Dracula Going Green
Making Ecotourism a Driving Force for Sustainable Development

Background

Romania is a country of contradictions, challenges, and great beauty. After 30 years since the fall of communism and 12 years as a member of the European Union, Romania is still one of the poorest countries, with the second to last lowest GDP per capita in the union. However, slow economic development had a positive impact in helping preserve its natural beauty and cultural richness. More than 40% of the entire European population of wolves, bears, and lynx live here. The high peaks of the long Carpathian-Vatra mountains, tracts of defragmented forest, and the Danube delta create a haven for great biodiversity of species, endemic plants found nowhere else in the world, and a rich heritage of rural culture and tradition recognized by UNESCO.

Project and Spatial Questions

The first objective of this study was to investigate the potential for the development of ecotourism activities in Romania, which gives the country’s endowment in cultural and natural assets, as an option to create sustainable development in the most poverty-stricken areas. Ecotourism, as an alternative form of tourism, involves visiting natural areas in order to learn, to study, or to carry out activities environmentally friendly, that is, a tourism based on the nature experience, which enables the economic and social development of local communities. Activities may include sports like rafting, canoeing; equestrian tourism on routes; skiing; bike trips on arranged paths; guided organized hikes; flora and fauna observation tours; and excursions to local communities or cultural attractions.

In order to locate those part of the country that have assets to attract the kind of tourism that is needed. To be able to know what are the areas of Romania most suitable for new ecotourism development? I asked which areas of Romania are close to substantial natural and cultural assets? And, are those areas close enough to transportation infrastructure to be able to attract visitors?

The second part of the project consisted in locating those areas that are underdeveloped and thus, would greatly benefit from increased economic activity if suitable for ecotourism.

Methodology

The first component to produce the ecotourism suitability analysis was to make a survey of the transportation infrastructure in Romania, a key element to be able to receive visitors. The data used included major airports, rail, and roads to calculate the distance from the different municipalities to the infrastructure. The second component measured the distant from each municipality to the 8 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the country and the major Natural Protected Areas. By overlaying these two components, a suitability analysis was produced to locate the municipalities that have high accessibility to ecotourism assets, natural and cultural, and also have close proximity to transportation infrastructure, hence, facilitating the creation of new economic opportunities.

Results

The final maps demonstrate that the areas more suitable for the development of ecotourism development are located in the north of the country in the Carpathian mountains and two WHS and in the west close to the city of Tîmesoara. However, the areas most in need are located in the NE, E, and center of the country.

Limitations

WorldPop dataset assumes 5 million more people than real estimates. Romania census and geographic agencies are archaic.

Information

Cartography: Stefanik International offers
EPSG (21781) CTR for International applications
Producer: Patrick Tolerun
Production Service: 7
Sources: ESRI, GADM, GL, National Institute of Statistics, OSM, WWF, UNESCO, WorldPop
Date: May 5, 2020