

*A Sustainable  
Tourism Strategy for  
Piatra Craiului National Park*

“Piatra Craiului - an accident in the geography of the Southern Carpathians”

Emmanuel de Martonne, French geographer, (1873-1955)

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## PREFACE

This is the first of a series of Sustainable Tourism Strategies for Protected Areas in Romania to be prepared under the Biodiversity Conservation Management Project funded by the World Bank, the National Forest Administration and the Romanian government. It is also the first sustainable tourism strategy for any region in Romania.

It proposes a holistic, environmentally and community friendly approach to tourism development and management within the Piatra Craiului National Park. Over the last 50 years tourism has been one of the world's great growth industries. But in many places it has also been a great environmental and cultural problem, because of the speed and power of its growth, and because of its short-term and uncaring approach to change. The concepts that together make up sustainable tourism have been devised and tested to overcome these problems. It is fitting that they be used in Romania. For many years Romania was cut off from tourism development by political circumstances. Now, using sustainable tourism management, the country can begin to seek the benefits of tourism without the drawbacks that other places have suffered in the past.

It is especially fitting that it is the protected areas of Romania that will pioneer this process. Protected areas are extremely vulnerable to the changes that unmanaged tourism can bring. But they and their communities desperately need the revenue, jobs and hope for the future that visitors can transfer to them. Traditional rural activities such as forestry, agriculture and mining are in decline. Conservation costs money – to repair the problems of the past and to maintain fauna, flora, landscapes and communities for the future. Sustainable tourism, as part of a carefully thought out holistic programme, can be part of that future. But it will be no easy task.

Sustainable tourism needs an informed partnership approach to make its concepts work. Partnerships need good will and flexibility between the public and private sectors – and between all the many partners involved. They need a long-term approach: that is often not easy in the fast changing modern world. Tourism needs new skills- including technical skills and people skills. And tourism is a fiercely competitive market economy; flair, risk taking skills and market knowledge and networks are all essential.

Finally it must be stated clearly that tourism cannot guarantee to solve all the problems of Romania's protected areas. Tourism is a risk business. Not all years can be successful, and not all regions can be successful either. Every region of the world, and all of the world's 30,000 protected areas, seek a share of the global tourism cake. Romania has some wonderful natural assets and some very enterprising people. If they are to survive they will need a balanced approach, strong cultural and conservation values and help from both local government and central government. There will be no place for petty rivalries: there will be a great need for enlightened ideas and leadership.

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## SUMMARY

This strategy document explains the concepts of sustainable development, sustainable tourism and ecotourism in the context of protected areas in Romania, currently the subject of a special Biodiversity Conservation Project. It looks at the specific case of Piatra Craiului National Park, explaining its geography and its fauna, flora, and cultural heritage. It goes on to examine the tourism potential of the area, and analyses the types of tourism currently in the Park, drawing on the results of a visitor questionnaire survey carried out in summer 2000.

Using this background, the document examines the key issues facing the development and management of sustainable tourism within the Park, expressing the situation in a presentation of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing Tourism in the Park, and facing its communities and administrators. While the Park is well placed geographically and naturally to develop additional tourism in order to fund local welfare improvements and Park activities, it does suffer from key infrastructure, promotional and tourism management weaknesses. But there are valuable product development opportunities in many niche markets. There are also opportunities to build on existing and new partnerships between the public, private and non – profit sectors within and around the Park. However, there are a number of threats to the successful implementation of sustainable tourism within the area. These include threats from unsympathetic development outside the field of tourism, threats from failure to manage tourism effectively, the possible inability to raise standards within the local area to European levels, the inability to compete against the world’s other 30,000 protected areas, and funding problems for the Park administration at the end of the current externally funded project in 2004.

The key aim of the park is to conserve the area’s natural and human heritage and values. Ecotourism development is regarded as a central part of the policy to achieve that aim. A number of measures are proposed to enable ecotourism to succeed. These include a considerable programme of infrastructure improvements, covering aspects such as accommodation, transport, signing, trails, information / interpretation / visitor centres and guiding. The existing zoning system for the Park, together with other management techniques, will be used to control tourism activities. The Park proposes a programme of product development, stressing non-damaging products that will assist the local economy. Ideas include guided walks, conservation holidays, bear and bird watching and activities such as mountain biking, horse riding, rock climbing and snow tourism. The programme will be backed by a marketing programme and will be developed in partnership with other stakeholders from the public, private and non-profit sectors. A parallel programme of ideas to support local food and craft production will be sought.

To help ensure the implementation of the strategy there will be a programme of support measures to encourage local enterprise. Training will form part of that programme, as will the creation of local organizations where necessary. A list of potential partners has been drawn up.

The funding of the park is assured until 2004. A number of ideas are put forward for funding after that date, although those discussions will most likely be the subject of national as well as local debate and decision. The Strategy will be subject to regular evaluation and update. Procedures for that process are discussed.

## ***Section A: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM***

The modern concept of Protected Areas and National Parks dates back to 1872, when land was deliberately set aside for conservation during the peopling of the USA by Europeans. That concept is now global: there are now more than 30,000 protected natural areas across the world. Over one hundred years later came the concepts of Sustainability and Sustainable Development. Their origins can be traced to the famous Brundtland Report of 1987 – the World Commission on Environment and Development. (WCED,1987)

Brundtland put forward four basic principles crucial to the concept of sustainability:

- (1) The idea of holistic planning, cross-sectoral planning and strategy making
- (2) The importance of preserving essential ecological processes
- (3) The need to protect both human heritage and biodiversity
- (4) The recognition that development should be carried out so that productivity does not deplete resources for the long term and future generations

The key words are balance and thought - thought about consequences before precipitate action. In addition Brundtland introduced to the debate the issues of fairness - of intergenerational equity, and also of international equity - requiring a greater convergence between rich and poor nations if the global system was to remain stable.

### **But what about Sustainable Tourism?**

Sustainable tourism was in fact being discussed long before Mrs. Brundtland's commission delivered its verdict on the general economic development process. It emerged as a theoretical concept in the European Alps and around the Mediterranean Sea in the late 1970s. But the theory was long in discussion before it became practice - that had to wait until the late 1980s.

### **The Tourism Story**

Tourism has been one of the post war period's most successful growth industries. Back in 1950 there were just 25 million international tourist arrivals around the world. Now, over 650 million international tourists travel the globe each year: in addition, up to ten times that number takes holidays in their own lands. But, while tourism is a powerful force for the transfer of wealth and the creation of jobs, we now know that unmanaged tourism development has four major drawbacks for its destinations. They are especially problematic for protected areas.

- Tourism can have powerful physical impacts on places visited - farm and forest land swept away for airport and road construction, hotels and golf courses - often in scenic regions. Physical impacts can be complex and far-reaching – changes to beach profiles can cause silting and / or erosion elsewhere, ski run development can lead to landslides and potential major disasters. Heavily used areas can suffer erosion from the large

numbers of visitors - mountain erosion in the European Alps, in some US National Parks and in the Himalayas are all classic examples.

- It can have serious cultural impacts. Tourists are wealthy and demanding guests. They can dismiss local customs, turn land values and labour markets upside down, make local languages redundant, and shift the balance of political power in favour of distant multi-national companies. Loss of local ownership can lead to dividend loss and loss of local control. In worst-case cultural scenarios, tourism can bring increased vice and crime.
- Transport to and from tourism destinations can have serious impacts – not least on global warming and other atmospheric changes. Air and car travel burn large quantities of fossil fuels and release huge quantities of emissions into the atmosphere. On land, car travel and car parking can destroy the peaceful unspoilt nature of many protected areas.
- More subtly, tourism can destroy the future it promises by rendering a destination dependent on its money, then finding it spoilt by tourism development, and therefore unfashionable and redundant. Tourism is a fiercely competitive business: destinations are essentially fashion brands, subject to the changing vagaries of the market. This, the operation of the tourism product cycle, can affect both large resorts and small rural communities.

Conventional tourism development regards culture and environment as a free resource to exploit and deplete. It is a short-term industry – a season is a long time in the tourism business. It survives by growth – therefore, marketing is typically seen as a way out of many problems. Marketing policies almost always seek to boost the number of visitors. They rarely if ever have any environmental responsibility: that may not be their fault, however, because marketing people have no training in the issues of sustainability and they are only judged on visitor growth rates. Paradoxically that marketing led approach that is so common that has produced an equally unproductive response from environmental interests: they oppose development and marketing rather than seeking to work with development and marketing to achieve their goals. Subtlety, a holistic approach and balanced thought have not been hallmarks of mid twentieth century tourism development. And an understanding of markets and niche markets, and of the fears of business people for the future of their investments, have not been hallmarks of the environmental lobby either.

Sustainable tourism is a concept designed not to stop tourism but to manage it in the interests of all three parties involved - the host habitats and their communities, the tourists and the industry itself. It seeks a balance between development and conservation. It seeks to find the best form of tourism for an area, taking into account its ecology and its culture. It may mean limits to growth, or in some cases no growth at all. It uses a range of tourism management techniques. It seeks not just to plan for tourism, but also to integrate tourism into a balanced relationship with broader economic development and with conservation goals. A well thought out long term vision is essential. That vision should be thought out with the people, not just for the people.

