 2014)

In order to achieve sustainability, Daily and Huang (2000) propose another planning tool which according to them, helps environmental managements to complete these objectives. The tool proposed by them, **environmental management systems** (EMS) is derived from a series of guidelines for new environmental management standards, ISO 14000, which *consists of 20 environmental standards that are voluntary and process-based*. (Daily and Huang, 2000: 1540) According to the researchers EMS is a tool that works successfully

when using human resources. Furthermore, a management organization, such as the management of a protected area, can influence the success of an EMS by:

- *Promoting employee empowerment to affect changes*
- *Affecting organizational culture to support changes*
- *Instituting systems to promote desired behaviors like: rewards or incentive programs*
- *Provide training, and increase communication throughout the organization*

(Daily and Huang, 2000: 1543)

Madsen and Ulhoi (1996, p.21, cited in Daily and Huang, 2000:1544) argue, according to a survey they conducted, that *employees generally indicate that they do not feel sufficiently informed about environmental matters*. In this case, full dedication from the management organisms in these matters is not enough, and *employees should be able to make changes to improve the environment without excessive management intervention*. (Daily and Huang, 2000: 1544)

To summarize, EMS is a tool that an environmental organization or management can use in order to achieve a certain level of environmental sustainability. This tool works best when the leading management is using involvement of human resources. Also, the advantages of this tool come when environmental managements and organizations are using employee and public awareness of the policies they want to implement, teamwork and a reward system for a better performance of environmental practices. (Daily and Huang, 2000)

Ballantyne and Packer (2005) approach the topic of sustainable and environmental awareness, from an educational standpoint. *Environmental education, both in and outside of the classroom, aims to facilitate adoption of sustainable practice by both school students and the general public*. (Ballantyne and Packer, 2005: 281) The researchers believe that ***informal educational environments*** can have a positive effect on promoting sustainable practices and behaviors. They offer some examples of how informal educational environments can promote sustainable attitudes and behaviors, such as: encounters with nature, sustainable tourism, school field trips and issues exhibitions (Ballantyne and Packer, 2005: 284-287) In other words, environmental educators can teach students as-well as tourists to practice in such environments, because having an experience first-hand in how to behave more sustainable can leave an imprint of these experiences, which can be used in the future.

Following on of their earlier researches (Ballantyne and Packer, 1996), Ballantyne and Packer (2005) suggest a theoretical framework that gives a meaning to environmental learning. *They propose that, to accomplish lasting, meaningful and effective change in environmental conceptions, it is necessary to employ a range of strategies that address the learner's knowledge, attitudes, values and behavioral orientations as part of an integrated approach*. (Ballantyne and Packer, 2005: 289) Some of the strategies they propose are presented under.

Arousing emotions – imply that emotion is a definitive factor and has a motivational effect on learning and choosing what to do or what to explore. (Ballantyne and Packer, 2005) What the researchers suggest is the fact that through stimulating the emotions tourists can memorize more easily the practices and behaviors specific for a certain environment. They further comment that emotion plays an important role in moral judgement: [...] *rational decision making processes are not sufficient to explain engagement in such behaviours without taking into account the power of emotions such as feelings of guilt, fear or emotional affinity toward nature.* (Ballantyne and Packer, 2005: 290)

Challenging beliefs – by challenging beliefs the researchers suggest that it is important for informal education programs with the target of influencing visitors' attitudes and behavior, to address the collective beliefs of those visitors. In other words, *themes that are selected and developed on the basis of salient beliefs will be strategically more useful than those selected for other reasons.* (Ham and Krumpe, 1996: 18, cited in Ballantyne and Packer, 2005: 291) Therefore, it is important for the informal educational programs to understand the visitors' prior knowledge (Ballantyne and Packer, 2005)

Also, Ballantyne and Packer (2005: 291) further argue that it is important to challenge the [...] *learners' beliefs about their own ability (or inability) to make an impact on environmental problems [...]*. By challenging the visitors' ability of whether they can make an impact on the issues or not, the researchers suggest providing positive examples and experiences of situations in which visitors had an influence, this way making them more action-active towards environmental issues.

Enhancing environmental conceptions – seen from a constructivist perspective, Ballantyne and Packer note that it is important to have a prior knowledge on learners' beliefs and conceptions on a certain topic, and to confront them with new information that is designed to strengthen or put into doubt those current conceptions and beliefs.

Following a previous research on the topic, by Ballantyne, Fien and Packer (2001a, 2001b), Ballantyne and Packer (2005: 292) suggest that by focusing on an environmental problem, the effects of the problem and the actions needed to solve the problem, *allows the cognitive, affective and behavioural elements of environmental education to be effectively integrated.* They further suggest that cognitive experiences that include these three steps, with the mention that the *affective* element must be in all three of the steps, will be most successful in creating a plus of awareness towards environmentally sustainable attitudes and behaviors.

Ballantyne and Packer suggested approaching the issue of creating sustainability awareness through informal educational actions that tourists can employ, such as interacting with the environment and practicing ecotourism. By having a good understanding of the tourist conceptions and of what a protected area implies, environmental educators can stimulate the emotional judgement of the visitors which, as noted by the researchers, has an important impact on behavior and attitude change. As such, people responsible with informing tourists in natural\national parks can apply some of the strategies proposed above, in order to attempt

creating higher sustainability awareness among the internal and external tourists and local community.

Later on this chapter, I will refer again to Ballantyne and Packer's (2005) approaches and strategies for creating environmental sustainability awareness, while linking it with the theoretical framework chosen for this paper.

Conclusions

In order to conclude, the strategies discussed above are some of the few that approach or can answer our research question of *How can the "Vanatori Neamt" Natural Park ecotourism management plan, improve on the sustainability awareness among the locals and the community stakeholders?* The strategies, mainly address how can a management organization (or a primary stakeholder) improve on creating more collaboration and policy awareness, and positively influence sustainable behaviors and attitudes from the employees, public, and society in general (or secondary stakeholders). Also, educational strategies to approach sustainability were discussed, and I believe have a better approach to our research area, Vanatori Neamt Natural Park, due to the fact that this strategy allows easier implementation in small, rural communities that surround it.

Among other strategies mentioned in the selected literature, worth mentioning is Newell's *et al.* (2010) GLATE analysis which seeks to address the issue that organizations can no longer ignore environmental problems and must create a more sustainable environment among them. The analysis takes into consideration factors like *generation, logistics, accountability, technology and environment* that managements need to address for accomplishing their new sustainable objective. Also, Mahidin and Maulan (2012) interestingly approach creating a sustainable environment, by analyzing the environmental preferences of children. They argue that although there are growing numbers of campaigns, and promotion concerning nature awareness among children, they are highly ineffective and thus, propose achieving environmental awareness by understanding more about the environment preferences and needs of a still developing mind.

The sustainability triad

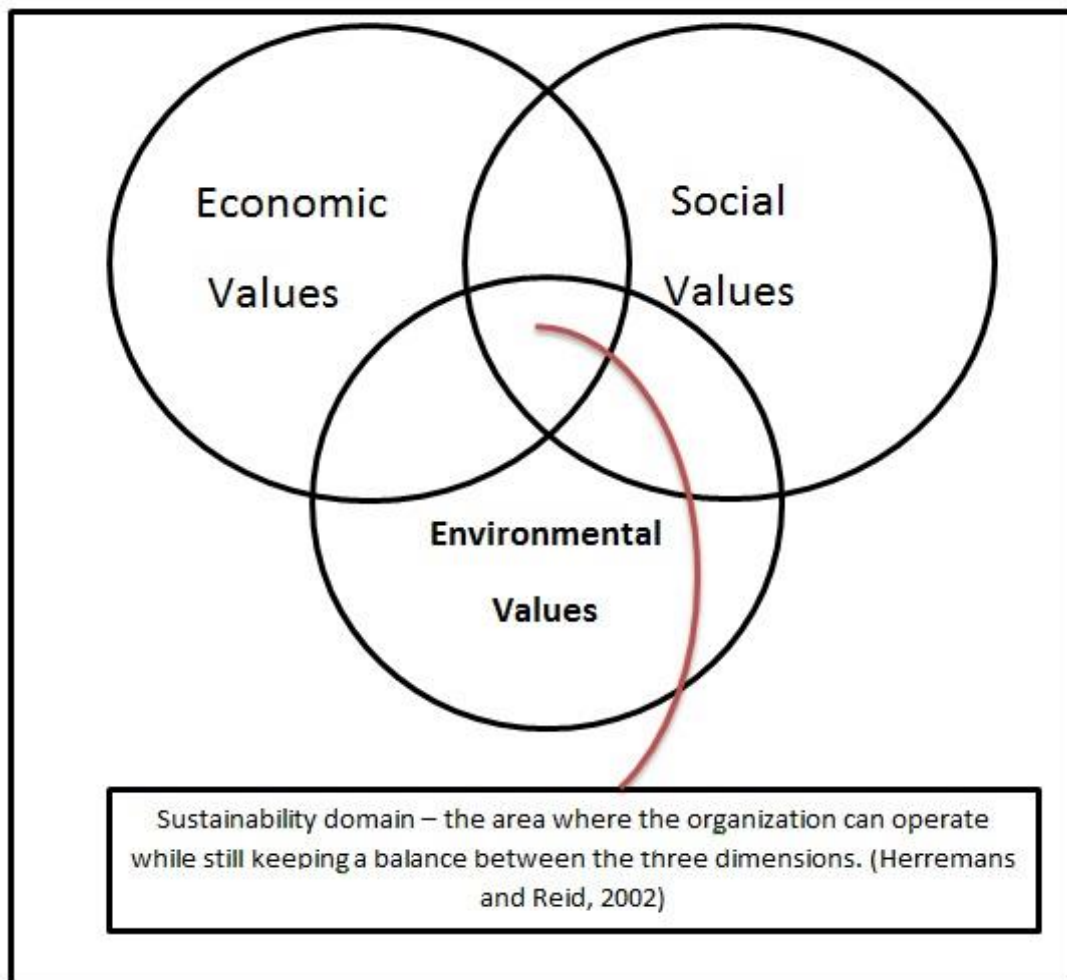
Herremans and Reid's (2002) sustainability triad (Figure 2) is a set of three dimensions attributed to the concept of sustainability that is meant as an educational tool for students, which provides them with [...] *a concrete process for identifying practices that are not sustainable and determining why they are not sustainable.* (Herremans and Reid, 2002: 17)

They argue that students should learn about the issues of the environment through *investigation and discovery*, and form their own values and attitudes that help having a well-documented opinion about the issues of the environment, and thus, find solutions for achieving sustainability.

According to Herremans and Reid, by using the triad for case analysis, students have several gains in understanding sustainability and how you can achieve it:

1. Students can more easily analyze the inter-relations between the three dimensions and *begin to understand the dimensions more thoroughly by defining activities that fit into each of the areas of overlap (education about the environment).* (p. 17)
2. The triad helps the student understand that the issues which stand against sustainability, are coming from certain mind-sets and conceptions of various stakeholders present in a community or organization; (Herremans and Reid, 2002)
3. Using the framework enhances the capacities of the student's judgement, analysis, synthesis and evaluation; (Herremans and Reid, 2002)

Figure 2 – The Sustainability Triad



Source: adapted from Herremans and Reid (2002:17)

Herremans and Reid's triad, as the researchers note, is actually how sustainability is illustrated in *the Western culture*. The three circles represent the three dimensions of

sustainability, and the area which unites all three circles, is the sustainability area. The sustainability area represents, as noted in *Figure 1*, the area where the organization can take actions while still keeping a balance between the three dimensions. (Herremans and Reid, 2002)

The researchers propose this theoretical framework because it discovers the cause of why a certain area isn't sustainable, and searches to find solutions for sustainable awareness issues. (Herremans and Reid, 2002) In other words, by applying this framework you could document yourself on the different stakeholder mentalities, behaviors and practices, from the perspective of each dimension and then find suitable solutions for the issue that you need resolved. Therefore, Herremans and Reid (2002), propose a solution which stands in educating future generations in the matters of sustainable attitudes and behaviors.

