



Visitor Motivations

Objective: Shift visitor motivation and behaviour towards nature-based activities

Carpathian Mountains
status: mixed



Problem: In the Făgăraş Mountains of Carpathia, as in many other areas of Europe, rural economies and societies have changed over recent decades. This has resulted in increasingly limited employment opportunities for local people. While tourism can contribute to economies and livelihoods, mass tourism can be harmful through resource use, pollution, crowding and disturbance.

Action: The Conservation Enterprise Programme was formed to develop new [sustainable enterprise opportunities](#) and increase [sustainable incomes](#) by providing technical support to both Foundation Conservation Carpathia-incubated businesses and businesses established by local people, many focused around sustainable tourism. In addition, the Carpathia Fund provides initial grants to new sustainable enterprises, including tourism-related enterprises. At the same time, Foundation Conservation Carpathia has implemented a successful [media communications strategy](#) to raise the profile of the Făgăraş Mountains, and is working to increase [awareness of the importance of restoration and the protected area](#), such as through the creation of visitor centres.

Indicator: Data on the profile and motivations of tourists visiting the Făgăraş Mountains is being collected, to help to inform Foundation Conservation Carpathia's work on sustainable tourism. In addition, changes in the importance of wildlife and nature to the visitor experience, and the proportion of visitors who are specifically visiting the area to engage in nature-based tourism (such as hiking, biking and wildlife viewing) indicate a growing market in and opportunities for sustainable tourism.



Wildlife watching at the annual Făgăraș Fest. Photo: Mihai Donea.



Carpathian forest. Photo: Călin Șerban.

Methods

This indicator focused on understanding visitor motivations, expectations, beliefs and behaviours. Data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire containing closed-ended questions and was printed in Romanian, German and English. The baseline data was collected in August 2018 at Bâlea Lake, from adult visitors who were intercepted and invited to participate. The questionnaire consisted of 145 items divided into seven sections:

- Past visits to the area
- Motivations for visiting the area
- Beliefs about the area
- Attitudes towards national park establishment, and what activities they would support in a national park
- Expectations of a potential Făgăraș Mountains national park
- Interest in wildlife
- Demographic characteristics

In 2022, data collection was expanded from Bâlea Lake to another seven locations in the Făgăraș Mountains. A stratified sampling approach was used, with the aim of collecting 100 completed questionnaires in Bâlea Lake, and 30 in each of the other locations.

415 visitors participated in the 2018 study; 47% identified as female and 53% as male. 71% were Romanian citizens.

340 visitors participated in the 2022 study, of which 46% identified as female and 54% as male. 89% of visitors in 2022 were Romanian.



Eco-tourism hiking. Photo: Călin Șerban.



Eco-tourism wildlife watching. Photo: Sascha Montag.

Results

There were more returning tourists in 2022 (88%) than in 2018 (60%). There was also a higher proportion of local and Romanian visitors in 2022; 13% of visitors in 2022 lived in the area, compared with 3% in 2018.

There were more visitors staying overnight in the Făgăraș Mountains in 2022 than in 2018. While the number of visitors staying between 1 and 4 nights did not change much during the period (62% in 2018 and 61% in 2022), there was a significant increase in the number of visitors staying between 5 and 7 nights in the region – 4% in 2018 and 14% in 2022.

Being in contact with nature was the strongest motivation for visiting the Făgăraș Mountains in both years. There was a significant increase in the reported importance of both nature and sports as visitor motivations, while there was no change in the importance of culture or visiting monuments as motivations (Fig. 1).