## **Is it Ecotourism?**

Sustainable Tourism can include ecotourism. But while ecotourism concentrates on people looking at nature, at natural landscapes and traditional societies, the concept of sustainable tourism copes with mass tourism as well. And the growth of ecotourism can be problematic in some places because natural areas and traditional societies find it far more difficult to cope with tourism's pressures than do mass tourism resorts that are professionally managed. So Sustainable Tourism is more than Ecotourism – it encompasses successful ecotourism and much more.

## **What is a Sustainable Tourism Strategy?**

Sustainable tourism achieves its aims by a variety of methods. These include media involvement, public education, training for the people in the tourism industry, the operation of physical planning policies, marketing (and de-marketing) policies, regulation and self-regulation, and the development of incentives for new initiatives by public sector bodies and by others. The whole process is brought together in the development of holistic sustainable tourism strategies. These strategies are typically implemented by agreement through partnership building. The partners may be from the public sector, the private sector and from non – profit special interest groups.

## **Key features of sustainable Tourism Strategies in rural protected areas include:**

**Working with Rurality:** The unique selling point of the rural tourism experience is that of rurality, contact with nature, with traditional rural society, with farming, forest or fishing communities. Sustainable rural tourism should not simply be based in the countryside - it should be functionally rural - it should not be a resort holiday on a farm.

**Scale:** Typically rural activities are small scale, local and individualistic. Sustainable rural tourism should, therefore, be in scale with the countryside in which it is based. Typically - *though not always* - that tourism will be small scale - much will depend on local circumstance to determine scale. Personal contact is important, and is made possible by small scale activities.

**Diversification not Substitution:** The aim of sustainable tourism should be to diversify the economy of an area but not to substitute tourism for farming. Substitution has three dangers - it brings dependency on a single activity, it begins the development of resort status, thus losing an area's unique rural and nature based selling point, and it begins the decline of agriculture, leading to loss of landscape and habitat. Loss of traditional landscapes and habitats loses both a selling point for tourism and irreplaceable cultural and environmental heritage.

**Tourism as a Tool:** Tourism can be developed in two ways. It can be developed for its own sake, and may during that process bring jobs and wealth to an area. Or it can be seen in a broader context and used as a tool to solve or alleviate specific issues. For example accommodation could be provided in the form of a hotel, developed by a national hotel chain. That chain, with its existing marketing and management facilities, may be very successful, and

may create jobs in the rural area. But sustainable tourism concepts would suggest a different route. If locally owned accommodation - perhaps in existing buildings - or newly built by local people - could be created, there would be a powerful series of additional benefits. Indigenous households would be strengthened and encouraged to stay on the land, safeguarding the farmed landscape. The community would acquire additional entrepreneurial skills. Training would need to be given, but that training could be a tool to re-skilling a traditional society. And the community would see traditional buildings conserved rather than new, perhaps non traditional, buildings appear in the rural scene. Profits would flow into local support.

The concept of tourism as a tool can be one used for nature conservation in protected areas, for adding passenger revenue to rural rail lines, to improving the revenue of rural retail outlets, and safeguarding other types of local service provision.

**Conservation:** The need to conserve host communities and natural habitats is paramount within the concept of sustainable rural tourism. While some forms of tourism can destroy communities and habitats, sustainable tourism aims to use the income and opportunities presented by tourism development as conservation tools. Tourism revenues from the world's many millions of bird watchers can be used to assist the conservation of specific habitats that might otherwise be intensively farmed or afforested out of existence. Revenues from the sale of traditional craft and food products can be a similar type of conservation tool.

**Empowerment and local control:** The concept that the control of, and the benefits from, tourism must be locally based is central to the operation of sustainable tourism. It can help the conservation of local values. It can bring new revenue to declining areas. It can re-activate political life in places which had lost hope of improvement. But local control demands skills and knowledge of a high order: a concomitant of successful local control and empowerment is always training, education and information acquisition by the community and its people. *From the beginning, local communities and stakeholders should be involved in the strategy making process, even though that process can be long and difficult.*

**The mixed economy:** Although tourism may seem to many rural communities and their leaders to be a panacea for their problems, there are great dangers in developing tourism as a single economic activity. Tourism is a competitive industry with fast changing fashions. Rural communities may find drawbacks in total reliance on the tourism market. And if tourism is to remain rural, it must encourage an authentic rural economy, with thriving farmers, ongoing country life, and an active and genuine cultural scene.

**Marketing:** There is a tendency for marketing to come low on the list of priorities when devising environmentally or community friendly strategies. However in the case of sustainable rural tourism, effective marketing is a vital requisite. It is a highly professional activity, without which the entire strategy could fail. One of the keys to success is to understand the many speciality "niche" markets that appreciate the special qualities of protected areas.

**How are sustainable tourism strategies structured?**

In the perfect scenario, a country would have a national strategy into which the regional strategies – like this one – would be dovetailed. And within the regional strategies, communities – like Zarnesti or Pesteră / Magura in or near the Park, would develop their own local strategies. But because the concepts involved are new to Romania, the national and local parts of the hierarchy remain to be conceived and created. The regional strategy is the start, therefore, of this process. Discussions about a national strategy are being held.

Further regional strategies, for Retezat National Park and for Vanatori Neamt Forest Park, will follow.

## ***Section B: INTRODUCTION IN THE AREA***

The Piatra Craiului National Park (PNPC) was established in 1990. The first park administration was set up within the framework of the Biodiversity Conservation Project. The partners involved in the Project are the Global Environmental Facility of the World Bank (GEF) who provide 60% of the project's funds, the Romanian Government - (providing 25% of the project's funds) - and the Romanian National Forest Administration - (providing 15% of the project's funds).

The main goals for the Park administration are biodiversity and landscape preservation in the Piatra Craiului Mountain area, the development and management of eco-tourism, and the conservation and promotion of the traditional ways of life in the local communities of the Park.

One of the central tasks involved in the discussion and promotion of eco-tourism consists of elaborating a tourism strategy looking 5 years ahead and beyond. By creating this strategy it is intended to avoid the problems of unmanaged mass tourism by developing and managing eco-tourism in Piatra Craiului – a better choice for the sustainable development of the whole area. In this case the essence of the term “sustainable development” consists of reaching a stable balance between natural components and human components interacting on the same territory. In Piatra Craiului we are talking about preserving yet balancing the natural values of the area with the resources needed for the existence and development of the local communities.

The tourism strategy includes directions for the actions and activities that will require special planning for the coming years in order to develop sustainable tourism in the Piatra Craiului Park. By developing and managing tourism we will offer to tourists the possibility to observe nature, to relax in a natural habitat and to enjoy the facilities and services in the local communities. In turn that will help provide incentives for the development of the general infrastructure of the area and raise local welfare levels. But both now and in the future these park staff activities require financial support and it is important, therefore, that sustainable tourism (which is an important source of income for communities across the world) will also be an important source of income for the administration of the Park.

### ***Section C: THR CONTEXT OF TOURIST ACTIVITIES IN THE PARK***

Conforming to the regulations of OUG 236 (art.5 alin.2 Anexa 1), regarding natural protected areas, PNPC includes different categories of protected areas within its borders. The park is divided into the following zones: Scientific Reserve, Central Zone of the Park, Natural Reserve and the Protected Landscape zone. This zoning has an important role for the management of the park and it is also the base for the tourism zoning of the park. The National Park aims to protect and conserve biogeographically representative samples at the national level, including natural elements with high value from the geographical, floral, fauna, hydrological, geological, palaeontological, and speleological points of view. The park offers also the possibility of visiting the area for scientific, educational, recreational and tourism purposes.

Within the perimeter of a national park only traditional activities and land uses are allowed to be practiced by the communities around the park, and they are regulated by the management plan. The management plan for the park seeks to maintain the balance between the natural elements and the human dimensions of the area, and encourages the preservation of the diversity of habitats and landscapes, promoting the traditional use of land and the traditional way of life of the local people.

PNPC covers a 14,800 ha surface area in the Piatra Craiului massif, including inside its borders Magura and Pestera villages and part of the Dambovitza gorges. This is a relatively small area. Its size and shape make it extremely vulnerable to unmanaged tourism growth – few parts of it can be remote. And its size and shape make it vulnerable to other outside development influences including new developments of all kinds.

#### **The Geography of the Area**

“An accident in the geography of the Southern Carpathians” – that was how the French geographer Emmanuel de Martonne (1873-1955) defined Piatra Craiului. The interaction between morphology, climate, waters, soils, vegetation, fauna and people has created a unique landscape, which has encouraged people, since the beginning of the last century, to protect and preserve this area for future generations. The creation of the new national park management structure is the culmination of those efforts.

#### **Geology**

The Piatra Craiului range represents one of the most diverse and fascinating geological records of the Romanian Carpathians. It comprises nearly the full spectrum of sedimentary rocks (limestone, sandstones, shale, conglomerates, phosphorites and chertstones), which were deposited on an older metamorphic base mainly during Jurassic and Cretaceous times.