Individuals who have knowledge about environmental issues or knowledge about how to take action on those issues, are more likely to engage in environmentally responsible behavior. (Hines et al. 1986/1987, p.3, cited in Herremans and Reid, 2002: 18)

Personally, I have found this theoretical model best suitable for framing my research analysis. As stated earlier, this framework helps in understanding that issues standing against sustainability are derived from a series of stakeholder conceptions (Herremans and Reid, 2002). With the help of this framework I will manage to find correlations between the stakeholders in the three dimensions of the triad, while analyzing the data collected. Also after establishing some ground points of my analysis, based on this model, I will proceed in discussing possible solution for my research question.

While conducting the research, based on the theoretical framework, I have managed to find a set of ethical values conflicts, between the stakeholders of the three dimensions, conflicts that have created the need of increased sustainability awareness. In the analysis of my research I will address those conflicts drawn from my observations and the responses of my interviewees.

In addition, I argue that education of students in the matters of sustainable awareness is a viable solution for the future ecotourism of our researched area, however, part of the current adult community which is currently active in the area of the park, lacks the basic education about sustainability, and threatens to limit possible positive actions, that future sustainable generations could take on the environment.

I would propose that implementing *education about the environment* (Herremans and Reid, 2002) in academic institutions, the natural park should also inform and collaborate more with the other ecotourism stakeholders. While doing so, they should implement informal educational strategies that appeal to the emotional judgement of the visitors and locals, and challenge their current values, beliefs and attitudes towards sustainability issues. (Ballantyne and Packer, 2005)

For the Vanatori Neamt Natural Park, implementing the proposed solutions would be a challenge, in the sense that they should be leaders by example in such strategies.

This would require managing a series of new educational programs for different stakeholders and get involved with competent environmental educators, in promoting sustainability awareness to visitors at destination points, in schools and in the society. Also, costs for informational and promotional materials that have to apply more to the moral judgement of visitors and local community.

Such as in the Sustainability Triad framework, the natural park in conjoint effort with other competent ecotourism stakeholders, must manage to achieve a certain level of sustainability, in which they need to address all the needs of the stakeholders in the three dimensions. Achieving this, would get them in the *sustainability domain* where they will manage to keep a positive balance between all three dimensions.

2.6 Conclusions

The literature review chapter was intended to provide us with theories and definitions of the key concepts selected, that regard the topic of the research question of this paper.

We have acknowledged in defining ecotourism and sustainable development that the two concepts go hand in hand. Ecotourism is an experience that is widely based on conservation of the natural and cultural resources, with actions that will create future advantages for the community and economy. It has an educational profile that is seeking to appeal to the spiritual experience of the tourists that raises their concern and awareness for the environment. (Andersen, 1994)

On the other hand, sustainable development is a prerequisite of ecotourism. After a review of several definitions given in the literature, I have concluded that sustainable development is a concept that has the power of defining itself, being subject to the territory's policies of where it is applied. In the case of sustainable tourism development, the phenomenon is regarded as the form of tourism which addresses the needs of all involved, and closely monitors the present and future economic, social and environmental impacts. (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005) As a way of achieving sustainable development, *monitoring*, seemed to be a viable solution for protected areas, which based on a careful analysis of well-established indicators, it can discover possible impacts of every nature, and through a joint operation with the stakeholders, find suitable solutions.

Current issues in ecotourism, has provided us with some of the intakes of different researchers on the general absence of consensus when it comes to properly define ecotourism. Also in this chapter, I have addressed and discussed some of the general challenges and limitations of developing tourism where we saw that political factors play a

relatively limiting role with their post-communist policies of tourism development in Central and South-eastern Europe. Finally, issues resulting from the impact of visitors and local communities on protected areas environments, where the impacts of local communities and private businesses on the natural resources, is of major importance and needs to be addressed.

Stakeholders in ecotourism, presents us with some of the general definitions of what a stakeholder is. Classified as primary and secondary, we have found that most of the stakeholder theory uses the *narrow* to *broad* view, where primary stakeholders are perceived as organizations and the actors involved in it, and secondary stakeholders range to basically any actor in the environment of the organization that is affected by the organization's management. This chapter also discusses the general roles of stakeholders, as-well as their role in nature-based and protected areas. We have concluded that stakeholders should play a big promotional role, in which secondary and primary stakeholders need to collaborate for spreading the awareness of sustainability, for their own and society's benefit.

The last part of the literature chapter, gave us some intakes on some of the strategies different researchers presented for creating sustainability awareness. In here, we have found that informal education environments that appeal to the emotional judgement of tourists towards environmental sustainability issues, could provide a viable solution for natural park managements in dealing with changing mentalities, behaviors and attitudes. Also, the *Sustainability triad* has helped me in framing my research, based on the three dimensions of sustainability (economic, social and environmental). The triad has also provided a solution which stands in future environmental aware students, based on environmental education they receive in academic institutions. In the case of our research area, I have argued that this solution, in link with informal education of the visitor and appealing to their moral judgement, is more suitable for the small rural community profile of the natural park.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Methodology is a way to study the observed world, and those ways are determined by the information and methods we use to manage to interpret our data. (Blumer, 1969 cited in Baugh, 1990: 1). Similarly, Ainley (2015: 1) notes that, *as a system to collect and analyze data, methodology refers to the tools, instruments, or procedures designed by a researcher at the outset of a study to conduct his/her inquiry*. However, Baugh (1990; 1) notes that *methodology* is a concept that has no defined meaning and in reaction, it has unlimited boundaries.

Based on what is stated above, in this chapter I will explain systematically the types of data collected as-well as the ways through which I did it.

3.1 Research philosophy

In this section of the chapter I will present the ontological and epistemological implications of this research.

Ontology and *epistemology* are a set of two different views of one's research (Figure 2). *Ontology* can be defined as the view in which *the knowledge of being in general-fundamental ontology-presupposes the 'factual situation' of the mind which knows.* (Levinas, 1989: 121) In other words, ontology is *the science of being* or, a science which is assessing the origin and nature of reality (Blaikie, 2010).

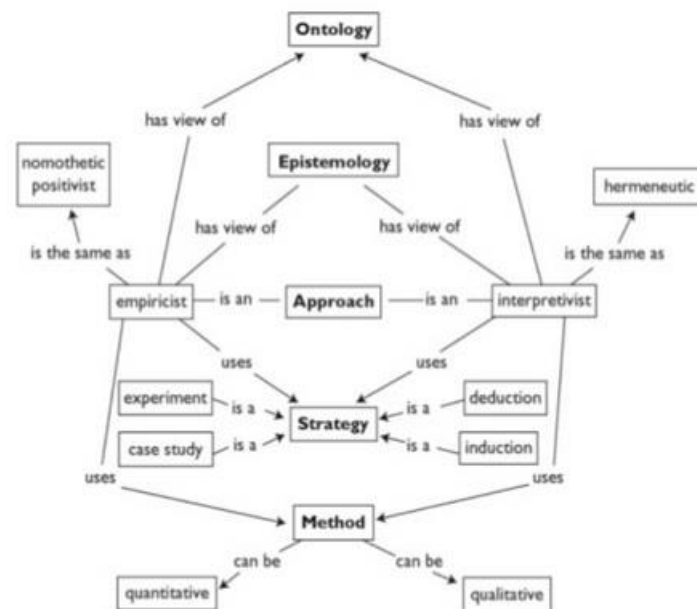


Figure 3 – The impacts of ontology on the chosen research method

Source: retrieved from Dudovskiy, 2011, <http://research-methodology.net/>

In a research, ontology requires that the researcher needs to decide on his perception on *how things really are*, and *how things really work*. (Scotland, 2012: 9) As a consequence, ontology implies two sets of paradigms in which the researcher has an *objective* or *subjective* view of a social entity (Levinas, 1989). Bellow I will define the two paradigms and also discuss my own ontological position.

Objectivism or *positivism* take on, a realist position (Levinas, 1989). In objectivism, *a discoverable reality exists independently of the researcher* (Pring, 2000a: 59 cited in Levinas, 1989: 10). On the other hand, subjectivism (also known as *interpretivism*) takes

on a position of *relativism* (Levinas, 1989), where relativism *is the view that reality is subjective and differs from person to person* (Guba & Lincoln, 1994: 110 cited in Levinas, 1989: 11).

The position that I took towards my research is one of *interpretivism*. As such, my view in this research was a subjective one, in which my assumptions were based on what I perceived as reality. In this research, my interpretative approach consisted in comprehending a social phenomenon from the perspectives of certain individuals and considering the interaction between those individuals and their cultural context. (Crotty, 1998 cited in Levinas, 1989: 12) As a consequence, I have chosen the appropriate method for collecting my data, method that I will discuss in the next sections of this chapter.

The interpretive epistemology is one of subjectivism which is based on real world phenomena (Levinas, 1989: 110). Consequently, my aim was to respond to my research question based on what I have perceived on the field study, as-well as comparing the issue with other cases that presented similar phenomena.

3.2 Qualitative research

A qualitative research was used in order to gather data for this paper, because this type of research helps to study behaviors, attitudes and mentalities in their entirety without interacting with the natural flow. (Johnson and Christiansen, 2008) Also, according Johnson and Christiansen (2008: 36) qualitative researchers argue that *it is important to 'get close' to their objectives of study through participant observation so that they can experience for themselves the subjective dimensions of the phenomena.*

Silverman (2006: 18), suggests that there are four major tool that qualitative researchers use, namely, *observation, analyzing texts and documents, interviews and focus groups, audio and video recording.* For gathering the data in this project, in-depth interviews were taken because they tend to draw more on answering the *hows*, as in trying to *understand the biographical, contextual, historical, and institutional elements that are brought to the interview and used by both parties.* (Fonatana, 2002: 166, cited in Seale, 2004: 1) Silverman (2006) further notes that interviews are commonly mixed with observations, however, he further comments that observations are only necessary in the incipient phase of the research.

According to Merriam (2002), one common approach for a qualitative type of research is *the basic interpretive qualitative study* where, [...] *the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon [...].* (2002: 8) Merriam (2002) also notes that the meaning of the phenomenon is being mediated by the researcher, while the data collection uses and inductive strategy with a descriptive result.

As such, although the time was short, I focused on getting as much interviews as possible for the data collection. Being able to approach a series of primary and secondary stakeholders, offered me substantial information on the current status of ecotourism in the area, as-well as their opinions on the level of awareness of sustainability and the measures they took or not, towards increasing it. As stated earlier, the focus was to gather as much data as possible. This approach, according to Thomas (2006) is called *inductive analysis* where the researcher seeks to draw upon themes and concepts through interpreting the data he collected. However, while the inductive approach helped me in gathering data that I used for analyzing different themes and concepts regarding my paper's topic, I argue that the process of data collection was also conducted in order to respond to my assumption about the lack of sustainability awareness being an issue. This kind of approach is called by Thomas (2006) *deductive*, and he states that *deductive analysis refers to data analyses that set out to test whether data are consistent with prior assumptions, theories, or hypotheses identified or constructed by an investigator* (2006: 238). At the same time, Elo and Kyngas (2008: 111), suggest that deductive analysis implies using and testing *concepts, models and hypothesis*. As such, my analysis will be organized according to Herremans and Reid's (2002) model, *The Sustainability Triad*.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

All the data collected for the purpose of this research was achieved through observations and in-depth interviews, combined with getting information on the key concepts of our research from articles, books, studies, journals, websites and others. While gathering data, my focus was on topics like ecotourism, sustainability and sustainability awareness, major issues and impacts of ecotourism protected areas along with stakeholders and their role in nature-based destinations.

Primary data collection started with an individual at-home research on the potential interviewees that I could have. I have chosen to reduce the area from which I gather my interviews only to the Natural Park's location of the administration, and the two neighboring communities, Vanatori Neamt and Targu Neamt.

Before flying to the destination point, I have focused my attention on contacting the people that I wanted to interview. As my focus was mainly on interviewing some actors of the natural park organization and some ecotourism/tourism organizations independent from the park, I have managed to contact some of them by email and the responses were positive in most of the cases. In order to systematize conducting the interviews, I have chosen my interviewees based on the power of influence their organization has on the ecotourism development of the area, and also in order to know how to place them on my priority list.