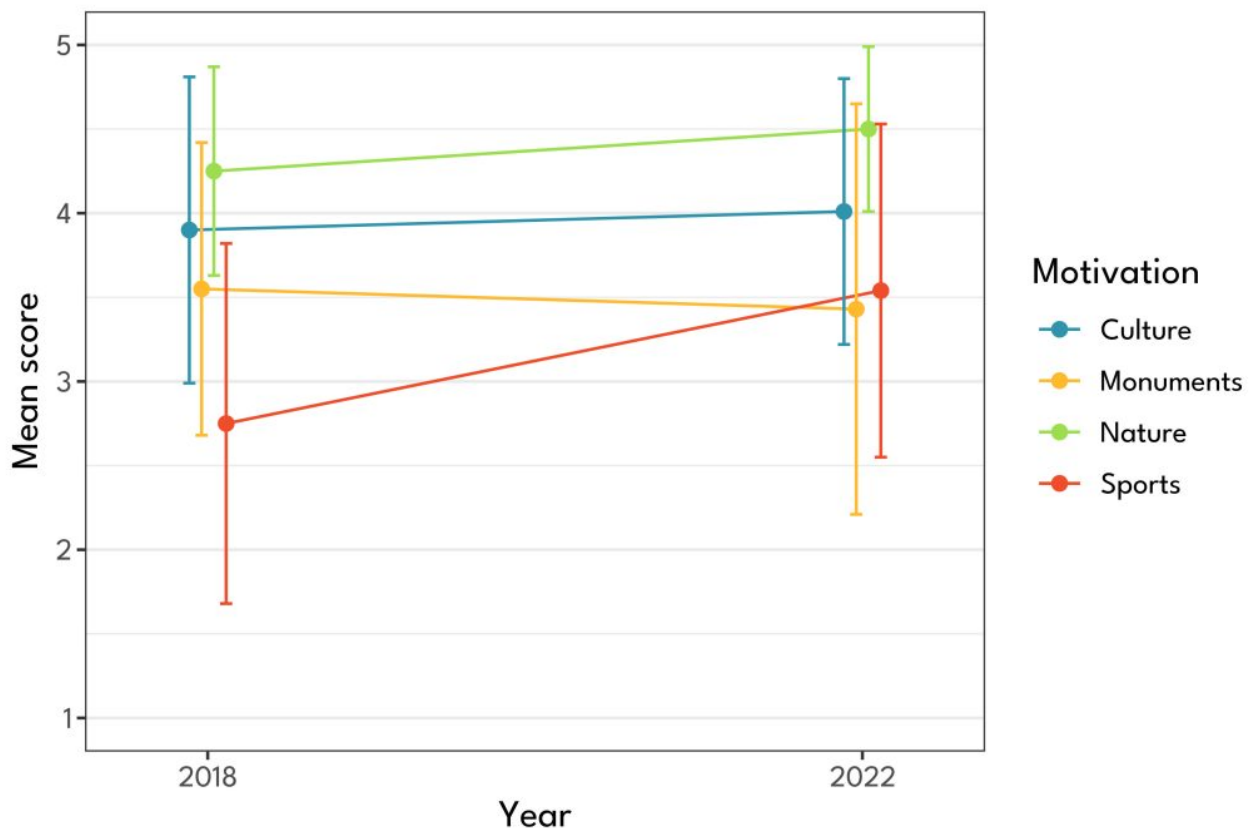


Figure 1: Change in importance of different motivations for visiting the Făgăraș Mountains, based on a scale ranging from Not at all important (1), A little important (2), Somewhat important (3), Important (4) and Extremely important (5). The importance of nature and sports increased significantly, while there was no change in the importance of culture or monuments.

There were also significant increases in the perceived importance of several factors for attracting visitors to the Făgăraș Mountains (Fig. 2), in particular wildlife, large carnivores (such as [wolves](#), [bears](#) and [lynx](#)), old-growth forest and food. There was no change in the perceived importance of outdoor activities, while the perceived importance of scenery decreased.