After the Jurassic and Cretaceous seas drained, came the coral reef fragments, accumulated as massive carbonate breccias at the bottom of the basin and giving rise to a huge

limestone platform. Out of the 1050 meters thick carbonate sequence in the Piatra Craiului ridge; the lower 500 meters are made up of these hard limestone breccias. On top of the carbonate platform, clean, white limestone developed in a shallow lagoon. These limestones occur in the upper part of the Piatra Craiului ridge and one of their characteristic features is well preserved stratification.

The relief as we can see it today is a relatively recent feature (created through tectonic movements). One beautiful example is the up-lift that occurred in the area 5 million years ago, forcing rivers to cut their way through hard limestone, thus creating the Zărnești and Dambovicioara Gorges.

## **Geomorphology**

A NE-SW trending calcareous ridge of some 25 km in length, which culminates in the Piscul Baciului Peak at 2238 meters altitude, forms the main Piatra Craiului range. As part of the Southern Carpathians, the Piatra Craiului range is separated from the surrounding mountain chains by the Bran Rucăr corridor in the east and by the Dâmbovița and Tamas basins in the west. To the north, the Brașov basin is the delineating element, whereas in the south the Dâmbovicioara basin marks the limit of the mountain range. In this respect one of the most striking features of the Piatra Craiului Mountains is the huge relief of more than 1000 meters, the result of elevation differences between the surrounding basins and corridors and the summits of the ridge itself.

In general terms the Piatra Craiului range is divided into three distinct parts:

- (I) Piatra Craiului Mică, a detached mountain of 1816 meters altitude in the North East which is separated from the main ridge by the Curmătura saddle
- (II) the Piatra Craiului Mare, which refers to the main ridge itself, extending between the Curmătura saddle in the north and the Funduri saddle in the south
- (III) the Pietricica mountain with an altitude of 1764 meters, representing the southern extension of the range down to the Dâmbovicioara basin.

The highest peaks, all of which are located in the central part of the range, are the Piscul Baciului peak(2238 meters), the Grind peak(2229 meters) and the Sbirii peak(2220 meters)

The Bîrsa River and its main tributary, the Rîul Mare of Zărnești, in the North, and the Dâmbovița and Dâmbovicioara rivers in the south control the hydrological drainage of the area. Different landscapes evolved on the two flanks (eastern and western) of the Piatra Craiului ridge, mainly due to the direction and the angle of dip of the rock strata. Thus, on the eastern flank a relatively gentle slope is the characteristic feature, whereas on the western flank a rugged and steep scarp slope occurs. This western side of the mountain has a remarkable wealth of alpine landforms.

Although both the sight and the experience of the main ridge and the gorges are key tourism attractions, some of the residual rock shapes are also well established tourist attractions. These include: the Crăpătura Needle and the Orga Mare Wall in the northern part, the Călineț

finger, the three Diana Towers and the Zaplaz Arches in the central part, and last, but not least, the Big Scree and the Cerdacul Stanciului Arch in the southern part.

### **Caves and Potholes**

The approximately 200 known caves that are part of this karstic system represent, however, a small number when compared to other areas of the Romanian Carpathians; many more remain to be discovered. Horizontal caves occur mainly in the southern part of the range, in the Pietricica area, where the slight inclination of rock strata has favoured such cave development. Among others, the Dambovicioara cave, the Wolf's cave and the Valea Rea caves are the most important ones. Smaller caves, which are the remnants of ancient collapsed karst systems, can be found throughout the massif. Examples are the Stanciului cave, the Big Spirla cave and the Cathedral cave. The Colții Chiliilor cave is a well known tourist attraction; it hosts a Christian-Orthodox shrine. In the XVth century the cave sheltered refugees during Turkish invasions, and nowadays it is a place of pilgrimage. The high angle of inclination of strata in the central and northern part of the Piatra Craiului ridge has facilitated the development of potholes, which are the main karstic features of the area. These potholes evolved either along bed boundaries or along steep fractures and represent the main water drainage path was in the upper half of the massif. By far the most important shaft is the Grind pit, which is, with a total depth of 540 meters below ground level, Romania's deepest cave.

### **Climate**

The annual precipitation average fluctuates between 1000-1300mm, depending on elevation. Snow falls from November to April, with the maximum in January-February, when the most abundant snow is recorded. Some cross-country skiing is possible from December to March.

### **Flora and vegetation**

The richness of the flora of the massif is a result of the variety of microclimatic conditions, and its many physical habitats.

Forests, rocky faces, scree slopes and marshes offer favourable conditions for a variety of plants, which are adapted to these types of habitats. Fungi flora is relatively little researched. But so far more than 300 fungi species were recorded in this area. The majority of recorded species are parasitic on superior plants.

Lichens are well represented in the Piatra Craiului flora. Until now more than 220 rocky lichen species were registered.

Mosses and liverworts have been studied since the nineteenth century. Until now more than 100 species were recorded, some of which are only located in the Romanian Carpathians including *Bucegica romanica*, *Riccia sorocarpa*, *Grimaldia pilosa*. Others are protected species according to the habitats Directive 92/43 EEC: *Mannia triandra*, *Buxbaumia viridis*, *Sphagnum* sp.

In Piatra Craiului, about 1300 species of vascular plants have been recorded so far. Among these species 150 are included in "Romanian Superior Plants Red List", being endemic, rare or vulnerable.

Around 53 endemic plant species for Carpathians are known to be part of the massif's flora, many of which are calcicole. There are two strictly local endemic plant species. The most important is the Carnation of Piatra Craiului - *Dianthus calizonus*, found only on limestone rocks and *Aubrieta intermedia ssp. falcata*, which grows on scree slopes.

Some especially rare species for Romania are: *Ligularia sibirica*, *Taxus baccata*, *Arolla pine, angelica*, *Nigritella rubra and nigra*, also protected species according to the habitats Directive 92/43 EEC and the Bern Convention.

### **Natural Vegetation Units**

In the Piatra Craiului Park there are three altitudinal levels: mountainous, subalpine and alpine. Limited by altitude and site factors, the following vegetation units have been defined for the Piatra Craiului massif:

*Low level Meadows*, which are used by local people as hay fields. These meadows are found in the Barsa Valley, the Dambovita valley and near the Magura and Pestera villages. These hay fields have high species diversity.

*Forests* cover a large area of the park surface. The existing forest types belong to the following formations: pure spruce (*Picea abies*), mixed fir-spruce-beech, spruce-beech stands, fir-beech, mountainous beech and pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) groups. Of great importance, and unique in Romania, is the high altitude variety of semi natural Norway spruce on limestone parental strata.

*Alpine and subalpine meadows*. Some of the sub-alpine meadows have been used for grazing for hundreds of years. Species biodiversity is lower here. The dominant species is *Nardus stricta*. Alpine meadows have specific limestone vegetation. Vegetation around alpine gorges and gullies grows in specific conditions, such as rich humus soils, diffused light and moist conditions.

*Scree slopes*, which are situated at the base of rocky walls, are frequent in Piatra Craiului. They are found in different stages, including mobile scree slopes, almost bare, semi-fixed screens, and almost fixed screens. There are some characteristic vegetation associations, which mark the transition between these stages. Dwarf pine shrubs cover almost 400 ha.

*Alpine crest and lateral walls* support characteristic alpine vegetation. Because of the high calcareous walls, vegetation can survive only in rock fissures. Here a characteristic flora is found according to each particular vegetation level.

### **Fauna**

Invertebrate fauna is very rich in Piatra Craiului and important from the scientific point of view. There are about 35 species endemic to the Romanian Carpathians and 91 discovered for the first time in this area. We mention here two important endemic species for Piatra Craiului: *Nesticus constantinescui*(Arahnida) and *Rhagidia carpatica*(arahnida, acari).

So far more than 270 butterfly species have been found. Amongst others *Psodos coracinus dioszeghy* is an endemic sub-specie in alpine meadows; *Apamea zeta sandorokovacsi* is an endemic sub-specie for the Carpathians .

Watercourses are few in the National Park because of the absorbent limestone rocks. Aquatic fauna consists of invertebrates and 10 fish species, including miller's thumb- *Cotus gobio* and trout *Salmo trutta* . Batrachians and reptile fauna are both still insufficiently known. There are some frog and toad species: salamander *Salamandra salamandra*, newts *Triturus cristatus cristatus* (protected species according to the habitat Directive 92/43 EEC), mountain triton- *T. alpestris alpestris* ; red mountain frog *Rana temporaria temporaria*, etc. We should also mention here some reptile species: mountain viper *Vipera berus berus*.

So far 110 bird species have been identified. Fifty species are strictly protected species according to the Bern Convention and Romanian law (annex 3 of law nr.13/11 March 1993, six are included in the Bonn Convention (law nr.13/8 jan.1998)

Small mammal fauna is well represented. So far, 15 bat species have been identified which live in caves or old trees hollows. Fourteen species are strictly protected (Bern Convention), 6 species are included in the Habitat Directive 92/43 EEC (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*, *R. euriale*, *Myotis bechsteinii*, *M. blythii*, *M. myotis*, *Barbastella barbastellus*) and a specie - *Vespertilio murinus*- is included in the Bonn Convention.