As such, out of six successful interviews, the primary stakeholders were the leaders of the natural park management (tourism manager and park guide, chief ranger and project

manager, director of the park) and Vanatori Neamt town hall, in which I managed to get an interview with the mayor. The secondary stakeholders interviewed were a school principal and also ecotourism NGO founder, and the tourism information center manager from Targu Neamt.

Primary stakeholders:

In the Vanatori Neamt Natural Park I have managed to conduct three interviews, all three were programmed ahead, by phone call:

- **Mr. Razvan Deju** was the first interview that I managed to program. The interview was taken on 7th of June around 9:00 am. Mr. Deju is the chief ranger of the Natural Park, and he is also the one responsible with the Carpathian Bison reintroduction program that the Park has, as-well as ecotourism promoting projects and collaboration with other institutions and private businesses in the community. The interview was conducted in the native language, due to the fact that Mr. Deju didn't felt comfortable with his level on English. After the interview Mr. Deju was also the one who helped with programming the interview with the director of the Park.
- **Mr. Sebastian Catanoiu** is the director of the Vanatori Neamt Natural Park for over 10 years. The interview was taken on 8th of June around noon, and interestingly, it took place right after his meeting with the secretary of the US Ambassador in Romania. This was the only interview I managed to get in English.
- **Mrs. Elena Curea** is a park guide and responsible with tourism in the area of the Park. Also, she is the one responsible with educational programs initiated by the Park, in collaboration with the schools in Vanatori Neamt, and other rural areas in the proximity of the Park. The interview was taken on the 10th of June around 15:00 pm
- **Mrs. Maria Petrariu** is the mayor of the Vanatori Neamt community, which also has under administration other two satellite communities, Lunca and Nemtisor. In her case, I couldn't manage to get an interview while I was present in Vanatori Neamt due to the fact that she was on an international trip. After arriving from Romania, I have managed to contact her by email, and send her the interview which she completed by writing her responses.

Secondary stakeholders:

- **Mrs. Carmen Petrariu** is the EcoOzana NGO founder and principal in the biggest school in Vanatori Neamt community. The interview took place in her office after school hours, on 13th of June. Prior to the interview, I have contacted Mrs. Petrariu through some common acquaintances and manage to schedule a meeting with her.
- **Mr. Daniel Amihailesei** is the project manager and founder of the Targu Neamt tourism information center. He is relatively new at this job, due to the fact that he founded this tourism information center in 2015. He was also unreachable during my stay in the region. I have contacted him later on, via Facebook and proposed the interview to him. His opinions also came in writing and in Romanian language.

Worth mentioning is that my period of staying there was short, only 10 days. Prior to arriving there, I have also tried reaching by email one cultural foundation, and two NGO's founders, which didn't answer to my emails. While I was in the region, there was also a challenge of travelling on distances that reached 25 km. The Natural Park has two headquarters, one near Vanatori Neamt, and one situated in Agapia community which is further away from my accommodation situated in Targu Neamt. The interview with Mr. Deju was taken in Agapia headquarters. The fact that summer holidays were starting might also have played a challenging role in finding more candidates for interviews.

Furthermore, there was a total of 10 days of field study, where I managed to conduct a total of six interviews. During conducting the interviews observations were used also. According to Silverman (2006) observation is one of the tools fundamental to many qualitative studies. Johnson and Christiansen (2008: 211) define observations as *watching the behavioral patterns of people in certain situations to obtain information about the phenomenon in interest*. Also they mention *qualitative observations*, which involve *observing all relevant phenomena and taking extensive field notes without specifying in advance exactly what is to be observed*. (2008: 212) By using observations, a researcher's objectives may include notes on the people activities, behaviors and roles, as-well as their relationship with other individuals or institutions. (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008) Observations have a subjective profile and they imply that the researcher has a certain level of academic preparation. However, they helped me in captioning some aspects on the field study which were not recorded. These aspects will be discussed in the last section of this chapter, regarding the barriers that I have encountered while conducting the research.

Interviews were the main tool used for gathering the data concerning our researched area. Interviews are ranging from highly structured, where the questions organized and prepared before the interview, to unstructured, where you have the area to be researched but the questions and the order of the questions are not predetermined. (Merriam, 2002). However, the researcher notes that *most interviews fall somewhere in between*. (2002: 13) As such, for gathering the data, semi-structured interviews were used. According to Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008: 113) *this interview technique is used to find out what is happening, seek new insights, identify general patterns and understand the relationship between variables*. According to them, researchers who use this technique have a certain liberty in structuring the questions according to the way in which the conversation is going. Using semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to counterbalance getting broad information on topics and issues, while using a descriptive technique to keep the concentration on the topic. (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008)

All the candidates of the interviews accepted and voluntarily offered to answer the interview. This is identified by Johnson and Christiansen (2008) as *convenience sampling*. The interviews had between 8 and 10 questions. All questions were focused on finding out information about the current state of ecotourism in the area of the park, the level of sustainability awareness of the stakeholders, tourists and locals, the relation between

primary and secondary stakeholders and present and future projects and collaborations for increasing sustainability awareness.

There were 6 interviews, out of which, 4 interviews were representing the primary stakeholder, namely, the Natural Park administration, and 2 were considered secondary stakeholders due to representing different institutions with lower influence, but with the same ecotourism and sustainability interests. Only 4 interviews were recorded, while the other two were written interviews, due to the fact that it was not possible to schedule a meeting prior, and while I was present in the area. Before starting each interview, the approximate time was shared with the interviewee and also the aim and background of my research. They were also informed that the data will not be used in other materials or given to other parties, and will be deleted after the research is completed.

All interviews, except the one with the director of the park, were conducted in the native language. This is important to mention due to the fact that the translation of the interviews might affect the analysis of the data. During the interviews, I have tried taking notes of the responses and also ask complementary questions where was considered. Also, all candidates responded to the interviews at their workplace office. This, I believe, did not have any effect on the quality of the responses, as every interviewee has been noticed at least a day before and the meeting was scheduled, so they weren't preoccupied with other tasks during the interview.

Secondary data was also an important aspect of this research. The secondary data for this research came from different journals, books, articles and websites. This data focused mainly on defining the concepts and theories that I considered relevant for the topic of this research. As such, secondary data provided me with intakes on ecotourism and sustainable development theories, theories on stakeholders and their role in a nature-based destination, as –well as frameworks and models found in specialty literature that regarded sustainable awareness.

According to Johnson and Christiansen (2008: 217) secondary data, or as they call it *existing data* or *already available data*, are data that were collected, recorded or left behind at an earlier time, usually by a different person and often for an entirely different purpose than the current researched proposed at hand. There are different types of secondary data, like personal documents, official documents, official data and archived research data. (Johnson and Christiansen, 2008)

All research studies need secondary data in order to provide a backbone for the study. (Walliman, 2006) *An advantage of using this kind of data is that it has not been produced for the specific purposes of social research, and can therefore be the basis of a form of unobtrusive inquiry.* (Walliman, 2006: 83)

3.4 Research reliability

Data reliability is an important element in a research. This is why the method that one uses for collecting data has to be able to obtain reliable and unfiltered information. Selecting a qualitative type of research, I believe offered me an advantage towards reliability of my data, due to physically being on the studied area and gathering data.

Taylor *et al.* (2015: 9) notes that *all perspectives are worthy of study*. Through this, Taylor *et al.* (2015) trumps what Howard Becker (1967) stated regarding that only the most influential people have valid perspectives. He believes that in qualitative researches, the meaningfulness of the research comes from the fact that it contains *first-hand knowledge of the social life, unfiltered through operational definitions and rating scales*. (2015: 10)

Golafshani (2003) believes that reliability is a concept that is used mostly in evaluating quantitative researches. By quoting Eisner (1991:58) Golafshani (2003: 601) notes that a good qualitative study can help *understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing*. The researcher further comments that this relates to the idea of a good quality research when reliability is a tool for evaluating quality in quantitative studies with the *purpose of explaining*, while in qualitative studies, the quality concept has the meaning of creating understanding. *The difference in purposes of evaluating the quality of studies in quantitative and qualitative research is one of the reasons that the concept of reliability is irrelevant in qualitative research*. (Golafshani, 2003: 601) Pope *et al.* (2000) is also contesting the appropriateness of reliability regarding qualitative researches. He further notes that in qualitative research the use of more than one analysts could increase the reliability and flexibility of the data analysis.

3.5 Research validity

Validity can be defined as the extent to which the data collection method(s) accurately measures what is intended to measure, and the extent to which the research findings are really about what they profess to be about. (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008: 130) In other words, the validity of the research implies that the findings and results of the analysis really have to reflect what they imply to be about. The researchers suggest that in order to check the validity of the researchers, it is enough to ask a series of questions, starting with the research question, and to see if the data collection method you used answers those questions. (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008)

According to Golafshani (2003) *validity is affected by the researcher's perception of validity in the study and his/her choice of paradigm assumption*. Therefore, many researchers have developed their own concepts of validity according to what they think is more suitable, and validity transformed into *quality, rigor or trustworthiness*. (Golafshani, 2003)

The interviews conducted for this research were recorded and accompanied by notes. Afterwards, the responses were transcribed, and during this process, the results were reviewed and analyzed. In order to strengthen the trustworthiness of my research, the triangulation method was used. *Triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources.* (Carter *et al.* 2014: 545) Furthermore, the data resulting from the interviews and observations were later analyzed against the literature concepts and thus, I was able to more critically review the contents and making sure that the reality of the situation [...] is being conveyed as truthfully as possible. (Merriam, 1995:54)

3.6 Generalizability

According to Golafshani (2003) if the validity and reliability of a research can be augmented and tested then the result will be more credible and based on other similar situations, which could lead to *generalizability*. *Generalizability refers to the extent to which one can extend the account of a particular situation or population to other persons, times and settings, than those directly studied* (Schofield, 2002: 52). However, Schofield (2002) argues that *generalizability* or *external validity* are concepts that are mainly used for quantitative studies given that quantitative researchers tend to see the objective of this type of approach as, *to be able to generalize findings to diverse populations and times* (Smith, 1975: 88 cited in Schofield, 2002: 172)

Given the broad topic of my research which is, to be able to provide solutions for sustainability awareness, other similar situations are bound to be found. During the theoretical part of this research I have mentioned other similar cases of protected areas being concerned with the problem of sustainability and its awareness among the community. Also, by providing different theoretical approaches to solving this issue, in the *Theoretical framework* chapter, we can assume that the issue of sustainability awareness is being researched and the solutions are coming from similar concrete cases, such as ours.

3.6 Barriers in researching

Although from what was expressed above it might seem that that the research process went smoothly, it was not as fulfilling as I expected initially.

In this section of the chapter I would like to review some of the barriers that I encountered on the field, as-well as the challenges met in trying to contact candidates for interview, given that the whole process was done by one individual.

The process of gathering data started with planning a 10 day trip in which the purpose was to manage to schedule as many interviews as I could. Given the relatively poor area when it comes to social-resources, I have primarily focused on contacting the actors that I considered as primary stakeholders. As such, using some personal relations that I have in the area, I have managed to contact the NP administration and secure a visit at the park.

Worth mentioning is that prior to arriving in the study area, I have contacted other candidates (primary stakeholders: city manager – Targu Neamt, cultural house director, town hall - Vanatori Neamt) but I haven't received any answers back, leaving me to personally go there and meeting them. Before leaving I had a high response expectation but at the same time, I knew that there is the possibility of not getting all the interviews planned.

By the time I arrived in the study area, I only had two interviews scheduled. After the first interview with Mr. Deju I have managed to program the second and the third one with Mrs. Elena (the tourism responsible) and Mr. Catanoiu (the director of the Park). Before starting the interview with Mrs. Elena, I have already caught my first impressions about the level of awareness the community has, when Mrs. Elena stated, not necessarily in these exact words: *Sometimes we feel like we and the kids are the only ones that care about this problem*. This observation came after I have presented the topic of my research to her.