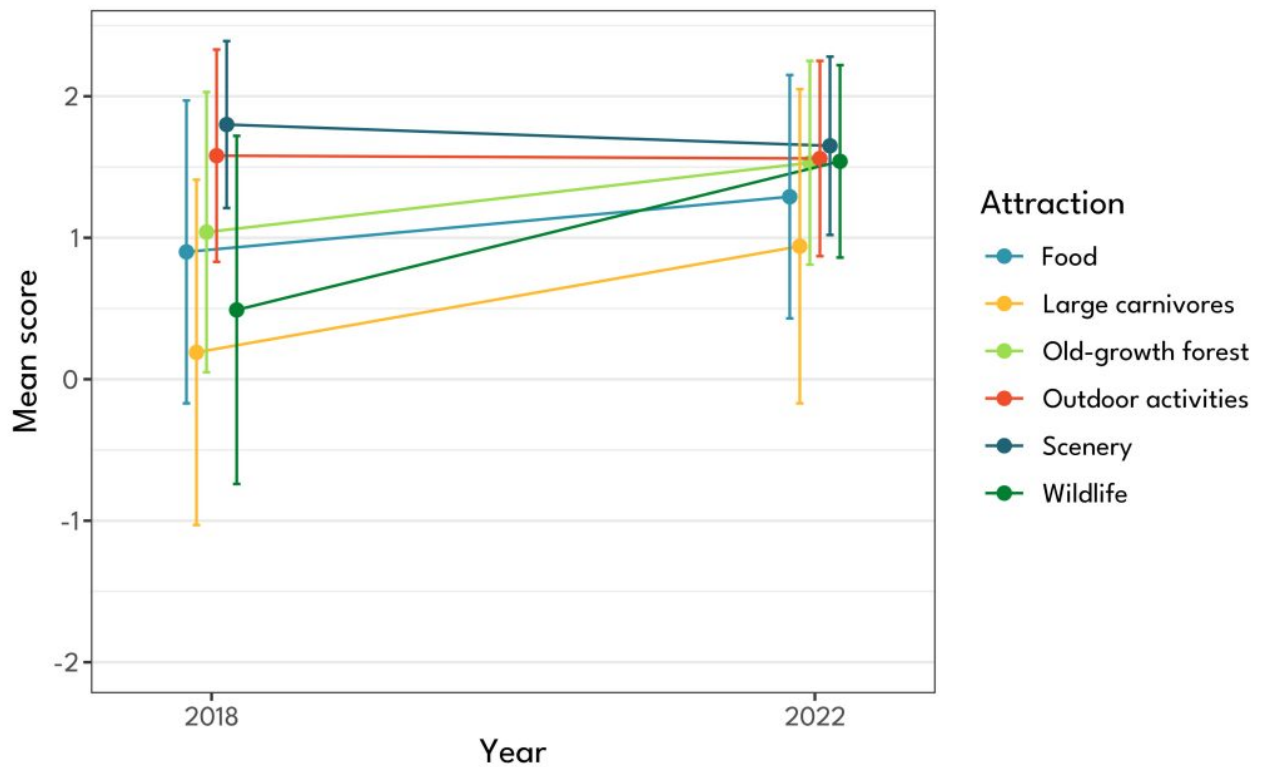


Figure 2: Change in perceived importance of different attractions for bringing visitors to the Făgăraș Mountains, based on a scale ranging from Strongly disagree (-2), Disagree (-1), Neither (0), Agree (1), and Strongly Agree (2). Agreement for wildlife, large carnivores, old-growth forest and food increased significantly, agreement for scenery decreased significantly, and there was no change for outdoor activities.

In both years, participants generally agreed with the idea of the Făgăraș Mountains becoming a national park and that this could generate economic opportunities (Fig. 3). Respondents agreed that a national park would bring more tourists, be a popular attraction, and create more positive opportunities for local residents. However, this agreement became significantly less strong in 2022 compared with 2018, with an increase in agreement that there is no need for a national park and that a national park would have more negatives than positives.