Piatra Craiului National Park has a healthy population of large carnivores including bear— *Ursus arctos*, wolves – *Canis lupus*, and lynx – *Lynx lynx*. A study supported by the park administration has pointed out the existence of three migration passages used by these species between the Piatra Craiului Massif and the Bucegi Mountains. These zones have received a special protection regime. Other mammals populating the massif are: *Capreolus capreolus* (roe deer), *Cervus elaphus* (red deer), *Rupicapra rupicapra* (chamois) (populating the upper side of the massif with up to 100 individuals), *Sus scrofa* (wild boar), *Martens martens* (marten), *Martens foina* (rock marten), and *Felix silvestris* (wild cat)

### ***The Zoning of the Piatra Craiului National Park***

In the Park Management Plan, the surface of the Park is divided into zones delimited according to the protection levels that need to be considered. Key zones are:

*The scientific reserve*, situated in the west side of the rugged zone, the most sensitive part of the massif, where special protection measures are needed (IUCN category I) Economic activities are not allowed here.

*The central zone* of the park (IUCN category II), is also a protected area where only traditional activities are allowed (grazing, according to the limits permitted, following specialized studies).

*IUCN Category V* zones, including the villages of Magura and Pestera, where economic activities such as grazing, agriculture and forestry, are allowed.

Three natural karst relief reserves on the south side of the Park correspond with IUCN Category IV and these are also under a special protection measures.

### ***Socio-Economic Factors***

The sustainability of the PNPC is in turn connected with the sustainable development of the whole surrounding area, characterized by the situation of local communities within and around the park. From the administrative point of view the park is divided into two counties, Brasov country in the North and Arges country in the south. From north to south the local communities outside the Park, but with influence in the Park, are as follows:

Zărnești, Bran, Moeciu, Sirnea, Dâmbovicioara, Podu Dâmboviței, Rucăr.

A special position is held by the local communities inside the park, the villages of Magura and Pestera affiliated to Moeciu commune.

The table below describes some key socio-economic statistics of the area

Parish	Population	Unemployed	Activity		
			Industry	Agriculture	Services
Zărnești	27000	75%	70%	20%	10%
Dambovicioara	1129				
Rucar	6339				
Moeciu					
Bran					

Current trends show decreasing employment in the industrial sector, and increasing unemployment in the context of industrial recession and the slow development of the ‘services’ sector. According to the Metromedia 2001 survey there are some particular socio-economic aspects that should be noted:

1. The potentially active population percentage is about 64%, similar to the national figures.
2. The employed population percentage is around 23% from the whole population, much below the national figure (37%). From the occupied population around 73% are females.
3. In the Piatra Craiului area were around 30 self-employed people per 10000 inhabitants with positive financial results in the year 2001. Only 5% of business closures are being replaced by new businesses.
4. Around 9% of the local population work in forestry and 35% were involved in grazing activities and firewood production. Over 60% of the inhabitants consider that without grazing, fodder obtaining activities, firewood obtaining activities, and wood manufactured articles they will not be able to survive in the near future. Only 6% of the surveyed population declared their use of resources from the central area of the park.

5.15% percent of the interviewed persons were interested in beginning a private business in the area.

6.For local people, the most interesting project idea for the development of a private business was very close related to rural tourism.

7. Average animal numbers declared on each family were:

National park	Sheep	Cattle	Horses	Pigs	Goats	Birds	Beehives
Piatra Craiului	1.3	0.8	0.1	0.4	0.0	7	0.01

85% of all farms are owner occupied compared to 45% nationally. Almost every family in the rural area of the park is occupied in raising sheep, cattle, birds and goats.

8.According to the survey the most important reasons for dissatisfaction amongst the inhabitants of the area were:

- a. Lack of financial resources.
- b. Lack of employment opportunities
- c. The difficulties in starting a private business in the area.
- e. The lack of assistance and initiative from the town halls of the area.

### **The Land Ownership structure within the park**

The overall land ownership structure in the park is illustrated in the table below:

Use Category	Owner	Area (ha)	% of the total area
Forest	State	7467.5	51
Forest	Mayors Offices	806.2	5
Forest	Churches	106.1	1
Forest	Communities	368.9	2
Forest	Private	1274	9
Hay-field	Private	1557.3	11
Meadow	Communities	590.2	4
Construction Sites	Private and Communities	339.2	3
Cliff	State	373	3
Cliff	Communities	622.9	4
Water Stream	State	Length = 281 km	
Agriculture	Private and Communities	1549,1	7
Total		14,773	100

*Administrative rights table:*

Managed area	Management Right		Area	% of the total area
	Managing Authority			
Forest	NFA-ROMSILVA		7467.5	50.5
Forest	OS Bucegi Piatra Craiului		818,2	5.5
Forest	OS Păpușa-Rucăr		463	3.1
Forest	Private		1274	8.6
Hay-field	Private		1557.3	10.5
Meadow and forested meadow	Moeciu Town		261.1	1.8
Meadow and forested meadow	Dâmbovicioara Town		110.3	0.7
Meadow and forested meadow	Rucăr Town		50.1	0.3
Meadow and forested meadow	Private		98.4	0.7
Meadow and forested meadow	Zărnești		272	1.8
Cliff	Zărnești		748	5.1
Cliff	Moeciu		202.3	1.3
Water stream	State		Length 281 km	-
Agriculture	Private and communities		1549,1	10.1
Piatra Craiului National Park	PCNP Administration	1999	14.773	100%

From 9223 ha forests owned by the state, around 2000 ha will be ceded back to their original owners, other individuals or to local councils.

## Services

### *Transportation facilities to the area*

There are no airline services to the area; the nearest airport is in Bucharest three hours away by car.

There are regular fast train services and bus lines from Bucharest and Western Romania to Brasov.

### *Transportation facilities within the area*

From an environmental perspective, rail transport is the ideal transportation medium for Park visitors, providing low levels of pollution and noise, and requiring few parking places. But few people travel by train to the park. The only railway coming near the park borders is the Brasov-

Zărnești branch line from the north. Because of declining industrial activity in Zărnești, the number of the passengers using the railway is decreasing and there are some problems regarding the economic viability of the railway. The frequency of the train service is much reduced to just 5 trains each way per day.

Road transport is increasingly important, comprising bus and private car traffic. There is access to the southern area of the park (Rucar & Dambovicioara) by buses, but, like the train services mentioned above, the service is infrequent. More frequent bus services are provided in the Rucar-Bran corridor. The bus lines between Brasov and Bran, Moieciu, Fundata and Zărnești are regular services.

The villages of Magura and Pestera are in a bad position from the public transportation point of view; at the moment there are no buses to serve these villages. Services ceased some time ago for a variety of technical and management reasons.

Private car traffic is increasingly important and could be a problem in terms of intrusion and parking demands.

An important negative factor affecting tourists and local people alike in the area **is the bad condition of the roads especially in the winter**. It is unlikely that there will opportunities to improve the roads in the short term.

### **Water Supply**

There are water supply problems to a number of settlements, including Magura and Pestera, linked to local geological conditions and technical problems.

### **Medical services.**

In the surrounding area the hospital bed numbers reported per 1000 inhabitants is 12, bigger than the national figure. Emergency access to medical care is comparable with the figures at the national level (around 40 minutes).

### **Educational services**

In each rural locality there is at least one primary school level institution. High school level institutions are located in Zărnești and Rucar.

### ***Cultural heritage***

Cultural traditions are closely related to the traditional lifestyles of raising animals, grazing, and agriculture. There are special occasions (marriages, christening) when rich traditional demonstration takes place. Local people organize popular markets and celebrations with large numbers of inhabitants participating (for example: the “Nedeea Muntilor” festival in the autumn).

### **The existing Tourism facilities in the area:**

Rural tourism has developed in the surrounding area, organized at individual enterprise, regional and national level.

According to the data gathered by the Ministry of Tourism, Bran, Zărnești, Predelut, Moieciu, Pestera, Măgura, Fundata, Șirnea have more than 161 official authorised pensions. In addition, a considerable number of pensions that are not authorised or are currently in the process of obtaining authorization. The classification system for rural tourism accommodation uses flower symbols based on the established Austrian model. This system is similar to the ‘star classification system’ used by hotels and mass tourism operations. The pensions are classified with one to three flowers with the average in the Park region having around two flowers. In the Arges county area near the park there are about 30 pensions. The majority of the pensions are situated in the Bran-Rucar corridor.

Of the tourism associations operating at the national level, the most representative is ANTREC with 93 official pensions in Bran, Moieciu, Predelut, and Șirnea and 30 pensions in the Rucar-Dambovicioara area. As described above, the typical Pension is in the two flowers category indicating bathroom, warm water, and a heating system with fire wood. Some pensions are designated with three flowers and have additional facilities, including en suite bathrooms. Around 10-20% of accommodations are at international standards.

The park administration is interested in developing a database listing the accommodation according to locations, level of comfort, etc. Accommodation within 5 kilometres of the Park boundaries will be included. Relatively little accommodation is available within the Park: most is situated near the Park.

