

Abstract

Practice has proved that efficient management actions occur only where decisions are taken based on relevant and reliable information about the respective protected area and the potential user groups. The last refers to the visitors of the protected areas, which express an increased interest in spending the leisure time in such areas and practicing different recreation activities. Thus, the profile of tourists is one of the main key elements in the decision processes regarding the management of tourism in the national and natural parks. This information is valuable for at least two reasons. First, this type of information should be considered when developing recreation facilities or maintaining attractive services for tourists because it may respond to their needs. Second, it is important for imposing use restrictions where necessary and if uncontrolled behavior is noticed. Data were collected during the summer of 2011 using an in-person questionnaire. Tourists were approached while they were recreating in the Romanian national and natural parks. The descriptive statistics analysis was conducted to create the profile of tourists. The trip characteristics were analyzed along with the socio-demographic characteristics, thus offering a detailed understanding of tourists' behavior during the recreation trips. Overall, results indicate that some characteristics differ among the groups of visitors. It remains the park managers' task to find solutions on how to adapt the recreation facilities and services to tourists' needs, definitely by imposing some restrictions that assure the preservation of the natural resources.

Key words: profile of tourists, management, recreation, national park, natural park