My first impressions after the interviews with the park representants were that the interviewees seemed well-prepared and informed regarding the issue of sustainability, and also really concerned about it, given that they were really interested in discussing this topic. (Mrs. Elena and Mr. Deju even offered me coffee while responding to my questions)

Another challenge that I encountered was arranging interviews by telephone. For example, when contacting the Culture House in Targu Neamt proved to be a dead. They have easily turned me down by motivating the lack of time due to a big agenda full with student celebrations for the end of school. Also a negative response I got from a couple of accommodation owners. One of them telling me that he is at his pension (accommodation and restaurant) only during busy nights and cannot help me due to the big distance between where he lives and his pension, while the other didn't seem to care a lot about the topic by telling me that he didn't think he is prepared enough to talk on this subject and to seek someone else.

In consequence, I think that some of the stakeholders don't seem to recognize the implications that they have upon developing ecotourism in the area. As I recall from past visits to one of their pensions, in the main hallway there were a lot of traditional and cultural exhibits specific to the area culture, along with information and brochures about the tourism objectives around in and outside the Natural Park.

The interview with Mr. Catanoiu, the director of the park went really well. The interview was conducted in English and although there seemed to be some challenges in understanding him, I believe it was coherent enough when transcribing the responses. Mr. Catanoiu seemed very pleased with the topic of my research, and he even mentioned coming from a meeting that he had with the Secretary of the US Ambassador in Romania. The meeting was specifically programmed for checking the use of some 'consistent' financial funds, as he told me, received from them by donation, for a four year use in

projects designed for educating and informing the community and visitors on the values of the land.

Another challenge encountered during my field study, was the unreliability of managing interviews via emails or Internet. Two of my interviews, namely, the one with Mrs. Maria Petrariu, the mayor of Vanatori Neamt, and Mr. Amihailesei at the center for tourist information in Targu Neamt, were conducted via email. By having these interviews in writing and sent through electronic mail, could affect the reliability and validity of the answers, in the sense that the candidate's responses don't have the 'face to face' aspect of a classic interview. This, in my opinion, has diminished the quality of the data, by not being there to get an intake and to observe the interviewee's attitudes and reactions.

In the case of Mr. Amihailesei, he assured me that he answered the questions as truthfully as possible, a fact, which I have observed in the personal touch of his responses, being more detailed and more attentive. However, the interviewer face to face observations are still missing. On the other hand Mrs. Maria Petrariu's responses, were more formal and more shortly formulated. Although her opinions on the matter were shared, her responses lacked the personal touch that was present in Mr. Amihailesei's responses. Therefore, this has put into doubt the fact that those responses were her true beliefs.

A more positive observation I made during the field study, was that the study area's academic institutions and the natural park were consistently involved in students' environmental education. Upon arriving for the first time at the Vanatori Neamt Natural Park headquarters, there were groups of students from schools with classes from 5'th to 8'th grade, in combination with highschool students, that were preparing to participate in a student project involving ecology and environmental awareness. Worth mentioning is that my father, who is the principal of one of the schools in Vanatori Neamt, was also there with his own team of student ecologists. However, I have not interviewed him out of consideration for the data not to get influenced.

Finally, a last challenge occurred was during the analysis of the data collected from the interviews. All the interviews, except the one of Mr. Catanoiu, were in the Romanian language. During the analysis I have systematically reproduced the answers in English. Similarly to what was expressed above, this situation played its role in challenging my research, and especially interpreting the answers. As a consequence I have done all I could in translating the responses as truthfully and as accurate as possible, in the limits of my English language level.

4. Analysis

4.1 How is ecotourism perceived in the area of the Vanatori Neamt Natural Park, and what are the stakeholder views on the level of sustainability awareness of the community?

From the results of the interviews I have concluded that there is a common view among stakeholders, towards the ecotourism practices of the area. In addition, the respondents have shared views, when it comes to judging the level of preparation and experience in ecotourism practices, of their local community. Bellow, I will try to share the views of the interviewees (stakeholders) on how they perceive ecotourism practices and behaviors, in the area of VN Natural Park, and later on, comparing the views they have on the level of sustainability awareness of the community.

According to some of the interviewees, the area of the VN Natural Park is a destination that offers a variety of natural landscapes and cultural values that make it a proper ecotourism destination. According to *Mrs. Elena Curea*, in the area of the park the tourists can visit multiple attraction like *Neamt Fortress, memorial houses, churches and monasteries, the zoo, and through the zoo they visit us (the park) and from here they can go to Bicz Gorge, The Red Lake [...]*. *Mrs. Carmen Petrariu* agrees with the above, and also adds that *these objectives can be visited in one day, maximum two*. She adds that tourists need some ways in which they can spend their free time here in the area, and for that she mentions that tourists can go to *different pensions, one of them has just opened a swimming pool, which is a good initiative for the kids and also for the tourists*, also she mentions *Dumbrava horse farm, where from the initiative of the Natural Park and the Dumbrava horse farm owner, people can horse-ride on wood trails from Dumbrava to the Natural Park head-quarters[...]*.

One of the common views regarding the tourism in the Natural Park area is the fact that tourists are mainly weekend tourists and they come in the area mainly for ecumenical tourism. *Mrs. Elena* states: *[...] transit-tourism characterizes the area [...] we can talk about ecumenical tourism, in the sense that in this area there are many monasteries, hermitages and other specific institutions, bigger in number than Athos [...]*. The director of the park, *Mr. Catanoiu*, also believes that *[...] they spend very little time in the area and their interest is 80% of the time in monasteries [...]*. Moreover, on a more negative aspect of tourism, chief ranger *Mr. Deju* states that, *Sadly, in the reference zone, there are a lot of visitors not tourists[...]*, further commenting that the visitors come and stay 1-2 days, and after, leaving for other areas out of lack of ways to spend the time. As the others, *Mr. Amihalesei* also identifies the ecumenical profile of the tourism in this region.

The views on awareness

When it comes to the awareness of the community towards sustainable practices, the interviewed candidates share different opinions. A common perspective is that the majority of the people have basic to almost none at all education when it comes to a

responsible development, whilst some of the secondary stakeholders are more focused on gaining the revenue from the tourist activities. Interestingly, Mrs. Elena Curea states that *we have the surprise of noticing that some of the people from Vanatori and Targu Neamt don't know that they are in a protected area [...] when they hear about the natural park they don't know about its existence [...]*. She further concludes that from an ecotourism education standpoint the region is poor.

In the same sense, Mr. Deju and Mr. Amihailsesei believe that the communities, mostly in the rural areas are lacking awareness towards the sustainable practices, while private business owners are concentrated on getting short-term revenues rather than being more responsible. Referring to the rural areas, Mr. Amihailsesei states: *[...] I don't know how prepared they are [...] I believe that many of them are aware that their land is under the Natural Park protection, but at the same time I don't think they are sufficiently educated in responsible development. It's a matter of interest also. Many of them are very interested in the funds from the European Union for their farms.* Mr. Amihailsesei blames this situation, on the lack of school education (this motive being summoned by Mrs. Carmen Petrariu and Mrs. Elena Curea also) from the communities present in the rural areas. He further mentions that also the local accommodation owners know the basis of informing the tourist of the practices and attractions on the area of the park but at the same time they focus on rapid earnings. In agreement with this is also Mr. Deju, who strongly believes that when it comes to the local tourism operators, namely, the owners of pensions and restaurants, *[...] they concentrate mostly on punctual events, such as weddings, baby showers [...] or on summer season.*

Mr. Catanoiu, doesn't think differently from the others: *The local communities are not educated, even the pension owners are not educated in providing services to sustain ecotourism [...]*, however, Mr. Catanoiu is not that concerned, mentioning that it is only a matter of time until awareness will be achieved, being just a matter of *different thinking* which implies hard work, but is doable.

Of a different opinion is Mrs. Maria Petrariu, the mayor of Vanatori Neamt. When asked about how well prepared are the stakeholders in the matters of ecotourism practices, she states that, *we consider that they are well prepared and experienced [...]*. On the other hand, when asked about the locals: *we think that it is necessary for a better awareness of the activities and practices of ecotourism from the local community [...]*.

In order to conclude, we can assume, that judging from the candidates responses, the Vanatori Neamt Natural Park and the areas adjacent, can be viewed as an ecotourism destination, in the sense that the area presents a high potential of nature-based attractions and possibilities for tourists to practice activities specific for this type of tourism, such as, trailing and horse-riding through the nature. There are also possibilities for tourists to experience beautiful and unique landscapes in Bicaz Gorges, and the natural-dam Red Lake. However, the area is characterized by an ecumenical type of tourism, meaning that the main objectives of tourists are to visit spiritual and religious destinations, which are

abundant in VN Natural Park. This situation transformed the area more into a transitory destination for most of the tourists, who spend no more than one or two days there, afterwards leaving to other areas.

When it comes to the level of awareness of the community, however, the area of the park can hardly be considered an ecotourism destination. As we observed, from the answers of the interviewees, the situation doesn't look so good. The area of the Natural Park consists mainly of rural communities. None of the respondents consider that the communities are sufficiently prepared and conscious of a responsible development of tourism. Some of the candidates like Mrs. Carmen Petrariu, Mrs. Elena Curea and Mr. Amihailesei found that the lack of school education of the rural communities and the absence of interest from the locals regarding the matters of ecotourism resulted in creating this situation.

Private business owners, more specifically the accommodation and restaurant owners don't seem to stand any different from the rest of the communities. As we acknowledged from the responses of Mr. Catanoiu, Mr. Deju and Mr. Amihailesei, stakeholders providing accommodation and alimentation services in the tourism sector, are aiming more for a fast and sure revenue form providing those services. Although some of them, as acting stakeholders are aware of one of their primary roles, to inform the tourist and to promote the area, they don't offer a good example for the rest of the community when it comes to responsible development. More positive attitudes towards this issue are coming from Mr. Catanoiu, who only sees it as a matter of time, and Mrs. Maria Petrariu who believes that the service providers are conscious and experienced enough. Mr. Amihailesei also believes that the service providers are well-prepared, but when it comes to the ones situated in the town of Targu Neamt.

Nevertheless, based on the responses, and on the assumption made prior to this research, we have acknowledged that in the area of the VN Natural Park exists the issue of low awareness of sustainable development coming from the community. Most probably, this issue has its roots in the poor education of the locals in the prevailing rural communities. As assumed initially, this issue needs to be resolved and there are multiple ways in which an organization like the Natural Park can assess it.

In the next section of the analysis we will present some the actions that the management organizations inside the Natural Park area have taken, according to the perspectives of the candidates interviewed.

4.2 Stakeholder collaborations and strategies

As we observed in the previous section, the tourism management organizations inside the Natural Park are fully aware of the issue that consists in the weak level of awareness towards ecotourism responsibilities, from the local community. As a result these organizations have taken measures towards improving the situation.

The field research has found that there were a series of projects and programs implemented, which came mainly from the primary stakeholder, the VN Natural Park. Their objectives are promoting responsible behavior among the locals. However, the data also shows that the main tourism planner had also attempted collaborations with the other actors with special interest in ecotourism.

As discovered in the interviews, the Natural Park attempted and succeeded on different occasions, in implementing a number of projects for assessing the problem of awareness. Furthermore, according to Mr. Catanoiu, one of the first projects initiated by the park management was called *Ecotourism in Bison Land*, further mentioning that *Bison Land* is also the Natural Park commercial name. The project's primary aim is to develop [...] *activities regarding public awareness and mostly we address the first front which is the pension owners*. According to Mr. Catanoiu, the initiative is targeting the pension owners as partners, because in his opinion, [...] *pension owners are the main beneficiaries of this change in the way of thinking*. This initiative has a purpose also in establishing the area as an ecotourism destination, and according to Mr. Catanoiu this implies a lot of changes to be done. One of the changes, as he mentions, is creating an [...] *ecotourism infrastructure in order to develop new hiking trails, resting places, watch towers and other things like this*. Worth noting here, is the fact that park management has set an objective on targeting pension owners for their awareness activities. They regard this as a solution mainly because, as Mr. Catanoiu states: *If they really understand the necessity and the benefit regarding ecotourism I think the war will be won because they will provide information to the tourist and we suppose that the tourist will be encouraged to change their behavior*.