Mountain cabins in the park and very close to the park constitute a further special category. In the northern part of the mountain the cabins are: Gura Raului with 50 beds, Plaiul Foi with 50 beds, Curmatura with 50 beds, and hunting lodge Gura Barsei, with 12 beds. On the southern side of the park (Arges country) are three cabins: Brusturet with 40 beds, Garofita Pietrei Craiului with 20 beds, and hunting lodge Valea lui Ivan with 12 beds.

Campsites represent another important category of tourism facilities. There are three campsites, at Plaiul Foi, Curmatura, and at Brusturet. More appropriate facilities are needed in those camps (toilets, shelters, and garbage collection systems): at the moment the camps are far below international standards, and also present environmental problems.

In the upper mountain area there are three mountain shelters designated as emergency accommodations: Vf.Ascutit shelter, Grind shelter, cabana Ascunsa shelter.

### ***Other services:***

### ***Rescue***

An important role in Piatra Craiului Mountain is taken by the ‘Salvamont’ rescue teams, in charge of the emergency rescue of injured, lost or exhausted tourists and other visitors placed in

danger. There are two rescue teams in Piatra Craiului, one on the northern side of the massif, (County Brasov), and one on the southern side (county Arges). The county councils of Brasov and Arges employ the rescue teams.

### ***Information***

Until now there has been a lack of information available for the visitors. There are no information points, the available maps are very old and they do not include recent changes. There is a lack of local qualified local guides. And there is a lack of information at the national and international level about the Piatra Craiului National Park, about how to reach the area, and about accommodation possibilities in the area. There are in fact only a few qualified mountain guides in Romania: there is only one organization that has the right to qualify mountain guides in Romania : “Asociatia Ghizilor Montani in Romania”. The park plans a series of actions to rectify these problems. It has already set up a web site, [www.pcr.ai.ro](http://www.pcr.ai.ro)

### ***Key parties interested in promoting tourism, now and in the future:***

There are ranges of stakeholders involved in tourism:

1. Rural tourism agencies (for example ANTREC) and individual Pension owners.
2. Eco tourism organizations existing in the area.
3. The Ministry of Tourism.
4. Local communities and local authorities from the perspective of potential service and employment development (tourism is considered as an important factor for increasing local welfare.)
5. Tour operators in the region.
6. County Brasov (special division for promoting tourism)
7. The National Forest Administration (forest districts Zărnești and Rucar)
8. Piatra Craiului National Park
9. Different professional associations (for example the Mountain Guides Association)
10. A number of persons in private enterprise.

An introductory full day discussion about the sustainable tourism strategy for the Park was held with many of the above in May 2002. It identified key problems, and potential opportunities in the area.

### ***Eco-tourism issues***

The Park’s interest in the development of tourist activities is closely related to eco-tourism. Ecotourism offers responsible sustainable nature based tourism, with specific ethical and practical rules: respect for natural values (responsible travel in the nature), help in preserving nature unchanged over time (a flow of income to assist biodiversity and cultural conservation), and contributions to improving local community welfare (through participation in tourist activities)

At national level eco-tourism activities are only at their beginning: an embryo national group has been recently formed. PNPC is involved in that group, under the name of the initiative group 'GIE'. There is a special interest at the Tourism Ministry for promoting eco-tourism activities.

***Piatra Craiului National Park's main goal is biodiversity conservation. The development of tourist activities will, therefore, be done according with well-established guidelines obtained after taking base line surveys and other studies made by specialists. There will be an ongoing survey of the interaction between tourist activities and natural elements in the park.***

The growth of the eco-tourist industry at international level constitutes a very important and potentially positive factor for the Park and its communities. More and more people are choosing eco-tourism destinations, seeking involvement in nature conservation activities, and in promoting and appreciating traditional cultures and ways of life.

## ***Section D – COURRENT TOURISM ACTIVITIES IN PNPC***

Information about tourist activities in PNPC is monitored through a series of annual tourism questionnaires.

The questionnaires are addressed to the visitors inside the park. The analysis and interpretation of the survey results have produced a overall picture of tourism activities and collateral tourist services from the local communities.

The first questionnaire survey took place in year 2000 when the goal was the quantitative and qualitative appreciation of the tourist flows in the area. These first results help in understanding the tourist phenomenon in Piatra Craiului and also show which are the market segments in deficit where improvement and development is required. In order to develop those segments this strategy seeks to put forward a range of proposals.

The survey took place in August-September 2000 at the main entrance points to the Park.

In the future tourism monitoring will be an important instrument for evaluating the impact of the strategy and will also provide essential feed-back in order to improve and correct the ongoing strategy. Also tourism monitoring will be a necessary instrument for keeping the fragile balance between the main goal of PNPC (biodiversity conservation) and the development of the tourism industry in the area.

According to the first results indicated by the 2000 survey, Piatra Craiului National Park has more than 80,000 visitors annually.

The questionnaire revealed that the motivations for visiting the area are, in order of importance:

- [1] The massif itself
- [2] Nature
- [3] Escaping from towns
- [4] To be alone
- [5] To be with the family
- [6] To camp
- [7] To see wild animals.

The most frequently noted motivations are therefore closely related to the uniqueness of the relief and nature of the Piatra Craiului National Park.

From the total figure almost 48% were young people between 18 and 29 years, 45% were middle aged people (30 to 60 years old) and 7% were under 18 years old.

An important aspect shown was the length of stay:

17% from the tourists stay for one day or less.  
44% stay between two and three days  
30% stay between four days and a week.  
Only 9% stay more than one week.

Accommodation used was:

64% used tents - 24% camped outside organized areas  
9% used the pensions from the local communities  
27% used the mountain cabins and shelters.

The longest period for staying in the park was registered at the camp sites (Plaiul Foi, Brusturet, and Curmatura).

From the whole survey 65% of the visitors intended to visit the ridge (which is divided into two sectors).

On average, visitors spent only 150,000 -200000 lei (US\$5- US\$7) per person per day during their visit. An important element shown by the survey was the relative small number of foreign visitors in the park (4% in year 2000). Anecdotal evidence suggests that this number is increasing every year since the survey. Because the number of foreign tourists interviewed was, however, relatively small, the qualitative dimension of the survey is accurate only for the Romanian visitors.

## **Section E: TOURISM ISSUES ASSESSED AND ANALYSED**

The discussion so far has built up a picture of a relatively small, easily accessible and very special area with a number of serious problems that a sustainable tourism strategy should address. These problems are connected with the fragile biodiversity of the area and the potential pressures of tourism on that biodiversity. They are connected to issues within tourism provision – the poor quality of camp sites, low usage of local serviced accommodation, increasing use of cars rather than public transport by tourists, and the low levels of cash flow into the local communities from visitors. And they are connected with the need for tourism to be used as a tool for conservation and regeneration – to support the work of the Park administration, to support local farming interests in order to maintain the landscape and communities, to support infrastructure provision and improvements including transport, local services, better water supply etc. Some of those latter issues concern communities within the park. Others concern communities immediately outside the Park’s boundaries. Of those park periphery communities, the historic but industrialised town of Zărnești – the site of the Park’s Headquarters and future main visitor centre – presents the park’s biggest challenge, a challenge made difficult because the town is outside the Park’s boundaries.

In order to analyse and synthesise these questions a SWOT analysis – covering the Park’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats in the sustainable tourism field- is given below:

### **Strengths:**

1. The Park is easily accessible by rail and by road.
2. It has high relief and many special landscapes.
3. High and special biodiversity levels exist in the area, including unique flora and fauna and pristine forests
4. There are traditional ways of life.
5. There are traditional agriculture practices.
6. There are traditional building styles and village forms.
7. Many partners working in tourism are involved in the Biodiversity Conservation Project.
8. The Piatra Craiului massif is a known tourism brand.
9. The Large Carnivore population is known nationally and internationally
10. The park can support a number of low impact open-air recreation activities from walking and rock climbing through to cross country skiing and caving.

The importance at both national and international level of the partners involved in the project gives the Park administration and the region the capability and enterprise necessary to penetrate the tourism market.

At the national level the Piatra Craiului massif is one of the most well-known and appreciated mountains in Romania. In 1873 10 Saxon mountain climbers from Brasov established an alpine club “Alpine Club of Transylvania”(SKF) as a part of a well known European Alpine Club. Very progressive for those times, the club has made collective tours (almost today’s guided tours), magazines, maintained the trails, built shelters, and written the basic rules for the

profession of visitor guiding. The Brasov area itself is relatively well developed: it is an important railway node with many tourist objectives in the town and outside the town (the old town with its churches, old Saxon villages, Music festivals, the biggest of Romania's ski resorts, Bran castle, and the Bran-Moieciu rural tourism area,). It is already well know by both domestic and foreign visitors

Weaknesses:

1. The lack of some key elements in the tourism infrastructure including information and interpretation.
2. The unmanaged character of the tourism in PNPC at the moment and its impact on biodiversity.
3. A large amount of unauthorised camping and poor facilities at the authorised campsites
4. The lack of a regional and national strategy in order to promote and manage eco-tourism in the protected areas.
5. The poor condition of the general infrastructure of the area (especially roads) and the lack of bus transportation to the villages.
6. The low percentage of visitors using local serviced accommodation.
7. Low levels of visitor spend.
8. The lack of organized tourist programs, especially those designed to attract older visitors.
9. Insufficient funds to develop a full programme of tourism management for the Park.
10. The unattractive townscape of Zărnești, a main gateway to the Park, as a result of its industrial decline.

