



ANALYSIS OF THE ECOTOURISM POTENTIAL OF THE SIGHISTEL VALLEY AREA LOCATED IN THE APUSENI MOUNTAINS

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Abstract: *Currently, tourism represents one of the areas with a very high potential for economic growth. In this area, the biggest challenge is to be competitive in the conditions of practicing sustainable tourism, knowing that in the long-term competitiveness is given by the way in which resources are managed. Protected natural areas have become holiday destinations based on the principles of sustainable development. Tourism activity proves to be a real support in the sustainable development of these areas, in the protection of their natural resources, the condition for achieving this support being responsible tourist consumption behavior in protected natural areas.*

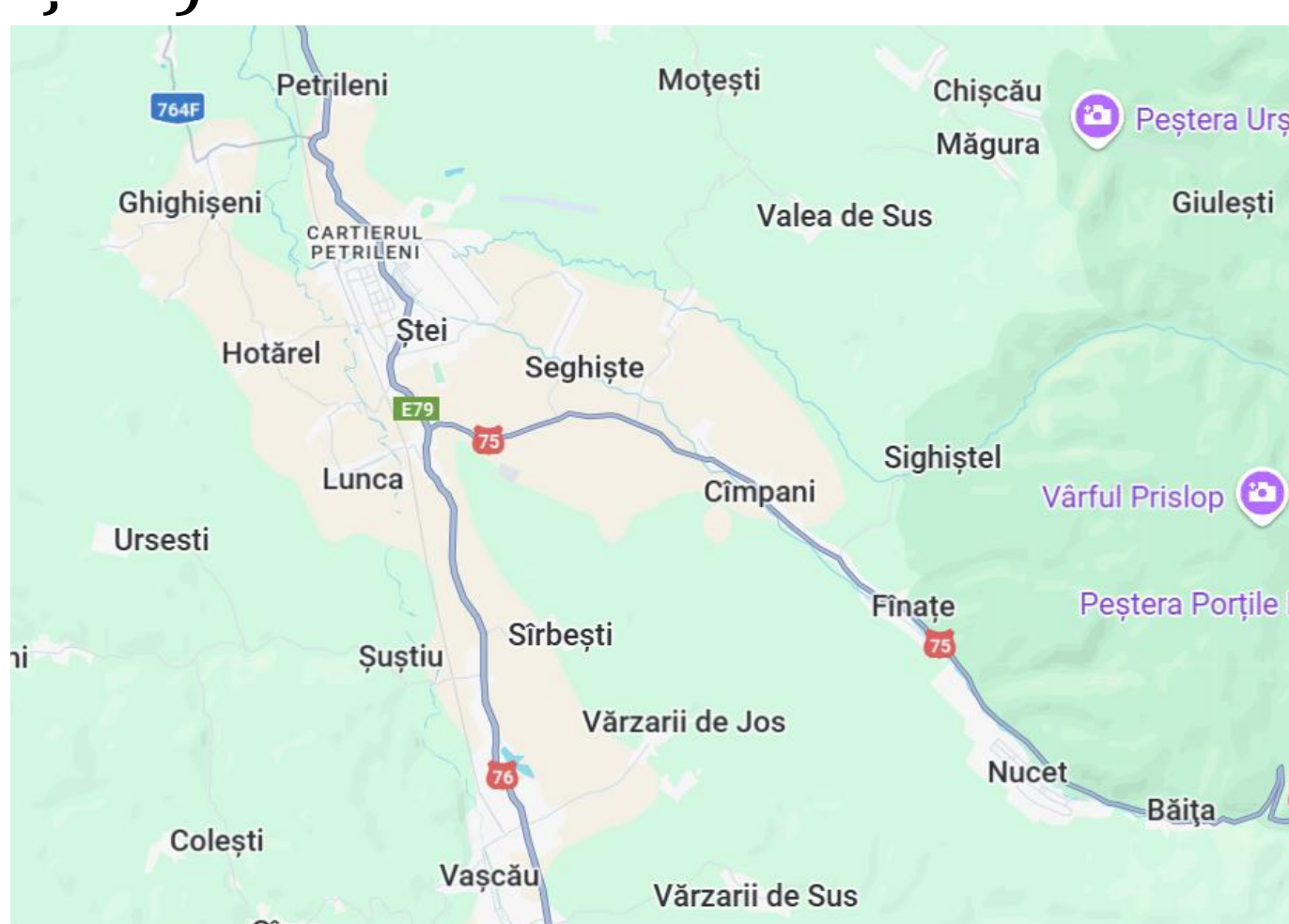
• Introduction

Tourism has several forms, including ecotourism. It emerged with the human need to retreat to nature and to visit and get to know natural areas. Unfortunately, not all of these areas enjoy a national or international protection status.

Ecotourism means a responsible attitude towards the natural and cultural values of an area, both on the part of visitors and on the part of those who organize and carry out this economic activity. [6] Beyond the attitude, ecotourism represents an effective way to conserve nature in general, the landscape and especially those fragile or highly valuable areas, which in fact represent the basic resource for this economic activity.

• Material and method

This paper presents aspects of ecotourism in Romania and especially from a lesser-known area belonging to the Apuseni Mountains – Sighiștelului Valley. The first part of the paper presents the Sighiștelului Valley area and its ecotourism potential. The Sighiștelului Valley is a protected area of national interest that corresponds to IUCN category IV (mixed nature reserve), located in western Transylvania, on the territory of Bihor county. The natural area is located in the southeastern extremity of Bihor county (in the northern branch of the Bihor Mountains, a mountain group of the Apuseni that belongs to the Western Carpathian chain), on the administrative territory of the Câmpani commune, close to the national road DN 75 (which connects the city of Câmpani to Ștei).



• Results and discussion

Although the entire valley measures only 9 km., almost of them run through the vertical walls that transform its lower sector into a canyon. The Sighiștel Basin houses over 200 caves on only 10 km², being the area with the greatest endokarstification potential in the country.

Among the most famous caves in the Sighiștel Valley we mention: Corbasca Cave (300 m) with the Crystal Lake, beautiful gurgles, stalactites, columns and large deposits of montmilch; Coliboaia Cave (310 m) and the Cave of Dealul Secăturii (1,450 m) which are part of the same karst system, with rich and varied concretions; Măgura Cave (1,885 m) with labyrinthine galleries, impressively sized halls and narrow galleries.

The nature reserve was declared a protected area by Law No. 5 of March 6, 2000 and overlaps the special avifaunistic protection area - Apuseni Mountains - Vlădeasa. It covers an area of 412.60 hectares and is included in the Apuseni Natural Park

• Conclusions

The Sighiștel Valley is an ecotourism and adventure destination, where you can practice hiking, speleology, rafting, horseback riding, climbing and cycling, in a gentle landscape, a mosaic of forests, meadows and hamlets spread over the hills, which hide a spectacular underground world, made up of dozens of caves, many arranged for visiting.

The Sighiștel Valley is a wild and spectacular valley due to its karst landscape, which is represented by numerous caves and wild gorges with narrow and high walls. The Sighiștel Valley offers tourists wild landscapes, rich vegetation, small waterfalls, caves, wild gorges and a diverse range of flora and fauna specific to the Apuseni Mountains.

The Sighiștel Basin is home to over 200 caves, being the area with the greatest endokarstification potential in the country.

Although relatively modestly publicized, the Sighiștel Valley is one of the most spectacular and attractive karst complexes in the Bihor Mountains, offering nature-loving tourists wonderful landscapes.