According to Mr. Deju, the park management is assessing our issue from a different perspective also. For Mr. Deju, [...] *the Carpathian bison constitutes an engine for sustainable development [...] and it can also be a revenue generator for the local communities*. In his opinion the main environmental program of the park, the reintroduction of the Carpathian Bison, represents [...] *added value to the area [...] and also, [...] the presence of the bison attracts many visitors and tourists [...] also foreigners [...]*.

As stated above, some of the measures that the park has taken implied collaboration with other actors involved in planning. Mr. Catanoiu confirms that during the initiation of the project presented earlier, the park management has collaborated with actors like [...] *The Local Association of Pension Owners, all the mayors of the localities in the area [...] and also the Gendarmerie Inspectorat, of course there are some alpine gendarmerie here, we think it's necessary because hopefully if we have ecotourists there will be problems regarding safety measures [...]*. According to the leader of Vanatori Neamt, Mrs. Maria Petrariu, the Natural Park has started collaboration with the *Territorial Administration Unit (UAT)* from inside the VN hall, in the [...] *development of ecotourism activities, following a durable development plan*. According to her, some of those activities worth mentioning include [...] *the analysis of the natural, cultural, institutional and human*

resources, taking into account the aging tendencies of the national populations and the European population. While developing these activities, the collaboration between these two stakeholders involve taking into account [...] the critical attitude of the ecotourist towards the quality-price ratio of the services offered to them, as well as the demand for education and awareness on every dimension and segment of interest regarding tourism [...]. Mrs. Maria Petrariu emphasizes that, there is a strong collaboration between the Natural Park and UAT, in Vanatori Neamt [...]. She further comments that some of the individual measures taken by her management plan were to recently mount a [...] street surveillance video system which is going to function after the end of the public acquisition procedure, and in the future, initiating a series of information and education of the locals campaigns, by organizing stands for local products which involve the locals.

From an educational standpoint, the Natural Park has initiated collaborations with schools from across its territories. A fact, strengthen by Mrs. Elena Curea: *[...] we insist very much on the education of children and youngsters, starting from the idea that when it comes to adults the cause is kind of lost [...] if we'd ask someone from Vanatori what is ecotourism, he wouldn't know how to tell me what is ecotourism.* However, Mrs. Elena Curea argues, that there are still some surprising elders visiting the park that are fully aware of the ethics and practices of ecotourism. In the actions that the Natural Park are engaging with academic institutions, according to Mrs. Elena Curea, they *[...] try to bring them closer to nature, and try to explain them what are those minimal rules and ethics that you have to respect when you are in nature.* She adds that the main activities that the park initiates with schools are *activities of ecology.* Furthermore, Mrs. Elena motivates these activities due to adults being *[...] harder to sensitize.*

Mr. Amihailsesei and Mrs. Carmen Petrariu further acknowledge the implication of the park management with environmental educators, in academic institutions. As Mr. Amihailsesei stated, *[...] they (the park management) involve themselves in schools, with sponsorships and ecologic activities, and from what I know they have representatives who offer environmental courses.* Mrs. Carmen also mentions that her ecologic club *Ecomil*, was formed under the initiative of the natural Park, also, the Natural Park offered counseling for a series of school projects that involved: *conservation of biodiversity, knowing the importance of the park, what does a natural park mean, collaboration with economy agents on the territory of the park.* Early in the interview, Mrs. Carmen Petrariu emphasized the fact that *[...] education needs to be done in reverse, starting from the children and ending with the adults.* Along with her NGO *Ecomil*, she implemented projects of voluntary work, tree plantation and a school workshop for traditional crafts.

As we observed, the main tourism planners present in the area of the Natural Park are involved in a series of project implementations, which mostly involve collaboration between primary and secondary stakeholders (Natural Park – town hall, Natural Park – pension owners, Natural Park – academic institutions)

In this section of the analysis I have presented, according to the responses received, different actions and measures taken by the Natural Park and other community planning entities towards solving our awareness issue. From Mr. Catanoiu and Mr. Deju we acknowledged some of the bigger projects that serve as responses to our problem: the *Ecotourism in Bison Land* project meant for establishing *Bison Land* as an ecotourism destination, and the reintroduction of the Carpathian Bison program, which also serves as a motor for sustainability development. From their intakes, as-well as the intakes from the mayor of VN, we have observed the first collaboration between planning organizations (primary stakeholders) namely the Natural Park and The Territorial Administration Unit representing the hall of VN. By these collaborations we can assume that the Natural Park has clear intentions in collaborating with other tourism interested parties in order to have more poles of creating awareness and informing the locals and tourists at the same time on responsible tourism and socio-economic development.

Going back to Mrs. Elena Curea, Mrs. Carmen Petrariu and Mr. Amihalesei's responses, we can also understand that the Natural Park is trying to secure the future development of their community, by getting involved in academic institutions, helping them develop projects and educating them about the environment. In other words, the Natural Parks is now concentrating more on educating the developing and curious minds of the children and students, rather than loosing funds on sensitizing adults.

4.3 Conception conflicts. The Sustainability Triad

As stated in the *Theoretical framework* section of the *Literature review* chapter, Herremans and Reid's (2002) Sustainability Triad helps in understanding that sustainability issues usually appear when conflicts of stakeholders conceptions appear.

By applying this model to my case, I was able to more easily make the distinction between the three dimensions of sustainability, and thus, by analyzing the data collected by interviews, I was able to observe the interrelations between the actors involved in the ecotourism activities inside the VN Natural Park and to identify possible contradictions in their mentalities.

By analyzing the responses from the candidates and having the three dimensions of sustainability in mind, I have identified a couple of conflicts in those three dimensions (economic, environmental and social) in the VN natural Park. From the triad's perspective the VN Natural Park is the planning organization that needs to create a balance between the three domains.

Environmental-social conflict (Natural Park against the locals)

The VN Natural Park's main priority is to preserve and *maintain its ecological integrity* (Herremans and Reid, 2002). Meanwhile the rural communities' lack of ecotourism education, results in flawed behaviors and attitudes towards a responsible ecotourism. As a consequence, these two different conceptions are creating a conflict among the *environmental dimension* and the *social dimension* of the triad.

The VN Natural Park has tried attenuating the implications of this conflict by initiating several projects that serve for informing the locals and tourists on proper ecotourism practices, informing them on a sustainable life style, and even actively involving the locals in the activities, as Mrs. Maria Petrariu points out. We can assume here, that because of the high number of rural communities, poor education and lack of interest in ecotourism activities present in these areas (as noted by Mr. Amihailesei), as well as the difficulty to stimulate and sensitize the adults and the elders, resulted in failure of sustainability, despite the efforts of the tourism planning organizations.

Environmental-economical conflict

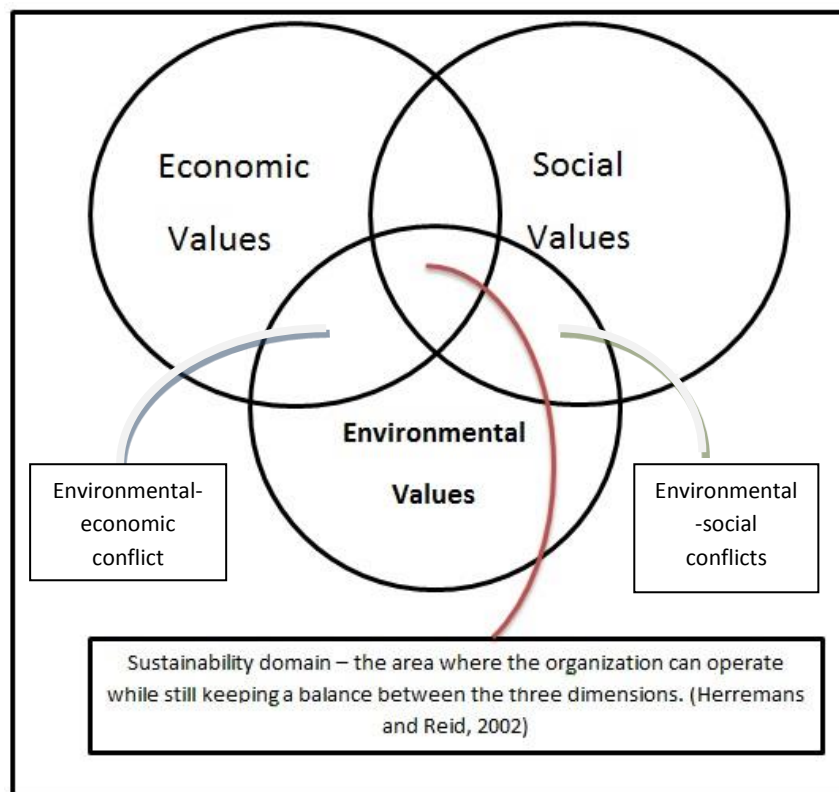
This conflict, similar with the one above, puts in antithesis the conceptions of the Natural Park and the conceptions of the secondary stakeholders, identified as the pension owners. The conflict between the *environmental dimension* and the *economic dimension* resides in the fact that the pension owners focus more on fast, short-term gains from the tourism activities.

Perceived as not sufficiently educated in the practices of sustainable tourism by almost all candidates, the Natural Park has tried to get the two dimensions into common agreement, by involving the stakeholders in their main ecotourism project (*Ecotourism in Bison Land*) and by making them the target group, as mentioned by Mr. Catanoiu, on which the park management will focus to 'educate'.

The aim of the Natural Park, by empowering the pension owners, is to transform them into secondary poles of sustainable development awareness. As such, the roles of the secondary stakeholders (pension owners) will be to further initiate actions towards informing the tourists and visitors about proper ecotourism practices.

As expressed in the *Stakeholder theory* chapter, a rewarding management planning comes to be when all the interested groups are involved and they each *contribute constructively* in various stages of the planning. (Eagles *et al.* 2003)

Figure 3 – Areas of dimension conflicts in Vanatori Neamt Natural Park



Source: adapted from Herremans and Reid (2002:17)

By analyzing the Sustainability Triad (Figure 3) adapted to our case, we can imply that the VN Natural Park is not in the *sustainability domain* yet. In order to achieve that goal the Natural Park alone, or in collaboration with other planning organizations need to find the appropriate solutions, in order to bring the park in the sustainability domain, *thus maintaining a consistent and suitable harmony between the three dimensions of the triad* (Herremans and Reid, 2002: 17)

As suggested is the theory chapter, a slow but safe solution is, investing funds and time into a *reverse education*, as Mrs. Carmen Petrariu would put it, in which young generations are targeted for training and educating them on the basic ethics of sustainability. A good approach would be, as Herremans and Reid (2002) suggest, applying the meaning of this triad in the educational process of the students. This would imply that *environmental educators* would need to focus their attention on:

- *developing content that springs from our knowledge on what variables are most influential in motivating individuals to be responsible environmental citizens* (Herremans and Reid, 2002: 17); and
- introduce environmental information on the school agenda, either as separate discipline or part of another course (Herremans and Reid, 2002); and in addition

- the contents of environmental studies should focus on delimitating between the three dimensions of sustainability, and stakeholder conceptions that might appear in each dimension.

As observed in the interviews responses, the VN Natural Park is actively involved in educational matters of ecotourism. They are constantly engaging young generations into ecological activities and training them for being responsible environmental citizens. According to Mahidin and Maulan (2012), although there are many attempts on educating school children, there aren't many that address the pre-school and primary school children.

As a result, I believe that concentrating efforts on providing children with a stable environmental awareness of issues would be a more, slower, but sure solution for achieving sustainable development. Using the efforts for addressing the adult generations, I believe would be a waste of time and funds, given that what is already embedded in their conceptions right now, is hard to deconstruct, and after provide them with a new mind-set.