Regarding tourism infrastructure, there is a lack of information (visitor centres, information points, informational panels, detailed maps are required). There is also a lack of specialized guidebooks, and a comprehensive list of available officially registered accommodation is also missing. The poor condition of some facilities at campsites, cabins, pensions (or the complete lack of facilities) favours the developing of a chaotic tourism and reduces the attractiveness of the area for foreign visitors.

One of the most important reasons for the inadequate tourism facilities is the lack of financial resources in the area. And tourism in Piatra Craiului is not regulated in any way: this is especially a problem at camping sites, in areas of sensitive fauna and flora, and along the area's trails. At national level there is no strategy or assistance in promoting and developing eco-tourism at national or international levels.

The bad condition of the local roads restricts access to the park and it is also a restrictive factor for the development of some local transportation systems. The survey has shown that a very low percentage of the visitors are using local serviced accommodation. This is due to the visitor profile, to the lack of or discomfort of transportation, to the lack of tourist programmes in the communities and to the lack of all kinds of information.

Opportunities:

1. The rapid development of eco-tourism at the international level.

2. The ability of international visitors to contribute more to the local economy and to Park funds
3. The existence of eco-tourism organizations at Zărnești, and of rural tourism in the Bran-Rucar corridor and at Viscri – giving opportunities for partnership.
4. The possibility of partnership with the Ministry of Tourism and with GIE
4. The existing Brasov County office for promoting tourism at the county level.
5. The neighbourhood of the Bran Castle.
6. The existence of the Large Carnivore Project in the area.
7. Increasing interest in outdoor active recreation.
8. Development of local craft and food production.
9. Many low impact niche market product development opportunities in specific ecotourism and activity tourism sectors.
10. New types of marketing, especially on the Internet, offering low cost access to global markets seeking new natural destinations.
11. The Park's role in promoting and managing ecotourism through its own actions and through partnership work.

Throughout the world there has been a rapid increase the eco-tourism sector. More and more people are visiting natural sites with beautiful landscapes, and remarkable flora and fauna elements such as pristine forests or large carnivores. An important role is also played by the traditional way of life still existing in some mountain villages. In Zărnești there is a nucleus of eco-tourism developed by the Carpati Foundation around the Carpathian Large Carnivore Project. Generally speaking the nucleus represents a good example of promoting the area and its eco-tourism activities across the whole world, although care must be taken to avoid excess pressure on wild ecosystems. PNPC is a partner with the Carpati foundation in the national programme of promoting eco-tourism named “Discover Eco-Romania”.

The Bran-Rucar corridor constitutes other much bigger tourism nuclei, with the centre in Bran. This is the most developed Romanian rural tourism programme (centred on rural communities with accommodation, traditional customs and local natural products). The ‘Bran’ pattern is a good example and also the starting point for the development of other rural communities. But it is also a negative example because of the dangerous pressures of uncontrolled over development in the area, which risks losing its rural character.

An important attraction point is the Bran Castle with the legends created around it. Almost 400,000 visitors a year come to the Castle, five times the numbers visiting the Park. This large number of tourists and the existing facilities in the area offer the opportunity to attract new visitors for guided walks in PNPC. The Ministry of Tourism, an important partner in promoting Piatra Craiului National Park has shown an interest in promoting visitation by international tourists to any new eco-tourism programmes in Piatra Craiului. Equally the regional tourism offices opened at the county council level are promoting a more comprehensive image of the Brasov area in order to penetrate the tourism market; they are partners with PNPC in developing activities related to tourism.

### ***Threats***

The threats to the area's sustainable tourism development can be divided into two distinct types.

**1. Dangers and threats from outside the tourism industry** that could reduce the attractiveness of the area for visitors (through the deterioration of its natural unique selling points). These include:

- Uncontrolled building without taking into account the traditional architecture of the mountain areas
- The development or extension of industrial units with a high pollution risk and of extractive industries
- The uncontrolled use of natural resources (logging trees without taking account of the existing rules, illegal hunting)
- Bad management of the forests
- The uncontrolled increase of the number of sheep and cattle in the alpine area, leading to overgrazing and erosion.
- More buildings for summerhouses and second homes, bringing no lasting economic gain to the Park's communities.

**2. Factors internal to the tourism industry, including:**

- Uncontrolled mass tourism development
- Badly designed, or non traditional buildings
- Uncontrolled camping in sensitive areas
- Growing volumes of uncollected litter and waste
- Water supply demand
- Walking beyond marked trails in sensitive areas.
- Increasing visitation by car from the Bran area into the park and other pressures resulting from Bran's development.
- Failure to bring the tourism infrastructure of the area up to the European level, resulting in lost market share.
- Inability to compete with the world's other 30,000 protected areas
- Unduly restrictive measures for biodiversity conservation
- An excessive fee system
- The ending of the project financed by GEF at the end of the year 2005, if no alternative funding for further administration activities is found.

## ***Section F: THE AIMS OF THE FUTURE STRATEGY***

The main goal of the protected areas system in Romania is to keep the natural and human values of those areas unchanged.

***Why, therefore, is the development of eco-tourism in PNPC necessary and how will it help biodiversity conservation?***

1. Direct influences of ecotourism on biodiversity conservation include:
  - The 'nature friendly' character of this type of tourism.
  - The possibility to return some revenue from ecotourism for biodiversity conservation.
  - The restriction of visitors to marked trails, with ecological information
  - The provision of guided walks, with guides helping educate visitors.
  - Direct participation by the visitors in conservation activities.
  - The provision of interpretation facilities throughout the area
  - The growth of eco-tourism activities can lead to the reduction of mass-tourism activities and the negative impact of those activities
  - Control of damaging uses including unorganised camping, the use of four wheel drive cars, motorbikes, mountain bikes and climbing activities in sensitive areas.
  
2. Indirect influences include:
  - Income from ecotourism can lead to the improvement of the local community welfare.
  - Eco-tourism can become a sustainable source of existence complementary to traditional activities.
  - The opportunity to obtain revenue from tourism will lead to a lower interest in increasing the number of cattle and sheep, and therefore a reduction in over-grazing and erosion.
  - The presence of complementary activities will lead to a lower pressure on natural resources generally.

**But how can the support capacity of the ecosystems for visitors be established and maintained?**

Zoning is an important factor in keeping natural and human values unchanged and for the sustainable development of the area. Zoning can be used both positively and negatively. Visitors can be encouraged to go to areas which are physically robust and where they can contribute to the local economy and to the park's conservation funds. Visitors can also be discouraged from visiting fragile areas and areas where they do not contribute to conservation funds and the local economy.

The key selling points for tourism in the park are its special combination of landscapes, biodiversity, active outdoor recreation possibilities and traditional culture. While the existence of the large carnivores population in the park is well known and the ridge walk is extremely popular, the park contains many more attractions for the visitors. One of the aims of the strategy must be to reduce the pressure on the ridge and the urge to see large carnivores and to increase interest in other attractions.

Other key aims will include:

- To improve visitor behaviour, reducing litter, trampling, interference with wild life and unauthorised camping.
- To increase the use of the local accommodation in the communities
- To encourage the use of guides
- To attract more visitors to the park, especially outside the peak season.
- To increase the number of foreign visitors
- To encourage more visitors to use public transport and fewer people to travel by car
- To use visitor spending to support local villages services and the production of traditional foods and crafts.
- To enable the park to work with local communities and businesses, encouraging sustainable development.

## ***Section G: THE STRATEGY'S PROPOSAL AND MEASURES***

### **The improvement of the existing tourism infrastructure:**

**Accommodation** is an essential part of any tourism strategy – it enables tourists to stay the night and brings high net returns to the region's economy.

The biggest problem for accommodation in and around the park is in unauthorised and low quality camping sites. The Park will therefore seek to:

1. Prevent unauthorised camping by ranger activity and by the enforcement of the park regulations.
2. Encourage the development of high quality camping facilities for up to 70 tents each at the following sites:  
Curmatura cabin  
Plaiul Fcii cabin  
Brusturet cabin

The campsites should have facilities regarding the safety of camping, fire places, bad weather shelters, social group facilities, and parking for cars.

Within the small grant program local people are encouraged to build some camping sites. Sites for up to 10 tents each will be encouraged at Pestera, Magura, and Sirnea.

Other types of tourism accommodation inside the park will be covered by the following measures:

- Normally, no totally new building should be constructed within the park for tourist accommodation.
- The conversion of parts of existing buildings within the park for tourist accommodation will be permitted subject to any conversion retaining the character of the building.
- In special circumstances, some small extensions to existing buildings may be permitted subject to any extension retaining the character of the building.
- New developments for second homes for people from outside the park will not be permitted.

Any further accommodation needs should be situated in the Bran - Rucar corridor, in Satic and in Zărnești.

### ***Infrastructure needs:***

Transport to the park - The Park will encourage the use of public transport to the park by:

- Promoting public transport in marketing materials
- Discussing with CFR the improvement and marketing of the Brasov to Zarnesti railway service.