5. Conclusions

This paper researched how the Vanatori Neamt Natural Park follows on solving the issue of the low level of sustainability awareness coming from the community and the local stakeholder.

Firstly, the study conducted tried to make a meaning on how ecotourism is perceived in the VN Natural Park, and how do the various actors involved in the ecotourism in the area view the level of perception of the locals on ecotourism. Secondly, it concentrated on the relations of stakeholders and their actions and measures on improving the awareness in their interest area. Lastly, the theoretical framework upon which I have framed my field study was discussed, along with the importance of educating the young generations for future sustainable growth.

In order to conduct this research, a previous background search was made on the specialty literature concerning concepts and theories related to our subject.

The literature review chapter started with defining the key concepts of this research, namely, ecotourism and sustainable development. After discussing the different implications that ecotourism and sustainable development have, I have tried and approach the current the literature's lack of consensus in defining the concept of ecotourism. Afterwards, I have addressed the key limitations and challenges resulting from the impacts of ecotourism on society and environment, where the intakes of Brandon (1996), Tisdell (1997) and Fyall *et al.* (2003) provided very useful. Also in this chapter, different methods of achieving sustainability were presented, where Dobson's (2007) *voluntarist and structuralist* approaches and Eagle's (2002) *monitoring* based on indicators method,

provided suitable solutions. The last two chapters of the literature review aimed on providing theory on the implications and roles of the stakeholders, in nature-based and protected areas, as-well as examples of assessing sustainability awareness in small and medium enterprises, and natural parks. Worthy examples were provided by Font *et al.* (2014), Daily and Huang (2000) and Ballantyne and Packer (2005). Lastly, Herremans and Reid's (2002) *Sustainability Triad* offered a suitable theoretical model upon which I constructed my research.

The primary research tools used by the researcher in conducting this research, were the semi-structured interviews assessed through a basic qualitative field study, that lasted from 5th of June to 14th of June, 2016. A list of possible candidates for interviews, was created, and after the selected ones were divided into primary and secondary stakeholders. As such, the Natural Park management (with 3 representatives) and the Vanatori Neamt town hall were considered primary stakeholders, while the environmental NGO owner and school principal, Mrs. Carmen Petrariu, and Mr. Daniel Amihailesei, the representative of the Targu Neamt tourist information center were interviewed as secondary stakeholders. For addressing data analysis, the triangulation method was chosen, as such, the data collected was interpreted through audio recordings, observations combined with a well-based theoretical background.

This research has found that in the area of the VN Natural Park there is a big potential for ecotourism activities, through a variety of natural, cultural and human resources. On the other hand, all the interviewees seemed to have a negative view upon the level of awareness on responsible development that the local communities have. There was a strong emphasis on the rural communities that were found to have an absence of interest in ecotourism practices, due to a much lower education level, specific for those areas. The second emphasis was put on the ignorance of some of the secondary stakeholders, identified as pension owners who more commonly chose to have fast earnings from tourism activities, rather than focusing on a responsible and durable development of their business.

Moreover, applying our research on Herremans and Reid's (2002) *Sustainability Triad*, I was able to clearly make a distinction between the actors involved in each of the dimensions presented by the triad. Also, by using this theoretical model, and interpreting the interviewees responses, I managed to identify two dimensional conflicts that are resulting in sustainability failure in the area.

As a consequence, based on the data collected and interpreted, I have concluded that trying to find ways of changing the local's adult mind-sets and to re-educate them will only lead to a wastage of efforts, given the difficulty of sensitizing an already developed mind.

Furthermore, as most suitable solution for the Natural Park to take, in order to bring balance and harmony in the *environmental, economic and social dimensions*, is to continue to address the education of the young generation, namely, pre-school and primary school

children, given that it is a safer solution on achieving sustainability awareness, due to forming a new, young mind, that is still learning and accumulating.

In this solution, it is necessary that the students are given proper guidance from environmental educators on how to be a responsible environment citizen, make out of environmental education a separate discipline and education, should focus on differentiating between the three dimensions of the triad and also identifying the mind-sets of the stakeholders that could pose an environmental issue, specific to each dimension.

6. Future recommendations

This paper addresses the issue of the lack of sustainability awareness of the communities and local stakeholders inside the VN Natural Park. At the same time it addresses possible strategies and solutions for assessing this problem. Given the concepts and theories discussed throughout the development of this paper are very common and the subject of sustainable development is a broad one among the literature, there are other future research recommendations that could follow this one:

- In future researches it would be important to analyze how can the conservation policies of a natural park, impact the development of ecotourism activities, out of the consideration that some policies might be restrictive towards certain human activities.
- Analyze the effect that foreign tourists have on the local communities of the Vanatori Neamt Natural Park
- It could be interesting on analyzing how can the fauna or flora reintroduction and conservation could affect the responsibility of ecotourism activities, behaviors and practices.

Appendix

Transcribed Interviews

Elena Curea – Natural Park Tourism manager

1. Currently, how would you describe tourism in the area on the Natural Park?

R: După părerea mea, după 15 ani de experiență în administrația parcului, turismul de transit este cel care caracterizează această zonă.[...] turiștii care sosesc aici vizitează câteva din obiectivele care sunt foarte cunoscute, cetate, Casa Creanga, mănăstirile din zonă una, doua, trei, grădina zoologică. Prin grădina zoologică au început să ne viziteze și pe noi (parcul) iar după aceea turiștii se risipesc efectiv către Iași sau către Cheile Bicazului, Lacul Roșu. Șederea în zonă este destul de redusă, dacă se înnoptează o noapte deja este foarte mult. Cei mai mulți turiști sunt în transit pe zonă.

2. What are the main activities of tourists when in the area of the Natural Park?

R: Putem vorbi de un turism ecumenic, prin faptul că în zona parcului sunt foarte multe schituri și mănăstiri, ca și densitate, depășește zona muntelui Athos, în numărul locașelor de cult. [...] excursiile școlare care vizează o parte din obiectivele care au legătură cu programa școlară, Cetatea Neamțului pentru partea de istorie, casa Creangă pentru Literatură, și mai nou, turiștii vizitează și Parcul Natural Vânători Neamț [...] despre parcuri naturale și parcuri naționale a început să se audă, copiii au început să studieze la școală despre așa ceva, și vin să vadă despre ce este vorba într-un parc.

3. Do you consider that the locals\tourists are aware and active on ecotourism ethics and practices?

R: Avem surpriza să constatăm că locuitori din zona parcului nu știu că se află în arie protejată. Persoane din Târgu Neamț chiar și de aici din Vânători aud despre Parcul Natural Vânători Neamț dar nu știu despre ce este vorba. De aceea noi insistăm foarte mult pe educația copiilor și a tinerilor, pornind de la ideea că în ceea ce privește pe adulți, după o anumită vârstă, cauza este cam pierdută. Mai mult la tineri și la copii abordăm problema respectivă. Nu știu dacă putem vorbi despre ecoturism sau dacă am întreba pe cineva din Vânători ce înseamnă ecoturismul nu știu dacă ar ști să-mi spună ce înseamnă ecoturismul.

So, people aren't somehow „educated” in this matter?

R: Cred că în privința asta suntem deficitari și cred că trebuie insistat.

4. Do you take any actions towards informing the locals or tourists about proper ecotouristic behaviour?

R: După cum am zis, abordez problema la nivelul copiilor și a tinerilor, și prin activitățile pe care noi le facem, încercăm să-i aducem mai aproape de natură și să încercăm să le explicăm care sunt acele reguli minimale etice și de bun simț pe care trebuie să le respecte în momentul în care te afli în natură și de aceea activitățile noastre în ceea ce privește pe copii vizează partea de ecologizare. Pentru că din păcate ne cam dau de furcă aceste probleme. Pe cei mai în vârstă e greu să-i mai sensibilizezi dar avem surpriza să constatăm că sunt persoane în vârstă care vin în vizită la parcul Vânători și care au noțiuni solide în ceea ce privește protecția mediului, apropierea de natură, modul în care trebuie să te porți atunci când te afli în natură.

5. Given the presence of the Natural Park, do you believe the surrounding regions are influenced by its activities and are of an ecotourist profile?

R: Parcul încă de la început a încercat să atragă fonduri prin care zona să se poată dezvolta. Și în momentul de față administrația împreună cu Asociația Valea Ozanei implementează o serie de proiecte care vizează tocmai partea de ecoturism.

6. Do you believe that Natural Park is contributing to the development of regional tourism through its activities?

- 7. R:** Cu siguranță da. Ultimul eveniment la care parcul a fost prezent împreună cu Asociația Valea Ozanei din Târgu Neamț a fost un eveniment de impact major. La Romexpo a avut loc târgul de turism al României în această primăvară și am avut o idee strălucită, aceea de a aduce zimbriul împăiat [...]; I vreau să vă spun că Facebook-ul și netul au sărit în aer în momentul în care au apărut diverse personalități din România fotografiindu-se cu zimbriul nostru [...] De multe ori s-a încercat, chiar și cu Valea Ozanei să se facă diverse activități la Romexpo, prin participarea la târgurile acestea de turism dar cred că nu s-a punctat ceea ce trebuia. În momentul în care am dus zimbriul, a fost maxim[...] Poate că e o idee bună aceasta, pornind de la zimbri, zona, ținutul zimbriului, să se încerce promovarea unui brand nou. Este un proiect în care s-a angajat un designer care a făcut un logo nou, pentru zonă, pentru ținutul zimbriului, pornindu-se de la elementele de cultură Cucuteni, simbolurile le-a dezvoltat le-a integrat cumva, arată foarte bine, elementele vor urma să fie pe puse pe toate panourile turistice din zonă, împreună cu primăriile și autoritățile locale, pentru ca omul când vede simbolurile respective să fie dus cu mintea la Neamț

8. How are the Natural Parks's activities impacting the local stakeholders that are benefiting from touristic activities?

R: S-au făcut tot felul de întâlniri în momentul în care s-a încercat promovarea acestui brand, Ținutul Zimbriului, întâlniri la care au participat atât proprietarii de pensiuni din zonă cât și cei care administrează diverse obiective turistice și toată lumea a fost de acord că dacă eforturile vor fi canalizate și toată lumea își va uni forțele, vor avea de câștigat atât cei care dețin pensiuni cât și cei care administrează diverse structuri. Se încearcă o adunare a tuturor celor implicați și canalizarea eforturilor tuturor [...] să câștige și cei care au pensiune, să se prelungească perioada de ședere, să câștige și cei care au restaurante [...] că sunt multe lucruri de oferit și din punct de vedere gastronomic, să câștige cu toții într-o oarecare măsură.

9. Do you believe the Natural Park should contribute more to local tourism through its activities and sustainability policies?

R: Întodeauna cred că ar trebui mai mult, dar nu știu în ce măsură reușim. Ne-am dori să facem mult mai mult și pentru cei care fac produse meșteșugărești [...] Noi încercăm prin proiectele viitoare să deschidem inclusiv în centrul de vizitare un magazin de suveniruri. Am văzut că în toate zonele vizitate ale Europei ieșirea se poate face și printr-un astfel de magazin de suveniruri [...]. Atunci meșteșugarii și cei care fac produse locale, nu lucruri chinezești, să poată să comercializeze, să-i ajutăm și pe ei.

Carmen Petrariu - Tourism NGO Founder and Vânători Neamț school director

1. Currently, how would you describe tourism in the area of the Natural Park?

R: *Spre deosebire de alte zone ale județului nostru, personal cred că în ultimii 4 ani turismul nostru a început să ia o amploare și o dezvoltare într-un sens pozitiv vizibil. Mai concret, prin proiecte inițiate de P.N.V.NT în acest loc și primăria Vânători Neamț, iar numărul de turiști a crescut. O asociație a unor tineri din Piatra Neamț, EcoSmile, au realizat în cadrul unor proiecte cu Junior Achievement, un sondaj la P.N.V.NT, anul trecut chiar, și crescuse în ultimii 5 ani de peste 10-20 de ori numărul de turiști din zonă.*

2. What are the main activities of tourists when in the area of the Natural Park?

R: *După inițiativa PN, cei doritori, petrecerea unei zile în PN, însoțiți de un ranger pe traseele turistice, întâlnirea cu zimbrii, vizitarea sediului central al PN, vizitarea mănăstirilor. Totuși, aceste obiective pot fi vizitate într-o zi, cel mult două. De aceea turiștii au nevoie și de petrecerea timpului liber. Au început acum pensiunile din zonă să ofere alternative ale petrecerii timpului liber, una din ele ar fi deschiderea unui bazin de înot pe teritoriul PN, la pensiunea Zimbru, o inițiativă foarte foarte bună și pentru copiii și tinerii din zonă dar și pentru turiști. Mai există ceva similar și la Filioara, depozitul de armăsari Dumbrava, și după o discuție cu directorul depozitului de armăsari Dumbrava, am înțeles că începând cu anul acesta, împreună cu Parcul Natural, vor să realizeze un traseu pentru turiștii care vor să practice acest sport de echitație, pe potecile de munte, de la Dumbrava până la Parcul Natural, poate și mai departe, și întoarcere. O altă idee pe care au avut-o tinerii din Piatra Neamț, cu care eu colaborez foarte bine, au avut-o pentru zona Cozla de lângă Piatra Neamț, dar s-ar preta foarte bine și aici în zonă și domnul director Cătănoiu (Natural park Director) este chiar interesat, să realizeze trasee pentru bicicliști.*

3. Do you believe that the locals\tourists are aware and active on ecotourism ethics and practices?

R: *Unii da, unii nu. Ține de nivelul de educație, iar aici intervine școala, implicit noi, prin educația în sens invers, de la cei mici la cei mari. Din păcate în zona noastră nu avem o cultură a educației ecologice, turistice și atunci trebuie să o formăm cumva, și de unde, de la cei mici. La școală realizăm activități prin voluntariat, cu educația ecologică, colectare a deșeurilor de pe traseele turistice, activități de ecologizare, atât noi cât și cealaltă asociație ecoturistică, EcoOzana 20, și colectare selectivă. Am primit o veste bună de la primărie că începând cu luna următoare se vor aduce pubele de colectare selectivă nu numai în centrele școlare dar și la nivel de comunitate iar atunci finalitatea va fi totuși vizibilă. Degeaba le adunăm noi selectiv în activitățile de ecologizare pentru că în mașina de colectare se amestecau. O altă activitate prin care noi încercăm să educăm copiii din punct de vedere ecoturistic, o reprezintă meșteșugurile. Chiar la noi la școală avem ateliere în parteneriat cu parohia Sfinții Voievozi [...] și cu centrul de cultură și arte Carmen Saeculare, Piatra Neamț, avem atelier de meșteșug pe țesăturimanuale, cusături tradiționale și împletituri nuiete. Totul se realizează prin voluntariatul cadrelor didactice și a unui meșter popular din zonă. Produsele finale le scoatem în târgurile meșteșugărești cu copiii. Realizăm inclusiv și educație antreprenorială pe meșteșuguri și turism. Unul din cursurile opționale din școala noastră o*

reprezintă Ținutul Zimbrului, în parteneriat cu P.N.V.NT, pe baza unui manual realizat de P.N. și cadrele didactice.

- 4. Is the Natural Park administration taking any measure towards informing the locals or tourists about proper ecotouristical behaviour? Can you give me some examples?**

R: Da! Tot timpul! Spectrul de informare este larg. Pe site-ul lor, pe contul de Facebook, direct, prin conferințe, simpozioane, panouri, prin participare directă în școli, prin întâlniri cu membrii comunităților, proiectele în care suntem implicați noi și alte școli.

- 5. Given the presence of the Natural Park, do you believe the surrounding regions are influenced by its activities and are of an ecotourist profile?**

R: Da, dar noi suntem mai binecuvântați, Vânători Neamț, școala, liceul tehnologic și cele 40 de altare bisericești prin prezența sediului central al parcului. Noi suntem favorizați de soartă, iar colaborarea noastră este foarte sudată.

- 6. Do you consider that currently the area of the park and its surroundings are of an ecotouristic profile?**

R: Eu cred că bazele sunt puse. Există o legătură între comunitate și turiști și cred că ne îndreptăm într-o direcție bună.

- 7. How are the Natural Park's policies impacting the local stakeholders benefiting from touristic activities?**

R: În primul rând, în cadrul proiectelor care s-au realizat și implementat de P.N.V.NT au fost implicate nu numai școlile ci și primăriile. Au fost proiecte care au vizat direct comunitatea și dezvoltarea zonei ecoturistice. Un astfel de proiect foarte criticat de unii dar de care comunitatea noastră s-a bucurat este pista de biciclete. Asociația, clubul ecologic Ecomil unde a-ți venit în vizită, este realizat în urma unui proiect înființat de P.N.V.NT iar noi am realizat sub-proiecte prin consiliere a P.N. Proiecte pentru păstrarea bio-diversității din zonă, pentru cunoașterea importanței Parcului Natural, ce înseamnă parcul natural, colaborarea cu agenții economici de pe teritoriul parcului. Tot timpul este pastrată legătura, informarea și colaborarea în cadrul proiectelor și nu numai.[...] APIA Neamț nu mai face decontări fermierilor care au teren pe teritoriul P.N. fără avizul parcului care să ateste că nu există prejudicii aduse P.N.

- 8. Do you believe that the administration of the Natural Park should contribute more to local tourism through regulations and policy making?**

R: Nu! Cred că noi comunitatea, ar trebui să ne implicăm mai mult. Pentru că ei au toată disponibilitatea de a ne ajuta. Și ne ajută nu numai cu informare, cu consiliere dacă solicităm colaborare pentru scriere și implementare proiecte, idei de proiecte, promovare de produse, promovare culturală, antreprenorială

Do you consider the current tourism practices in your area sustainable regarding future development?

R: Da! Dar totuși nu cred că parcul ar trebui să facă mai mult în privința aceasta. Aici aș aminti și mănăstirile care au teren, suprafețe foarte mari pe teritoriul parcului, iar aici mă gândesc la turismul de duminică, acei turiști care vin la iarbă verde și nu au nici un pic de educație, sau nu vor să-și însușească normele de educație ecologică. Parcul nu poate să impună aceste norme asupra turiștilor, amenziile pot veni doar de la proprietarii acestor terenuri și mănăstiri.

Sebastian Cătănoiu – Director of the Natural Park

1. What are the main priorities of the Natural Park in the present?

R: The main priority of our nature park is biodiversity conservation and in general terms, sustainable development of our local communities including eco-activities, maintaining of traditions and popular habits. Also, a specific goal of our park is the reintroduction of big herbivores, mainly the European bison and more recently the “huțul” a primitive specie of horse.

A secondary goal of our park is to maintain the prevention of forest desertification.

2. Do you regard tourism in the future development of the NP? How are you involved right now in tourism?

R: Yes, Vanatori Neamt is the third most visited park in Romania [...] with almost 300.000 visitors annually. It is good news but unfortunately these visitors have a specific pattern, they are usually weekend visitors, they spend very little time in the area and their interest is 80% of the time in monasteries.[...] we started an initiative to become an ecotouristic destination, that means a lot of things to be done. Mainly an ecotouristic infrastructure in order to develop new hiking trails, resting places, watch towers and other things like this. The main problem is to change something, think different, not only us, but also pension owners and tourists in order to change the priorities regarding the area. There aren't only monasteries [...] there are a lot of other things regarding Romanian culture, history, fauna and other reasons to stay in the area and have an ecotouristic attitude.

3. Do the policies that you are implementing have any impact on the flow of tourists on the territory of the NP and their behavior as tourists

R: Until now, as I told you there is one year since we started this initiative, with the support of the pension owners, because they are the main beneficiaries of this change in the way of thinking, we simply think good things will happen, but nowadays it's a little bit too early to say. We have some statistic data with the number of tourists and the period of staying which is around 1.5 nights per tourist. We will see if in the future this period of staying will become longer and also the number of tourists, the visitors are around 300.000 per year but tourists who accommodate here are around 30.000. So, we will see if the numbers will grow.

4. Does the NP have any policies implemented that contradict with tourism activities today?

R: Unfortunately we do not have any law mechanism at our disposal, we have some very weak rules but as I told you our tourism is a little bit particular and peculiar because, as I told you it's related only with visiting monasteries on the main transport road, so our intention is somehow to spread the tourists in the nature, so we do not have restrictions, we simply encourage tourists to stay more in the forest or in the nature.

5. Do you consider that the local community is “educated” towards ecotourism and the ethics that concern it?

R: The local communities are not educated, even the pension owners are not educated in order to provide services or to encourage ecotourism but it's a matter of time. We have to think different, all of us, including tourists because it will be a little bit different for them to have a new approach, but it's a hard work and if everybody involved will agree I do hope we have good results

6. **Do you have any activities with an educational purpose for the local community that contains information on “eco” behavior and sustainable tourism?**

R: There is a project called “Ecotourism in Bison Land” because our commercial name is “Bison Land”, it’s more easy to keep in mind, so we have some activities regarding public awareness and mostly we address the first front which is the pension owners. If they really understand the necessity and the benefit regarding ecotourism I think the war will be won because they will provide information to the tourist and we suppose that the tourist will be encouraged to change their behavior.

7. **During your policy making process, do you take into account or collaborate with the eventual stakeholders present in the area of the NP?**

R: In this project, there are partners not only the park administration but also the local Association of Pension Owners, all the mayors of the localities in the area [...] and also the Gendarmerie Inspectorat, of course there are some alpine gendarmerie here, we think it’s necessary because hopefully if we have ecotourists there will be problems regarding safety measures, first aid and having alpine gendarmerie will be helpful.

8. **Do you have any future projects or activities for creating awareness among the locals on ecotourism and how to behave and connect with the potential ecotourists?**

R: As I told you “Ecotourism in Bison Land” is ongoing, it’s a 4 year project, one year almost passed, for the other three we have to create new events, to put into light or give a new value to our cultural and natural values. There are some medieval festivals, gastronomic let’s say festivals but they are rather contests and activities like marathon trails and semi-marathon. We are also in a curious situation because we spend money and time and personnel for this ecotourism promotion but we do not have any revenue directly for us. If any, the revenue goes to pension owners. But this is our mission. In this case some money come from this project, but there is not a lot, it’s around 100.000 dollars, from an American organization. For 4 years it’s not a lot of money but enough to maintain the faith.

Răzvan Deju – Chief Ranger

1. **How would you describe the current status of tourism in the Vânători Neamț Natural Park?**

R: În momentul de față turismul este unul din obiectivele majore a administrației P.N., se încearcă promovarea acestuia folosind prezența zimbrului ca motor de dezvoltare durabilă a zonei.

2. **Care sunt activitățile principale ale turiștilor pe teritoriul P.N. ? What are the main activities of tourists when in the area of the N.P. ?**

R: Da, din păcate în zona de referință sunt foarte mulți vizitatori și nu turiști. Vizitatori sunt cei care vin și petrec o anumită perioadă, o zi, maxim două, vizitează obiectivele turistice, după care se duc spre altă destinație pentru că în zonă înafară de obiectivele naturale, culturale, istorice, mănăstiri nu sunt alte modalități de a petrece timpul liber.

3. **Do you believe that locals\tourists are aware and active on ecotourism ethics and practices?**

R: Teoretic da, practic, în momentul de față este în curs de implementare un proiect intitulat Ecoturism în Ținutul Zimbrului, se încearcă dezvoltarea de concept al „Ținut al zimbrului”, zona care se suprapune peste P.N.V.N.T., în care se dorește, practic, conștientizarea atât a turiștilor cât și a operatorilor turistici din zonă, privind respectarea unor coduri etice și de valorizarea zonei în ansamblul ei.

4. Given the presence of the park, do you believe the surrounding regions are influenced by its activities?

R: Da, sigur, zimbrul, existența zimbrului, atrage foarte mulți vizitatori, foarte mulți turiști, deja sunt în curs de dezvoltare o serie de programe turistice [...] chiar și turiști străini ... statisticile din ultimii 3 ani arată că numărul turiștilor atât români cât și străini este în creștere.