- Seeking ways to create a bus link from Zarnesti station to points in the park
- Seeking ways to institute a bus link from Zarnesti to Pestera and Magura for both residents and tourists.
- Seeking ways to create a Bus link from the national road Brasov-Pitesti to the entrance points to the park at Brusturet and Satic.

#### Transport within the park:

- The use of cars in the park will be restricted where possible to residents and to people visiting residents in the park, or with overnight tourist accommodation.
- Non-residents will be required to use parking places designated by the park authorities.
- Restrictions will be imposed on four wheel drive cars and motorbikes on some forest roads and in all off road situations.

#### Signing policies:

- Boundary / Welcome signs will be erected at all entrance points to the park on public roads.
- The signing of the trails will be improved and maintained on regular basis.
- The park will take steps to adopt European Tourism signing norms.

#### Walking Trails:

The park has renewed almost 90% of the existing mountain trails. A new trail has been designed which makes the connection between the Bran-Rucar corridor and the park. There are another three renewed trails also connecting the Bran - Rucar corridor with the PNPC (Moieciu, Fundata, Sirnea). To further develop eco-tourism and also for raising the attractiveness of the area, each tourist trail will have an auxiliary information package regarding local communities, relief, landscapes, flora, fauna. Specialized local guides will be able to give a proper interpretation of this auxiliary information. Some of the trails will be specialized on the observation of fauna and flora.

In the upper mountain area there are three shelters and the park administration considering enough this shelters in order to ensure proper safety levels for walks in the mountains.

#### Information and interpretation:

The PNPC information system has an important role in attracting tourists, and in providing all necessary data for conducting the tourism programmes in the spirit of eco-tourism. The information system also has an important role in educating tourists, to help them understand and respect the fragile equilibrium between natural phenomenon and anthropic elements. In the park two new visitors centres and three information points will be built. The information points will be in Bran, at Curmatura and Plaiul Fcii. The visitor centres will be situated at Zărnești and Rucar. The visitor centres will act as magnets, guiding the main flows of tourists to the park to the entrances where they stand. The centres will be constructed to an innovative design reflecting the forward looking policies of the park but using traditional materials where possible. The

largest centre will be at Zărnești, because that is the main gateway to the park. It will also be an important initiative in the regeneration of that town. The visitor centres' main function will be to present the park, its aims and programmes and to inform the tourists about local and environmental issues. Also, the visitor centres will offer an image of the mountain to the tourists unable to reach the upper area. The information point's main goals are to inform and to "lead" the tourists in the park. The information point at Bran has the additional role to attract visitors from Bran to guided walks in the PNPC. Now to cause of change USA dollar exchange rate we can build only Zarnesti information Center following in future to build the rest of facilities. The visitor centre at Zărnești will be multifunctional and will consist of:

- A main exhibition
- A classroom for school children
- Offices for the Park administration
- A separate module with accommodation for visitors
- A conference room
- A restaurant, using local food and offering local menus where possible
- A shop selling local and park related merchandise
- Recreation places outside the buildings for children
- A climbing wall - to enable safe rock climbing to be taught and practised
- Parking places.

It is also planned to collect entrance fees at the visitor centres.

Information panels at the main entrances to the park will inform visitors about the park, leading the tourists to the most appropriate information point, giving information about the rules of the park and also giving contact numbers of rescue teams, police, local council, and the park administration. The panels will use international symbols on the map to show alternatives for parking, collecting waste and other elements. At five key points where trails cross maps will be installed, in order to lead visitors through the park.

An important role in the information system will be the administration personnel who will inform and lead the visitors in the park.

Methods of informing the potential visitors of the park will include: direct information, informing through the Internet and through promotional materials.

### ***The Zoning of PNPC for Tourism***

The surface area of the park is divided into four zones for biodiversity conservation purposes. These same four zones will form the basis of the proposed zoning system for tourism purposes. They are:

#### **The scientific zone**

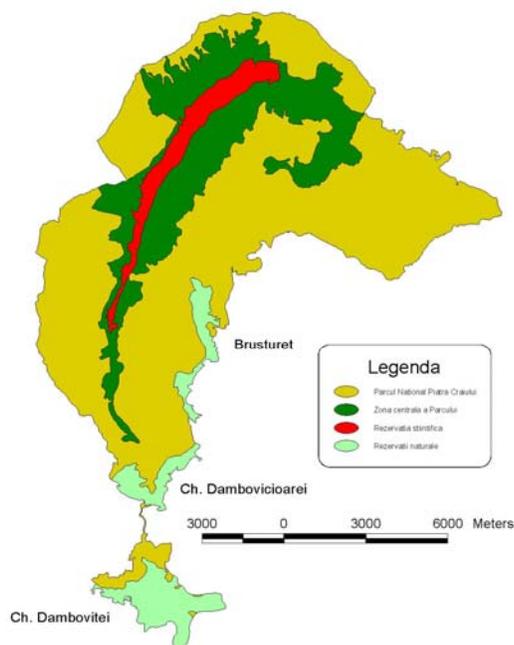
Normally, in scientific reserves in protected areas access for the public is restricted in order to preserve special ecosystems. In the case of PNPC, because there are already well known tourist

trails traversing the reserves, which are also unique access ways to the ridge from the western side of the mountain, they remain as permitted tourist trails.

In the future, however, access for groups of more than four people will only be allowed in the presence of authorised guides. They will assure the safety of the walkers, safeguard the ecosystems and they will provide information about the trails and about the scientific reserve. Special signs will be placed along the trail explaining the importance of conserving the area.

The southern side of the scientific reserve is especially vulnerable to damage by walkers because the ridge here is very narrow and subject to erosion. It is also the refuge of the small chamois population and a number of threatened flowering plants. A series of measures are proposed to protect this area:

1. The tourists who enter the park via Dambovicioara common and Satic who do not use guided tours will be strongly advised to use the alternative scenic trails which surround the ridge to reach the highest point at “Piscul Baciului”.



2. The park may consider closing some ridge routes during animal breeding seasons and/or to allow regeneration of flora.

3. Camping and the lighting of open fires in the scientific reserve are not allowed. In case of emergencies caused by bad weather, and in case of exhausted tourists, there are mountain shelters where visitors can accommodate themselves until the danger passes. No other activities are allowed in the scientific reserve.

### **The Central area**

In the central area of the park, some traditional activities are allowed and visitor access is permitted on marked trails. The park will install a campsite in one perimeter area situated around the information point at Curmatura. The park is investigating the possibility of using ecologically friendly methods of electricity generation and waste disposal at this site. It will be not allowed to camp elsewhere in the central zone, or to have open fires.

The only tourist cabin in the central area of the park is also at Curmatura . In the central area there will be two renewed mountain shelters and there is also a shelter owned by the rescue team.

### **Natural reserve areas**

In the natural reserve areas around the gorges, walking, mountain biking and horse back riding is allowed. It is also allowed to camp in organized campsites. Some rock climbing activities are allowed in designated areas. Camping outside organized sites will be forbidden along with open fires outside the campsites. Also, the access to cars beyond the installed barriers will be strongly restricted.

Taking account of the minimum impact produced on the surrounding nature the use of some trails for mountain bikes and horse back riding will be encouraged. The establishment of parking places at the key entrances in the gorges is also a priority.

### **Landscape protected areas**

This zone is composed of forests, meadows and the two mountain villages of Magura and Pester. Inside the villages it will be allowed to build family houses for local people, farm buildings and some extensions to houses in special circumstances to develop ecotourism in the local communities. PNPC will encourage the establishment of tourist information centres, using funds from the small grant programme. These could be at the proposed campsites or associated with local shops.

The park is actively involved in creating a partnership with architects associations and with the county councils in order to eliminate the problem of unplanned building and unsympathetic building styles. It is hoped to produce a design and conservation guide to traditional buildings.

In the forests, forestry activities are allowed only under forest regulation control. The forests are traversed by mountain trails where access is permitted for walking. From the tourism point of view the forest is designated for the development of some specialized tourist programmes including:

- The observation of flora and fauna
- Trails traversing pristine forests

For this kind of tourism programme guided walks will be made available using specialized guides. There will be also special trails for horse back riding.

### **Product development**

A key factor in the development of eco-tourism is a programme of environmentally friendly product development, designed to increase the income of the local communities and the park administration. The park intends to become involved in the following initiatives:

#### Guided walks

The first step in completing this idea was the training of a nucleus of authorised mountain guides. A special course for mountain guides took place in the period September 2002 - May 2003 organized by the Romanian Mountain Guides Association in collaboration with the National Park. At this course there were young people from local communities and also Park volunteers and members of the rescue teams. In order to ensure a large participation from the local communities, PNPC contributed 70% of the course costs. At the end of course about 10 participants will receive an official permit from the Ministry of Tourism and also a special permit (free of charge) from PNPC.

It is intended to extend permits to existing guides who are familiar with the park subject to them demonstrating their understanding of the park regulations and ecosystem conservation. These permits will be also free of charge.