5. Do you believe that the N.P. is contributing to the development of regional tourism through its activities?

R: Practic acest proiect de reintroducere a zimbrului, este un motor de dezvoltare durabilă a zonei de referință, a micro-regiunii „Ținutul Zimbrului”. Clar, zona are un plus-valoare prin această inițiativă [...] această reintroducere poate fi replicată peste tot în țară unde există inițiative de reintroducere a zimbrului [...] mai ales, cum spuneam, zimbrul poate constitui o unealtă pentru dezvoltarea durabilă și poate fi generator de venituri pentru comunitățile locale din zona de referință.

6. How are the N.P.'s activities impacting the local stakeholders that are benefiting from touristic activities?

R: Da, orice măsură cu impact major, se ia în urma unor consultări publice în prealabil, astfel că toți factorii interesați sunt consultați, sunt conștientizați, privind eventualele măsuri care ar putea avea impact cu activitățile acestora.

7. Do you believe the N.P. should contribute more to local tourism through regulations and policy making? Should you have more power?

R: În primul rând să avem turiști, și apoi puterea că este loc și de mai bine. [...] Noi, prin obiectul muncii, suntem mai degrabă dedicați conservării naturii turismul este un joc dintr-un puzzle. Noi mai degrabă ne focusăm pe conservarea valorilor naturale din zona de referință, pe lângă aceasta, promovarea tradițiilor locale, culturale, spirituale, promovarea turismului, dezvoltarea durabilă sunt piese dintr-un puzzle.

8. Do you consider the current tourism practices in your area sustainable regarding future development?

R: Din păcate, o spun cu tărie nu. Pentru că majoritatea operatorilor de turism din zona parcului, mă refer aici la cei care au facilități de cazare și restaurant se focuzează în principal pe evenimente punctuale, mă refer aici la nunți, cumătrii, saube perioada verii, cazare pentru turiști, nu și alte programe adiacente pentru a determina creșterea numărului de zile petrecute în destinația ecoturistică.

Daniel Amihailesei – center of tourist information Targu Neamt

1. How important are ecotourism activities for the development of the regions inside the Natural Park area.

R: Activitatile ecotouristice sunt o parte majora din dezvoltarea noastra regionala avand in vedere faptul ca se bazeaza pe turisti ce vin si viziteaza mai mult pentru cultura religioasa si aspectele natural-montane ale regiunii. Dezvoltarea turismului de natura eco este providential pentru profilul zonei noastre. In ceea ce priveste Targu Neamt, turismul este destul de redus, nu datorita lipsei de atractii ci datorita faptului ca turistii folosesc orasul mai mult pentru acomodare si centru de unde se pornesc spre manastirile si obiectivele naturale de pe teritoriul parcului natural din Vanatori si in general din regiunea Neamtului.

2. Do you consider the local community and the tourists in the region sufficiently aware of ecotourism practices?

R: Sincer, nu stiu cat de pregatiti sunt. Mare parte din activitatea ecotouristica se desfasoara in sate, cum ar fi Vanatori Neamt pana spre Poiana Largului si Bicaș. Este cunoscut faptul ca o buna parte din locuitorii satelor de la noi nu prea detin educatie scolara. Nu ma astept sa detina educatie in ecoturism.

Presupun ca multi sunt constienti de faptul ca arealul lor este sub protectia Parcului Natural dar nu cred ca sunt suficient de educati in ceea ce priveste dezvoltarea responsabila prin ecoturism. Tine si de cat interes este. Multi sunt interesati de fondurile ce vin de la Uniunea Europeana pentru gospodarii.

3. Do you consider that the stakeholders (like the private businesses, accommodation owners etc.) are aware of the ecotourism practices?

R: Cred ca cei ce beneficiaza de activitatile turistice in interiorul orasului sunt suficient de pregatiti in ceea ce priveste informarea turistului si oferirea de servicii satisfacatoare. In comunitatile rurale ce se extind pe teritoriul Parcului Natural cred ca sunt mai specializati pe ecoturism. Spre exemplu sunt multe pensiuni ce ofera acomodare in stil rustic, mancaruri traditionale dar nu stiu in ce masura sunt pregatiti sa informeze turistul sau sa-l educe, decat poate ce zone sa viziteze, si cateva detalii despre Parcul Natural. Dupa cum ziceam, tine si de educatie. Multi din patronii de pensiuni se concentreaza pe castiguri rapide.

4. Do you consider that the Natural Park gets directly involved in the sustainable development of its community? In what way?

R: Da! Cred ca acesta este un obiectiv principal al parcului, pe langa reintroducerea zimbrului in fauna carpatina. Deasemenea cred ca parcul are nevoie de oameni potenti dina cest punct de vedere deoarece nu cred ca dispune de fonduri care sa le permita dezvoltarea de proiecte de anvergura.

Din ce stiu eu directia parcului a initiat de ceva vreme o campanie de promovare a valorilor locale naturale si culturale. Sunt pancarte de informare la intrarile si iesirile din Targu Neamt, Vanatori si celelalte sate. Deasemenea se implica si in scoli cu sponsorizari de activitati ecologice si din ce stiu eu au si reprezentanti care ofera cursuri de mediu.

5. As a stakeholder of ecotourism in the area, do you take any measures of community awareness?

R: In centrul de informare a turistului, cred ca ne facem destul de bine treaba in ceea ce priveste informarea turistului. Sediul nostru ofera o serie de brosure, ghiduri turistice si alte informatii cu privire la profilul natural turistic al zonei Neamtului. Sediul este deschis de foarte putina vreme si nu dispune de foarte multe fonduri din partea primariei. Pe viitor suntem deschisi la colaborari si cu alte parti interesate, pe profil, dar nu cred ca o sa putem lua masuri foarte importante si de impact. Nu avem puterea necesara.

6. What is your opinion on the tourists in the area? Are they sufficiently aware of the ethics and practices of ecotourism?

R: Turistii ce trec prin sediul nostru vin in mare parte din orasele mari ale tarii si sunt interesati mai mult de profilul religios si cultural al zonei Neamtului. Avand in vedere ca nu foarte multi turisti sunt constienti de existenta unui centru de informare in Targu Neamt, nu vedem foarte multi intrand pe usa. Cei care vin, consider ca au un minim de valori care sa le permita sa se comporte ecologic si sustenabil.

7. Do you believe that the Natural Park should get involved in collaborations with the stakeholders, promoting awareness? Should the Natural Park have more power?

R: Din ce stiu, parcul are legaturi cu cateva pensiuni din zona apropiata in sensul ca proprietarii sunt constientizati de cateva reguli de functionare speciale. Ar trebui sa se faca niste campanii mai ample de promovare alaturi de diferite parti interesate. De exemplu, cred ca ar trebui sa se colaboreze foarte mult cu ghizi turistici din diferite obiective, si sa fie informati de noile reguli. Deasemena cu institutiile mai mari de la minister care au putere mai mare de promovare si alocare de fonduri.

In opinia mea cred ca Parcul ar trebui sa detina o putere mai mare. Nu stiu in ce masura poate actiona acum, dar ar trebui sa li se dea o putere de decizie mai mare cu privire la sanctiuni pentru nerespectarea legilor de mediu. Din pacate sunt alte organizatii care au intaietate.

8. What are you predictions on the future of sustainable development in the area. What role does the Park have in that?

R: Cred ca viitorul arata bine! Noi inca suntem intr-o perioada de tranzitie iar generatiile adulte inca sunt prinse intr-o gandire mai veche si e mai greu sa le schimbi atitudinile. Urmatoarele generatii cresc intr-un mediu care pune din ce in ce mai mult pret pe dezvoltare responsabila si in scurt timp sper sa fim la un nivel decent in comparatie cu Vestul. Parcul Natural cred ca va avea in continuare un rol de educator al comunitatii si pe viitor sper sa se imbunatateasca activitatea

lor principală de a reintroduce zimbrii în pădurile noastre. Acest lucru ar ajuta foarte mult la responsabilizarea oamenilor.

Mrs. Maria Petrariu – Mayor of Vanatori Neamt

1. How important are the ecotourism activities for the sustainable development of your community?

R: Aceste activități au un impact major în ceea ce privește dezvoltarea durabilă a comunei Vinători-Neamț, contribuind la o mai bună înțelegere, apreciere și bucurie de a descoperi și ocroti natura și cultura locală tradițională, atât pentru vizitatori cât și pentru comunitatea locală. Punerea în valoare a patrimoniului local, folosirea ghizilor locali, cumpărarea bunurilor și serviciilor locale și folosirea facilităților care se pot pune la dispoziție de către administrația publică locală duc la dezvoltarea comunei Vinători-Neamț.

2. Do you consider the local community and the tourists sufficiently prepared and aware regarding the activities and practices of ecotourism?

R: Considerăm că ar fi necesară o mai bună cunoaștere a activităților și practicilor ecoturistice de către comunitatea locală prin diverse metode de publicitate și eventuale cursuri ce s-ar putea organiza de către Asociația Ținutul Zimbrilor în parteneriat cu UAT Vinători-Neamț dar și cu sprijinul școlilor din comună, venind astfel în întâmpinarea elevilor dar și a părinților și nu numai.

3. What is your opinion regarding the current state of ecotourism in the communities inside the NP and proximity?

R: Asociația Ținutul Zimbrilor în parteneriat cu UAT Vinători-Neamț și cu alte instituții se concentrează în acest moment pe dezvoltarea activităților de tip ecoturist, urmând un plan de dezvoltare durabilă a destinației de ecoturism cu analiza resurselor naturale, culturale, instituționale și umane și ținând cont de tendințele de îmbătrânire a populației atât la nivel național și european, experimentarea turistului cu o atitudine mai critică privind calitatea produselor și serviciilor oferite și asupra raportului calitate-preț, cererea de educație și conștientizare pe toate domeniile și segmentele de interes ale turismului, creșterea

securității și siguranței, valorizarea timpului liber, modificări ale stilului de viață, utilizarea tehnologiei IT.

- 4. What kind of relations do you have with the NP? Are there any collaborations regarding sustainable development of ecotourism?**

R: Există o stânsă colaborare între Parcul Natural Vinători-Neamț și UAT Vinători-Neamț pentru dezvoltarea activităților mai sus menționate. De asemenea, în prezent, pentru creșterea siguranței și securității s-a optat pentru un sistem video de supraveghere stradală, care se va pune în funcțiune după desfașurarea procedurii de achiziție publică.

- 5. What kind of actions and projects are you generating regarding the „education” of the local community, regarding a good code of ecotourism ethics and sustainable development?**

R: Se vor întreprinde campanii de informare și educare a comunității locale, se vor organiza stand-uri cu produse locale, implicând cetățenii comunei.

- 6. What measures does the NP take regarding informing and educating the local community?**

R: În prezent, organizația este implicată în obținerea statutului de destinație ecoturistică pentru microregiunea Ținutul Zimbrului și dezvoltarea ulterioară a acesteia, în principal în cadrul Programului Entrepreneurship 2.0, Dezvoltarea destinațiilor de ecoturism din România. Astfel se întreprind acțiuni de informare ecoturistică a comunității locale dar și a vizitatorilor prin pliante, afișe, organizare de drumeții, etc.

- 7. Is there any collaboration between the NP and the stakeholders (accommodation owners, tourism operators etc.) regarding the ecotourism development of the area?**

R: Colaborarea este în curs de dezvoltare, deținătorii de spații cazare fiind informați cu privire la destinațiile turistice și îndrumând astfel către Parcul Natural.

- 8. Do you think that the stakeholders are sufficiently prepared and experienced in offering ecotourism services and information to the tourists?**

R: Considerăm că sunt pregătite și experimentate, însă se vor face campanii mai ample de informare și educare a acestora.

- 9. What are your predictions upon future ecotourism development of the community and what role does the NP have in this matter?**

R: Având în vedere că resursele sunt nelimitate, ecoturismul în zonă poate fi dezvoltat cu ușurință și ținând cont de tendințele enunțate mai sus.

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