A series of tourism programmes elaborated by PNPC will promote the park guides and accommodation providers from the local communities. The programmes will be divided into several categories:

- Complex guided walks in the mountains: the park will organize tours in the mountain, which will be design to minimize the impact on the environment. Each program will have interpretive information as part of the product.
- Easier guided walks in the mountains with visits to the local communities.
- Excursions specialized on fauna and flora observations, and on visiting pristine forests.
- Tourism programmes based on practical biodiversity conservation activities in the field.
- Tourism programmes based on biking and horse back riding. PNPC will define some trails where these activities are allowed; the effective administration of this kind of tour will be made by private tour operators or guides.
- Bear watching

The park is considering the creation of a bear observation site in the western forest area at a point where bears pass through the park. This action would satisfy visitor demand for large carnivore

observation under controlled conditions while safeguarding pristine forest areas. This activity would earn revenues for the park administration. The site has yet to be determined.

- Bird watching

There is a large demand for bird watching opportunities in the park. The park intends to produce a publication to guide bird watchers and will consider the constructions of hides in suitable places.

- Snow tourism

Cross-country skiing, ski touring and snowshoe walking is already established in the park. The park will encourage the small-scale expansion of these activities, which provide important low season income to the local communities. The park will discourage all mechanical installations connected with snow tourism in order to maintain the ecosystems and the character of the park. An additional strategy will be developed in the future to assist and regulate snow tourism.

- Rock climbing

Many parts of the park have a high potential for the growing sport of rock climbing. But some parts of the park could suffer ecological damage as a result of this sport. The park intends to:

Encourage rock climbing in approved areas

Prevent rock climbing in sensitive areas

Erect a climbing wall at the Zărnești visitor centre to enable training to be given and to offer wet weather climbing facilities

Work with the Zărnești and Campulung mountain rescue groups to determine the areas and policies best suited to rock climbing in the park.

Work with the Zărnești and Campulung mountain rescue groups to develop training and other rock climbing programmes for visitors.

## ***Marketing***

Marketing will be encouraged with four main aims:

- To encourage increased visitor flows especially outside the main season
- To encourage increased foreign visitor flows.
- To encourage increase visitor expenditure in the park and surrounding area
- To educate visitors in responsible visitation concepts.

The main thrust of the marketing effort will be aimed at the domestic Romanian market.

It will concentrate on the niche markets known to have a special interest in the area. In addition marketing will be aimed at selected international markets.

Specific marketing methods will include:

1. The park website, [www.pcr.ai.ro](http://www.pcr.ai.ro)
2. A tourist brochure edited in collaboration with Ministry of Tourism containing information about PNPC, including possibilities of recreation, accommodation, transport, and the ethics of the park. It will be distributed from the Romanian national tourism offices in 17 foreign countries.
3. Detailed tourist maps, posters, post cards illustrating the beauty of the area.
4. The production of a documentary film and video about Piatra Craiului together with the national broadcasting organization (TVR2). This film will be also distributed outside Romania's borders.
5. Information packages regarding each tourism programme containing information and also images. A comprehensive guidebook to the park will be produced. It will be written in conjunction with pension owners and other stakeholders.
6. A very important role in promoting the area will be played by the visitor centres and by the information points.

***The building of partnerships with tour operators, tourism agencies, and others interested in tourism***

In order to promote and to sell tourist programmes, the PNPC administration already has partnerships with some tour operators. For the next steps in that direction, the plan will include:

1. Participation in international tourism trades and fairs.
2. Building partnerships with tour operators and agencies.
3. Directly contacting tour operators, agencies, from outside the country.
4. The building of a more useful and more interactive site on the Internet.

It will be very important to build partnerships with tourism agencies and tourism operators because they will promote the image of the park more effectively than the park administration alone.

***Support policies***

1. Maintaining natural values and cleanliness. These goals are key elements in realizing the attractiveness of the PNPC zone. For this reason the park collects annually more than 10-20 tons of garbage from the park area. Most of these wastes come from the camping areas, and from the zones around the villages. This problem will be solved in the next 2-3 years through patrolling the area, granting funds to local communities, etc. The future entrance fee to the park will be the main source for covering the expenditures occasioned by the collecting of garbage in PNPC.

2. The small grant programme

The small grant programme of the GEF has approved projects in the local communities that are closely related to tourism activities. The park will grant some further funds for camps, information points and private pensions. This programme's main role is to stimulate local people to develop private tourism activities in their villages.

3.Promoting the idea of eco-tourism as an alternative for economic – social development of the community and organizing the main directions for action according with this goal. Measures will include:

- a. Advising local businesses about the possibility of ecotourism development
- b. Assisting the creation of local tourism forums and associations
- c. Promoting and keeping alive the local tradition in the communities
- d. Promoting the traditional elements in the new buildings, encouraging small farms aiming to produce natural food products and manufactured objects, organizing traditional festivities.

*4.Assisting* the provision of improved water supplies to Pestera and Magura to supply existing buildings and farms.

*5. Help with renewing* the basic infrastructure from the communities: roads, public facilities communication and transport facilities.

#### Organization

Cooperation between the authorities, PNPC, pension owners and other stakeholders will be essential in order to implement the tourism strategy of the park. To assist that:

- Local forums constituted by people interested in tourism will be encouraged.
- The park will work in partnership with all stakeholders (including landowners) wherever possible.

#### Training

The park recognises the importance of training to maintain quality standards in tourism in the park. It also recognizes the need to arrange training for new tourism businesses. It will assist with training courses when possible.

#### The Implementation of the strategy

It is proposed to implement the main features of the strategy by the end of 2004. A first step will be to discuss this strategy with all the stakeholders in the Park region, encourage an understanding of its aims and measures, and if necessary make minor amendments. Key dates in implementation will be as follows:

- End of 2003- trails completed and signed, interpretation panels erected, PNPC camp sites completed
- End 2004- Information points installed, visitor centres buildings completed

### The Implementation of specific initiatives

PNPC intends to enter into partnerships with tourism agencies, tour operators, guides and other tourism organizations to develop specific programmes. The proposed collaboration system could be as follows:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Marketing                             | Tourism agencies/associations-Park-Ministry of Tourism<br>County councils. |
| 2. Transportation-Accommodation          | Agencies -private enterprises-PNPC   |
| 3. Qualified guiding                     | Tourism agencies (with qualified guides employed)+guides                   |
| 4. Information & interpretation material | PNPC administration  |
| 5. Trails, other infrastructures         | PNPC administration  |
| 6. Guided tours                          | PNPC administration, agencies, private enterprises                         |

## Section H: FINANCE AND FUNDING

The funding of the strategy proposals for the period after 2004, when the current financial regime ends, will become increasingly important. This section explores a number of possibilities.

1. A future entrance fee to the park, which should be collected in cooperation with the local authorities. A part of the entrance fee would be used by PNPC for conserving the biodiversity, renewing the trails, and maintaining the cleanliness of the area: the local authorities for small infrastructure improvements and for keeping the surrounding areas clean will use the other part. The collection of the fee should be done by agents employed by the authorities at the main entrances to the park. The proper moment for establishing the entrance fee is considered to be the beginning of year 2004, after many new park facilities have been installed.
2. Car parking charges could be a further source for the revenue
3. Some parks have successfully collected voluntary contributions from guests using accommodation establishments to fund specific park improvements.
4. The park could obtain revenue from any tourism programmes and products it develops, alone or in partnerships with other agencies.
5. A successful accommodation enterprise at the Zărnești visitor centre, coupled with merchandise sales and food sales

The issue of future funding is, however, one common to all the protected areas in Romania, and will be the subject of a future national debate.

## Section I: EVALUATING AND UPDATING THE STRATEGY

The ongoing evaluation of the tourism strategy is necessary to:

1. Find out the trends in tourism in PNPC
2. Draw attention to problem aspects of tourism in the park.
3. Change, or further develop, the strategy according to the evaluation process' findings.

The evaluation of the strategy will be made in four important ways:

1. The tourist survey will take place annually starting with the year 2003, through direct interviews. It aims to understand the needs of the visitors, discover the most visited areas, where the visitors come from, if they use the local accommodation, spending patterns etc.
2. The interpretation of the biodiversity monitoring programme in conjunction with the tourist survey results will establish the support capacity of the ecosystems and decide if and where further reductions in tourist pressure on some trails is necessary.
3. Through evaluating the increasing / decreasing level of tourism activities in the local communities with the help of pension owners, guides, etc. This is very important for assessing the success of the alternative tourism activities in the communities.
4. The park will consider holding an annual meeting with all stakeholders to review the previous year and plan for the next year.

The sustainable tourism strategy will be updated on a regular rolling review basis, rather than be left unchanged for a specific length of time.

### **Targets and Monitoring:**

It will be necessary to set base lines and to set targets in order to monitor and evaluate the progress of the strategy. But it is not possible to do this at this stage:

- (1) Because useful national and regional tourism statistics are not available for comparison purposes.
- (2) Because there are no secure local base line statistics available at the moment.
- (3) Because the cost and complexity of setting base lines and targets, and monitoring them, is too great given the range of issues that the park has to cope with at the current time.

However, as and when possible, the park should aim to work towards more quantitative assessment of changes in the future.