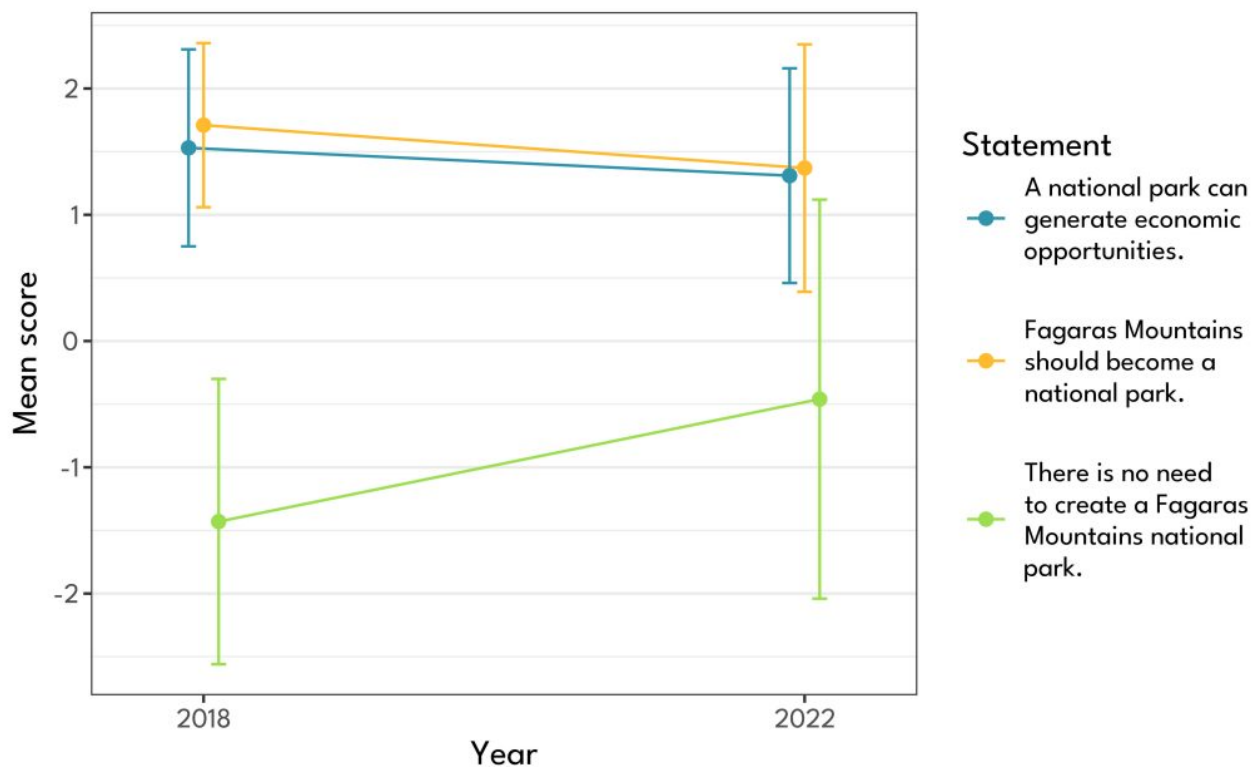


Figure 3: Change in attitudes towards the creation of a national park. Responses are based on a scale ranging from Strongly disagree (-2), Disagree (-1), Neither (0), Agree (1), and Strongly Agree (2).

Overall, visitors in 2022 were more supportive of all possible management strategies than visitors in 2018, particularly for limiting forestry and recreational hunting within the park. In addition, visitors in 2022 were more likely to agree among themselves than respondents in 2018. Allowing mountain biking and horseback riding within the park were the two options where a slight decline in support was observed during the period. Visitors also tended to agree with the idea of letting nature take its course, without intensive management.

In both years, the majority of participants agreed that they would donate money to the park, and this proportion increased from 2018 to 2022.



Eco-tourism activities. Photo: Foundation Conservation Carpathia.



Eco-tourism activities. Photo: Georgiana Cațan.

Interpretation

People were drawn to the region mainly for its natural characteristics and to be in contact with nature. Addressing this motivation will be important when advertising the area.

Visitors have high interest in seeing wildlife. There was considerable interest in seeing bison, which have been recently released in the Făgăraș Mountains; it is interesting that a few respondents reported they saw bison in 2018, even though data were collected prior to the reintroduction of animals – these respondents might have seen bison elsewhere.

Visitors seem to be choosing to stay in the area for a longer period as evident by the extended night stays in the region. This change may be due to a better awareness of activities in the area, more sensitivity and connection to nature, better accommodation options locally, or all the above. The increase in visitors staying overnight is a positive indication for conservation enterprises investing in lodging, and suggests growing economic opportunities from tourism.

The COVID-19 global pandemic started to affect travel in the spring of 2020. While many restrictions had been lifted by 2022, the pandemic continued to play a role in limiting foreign travel. This could explain the reduction in foreign visitors in 2022, as well as the increase in returning visitors.

These results can also be compared to the responses to [similar questions on the value of protected areas](#) posed to local residents over the same period.



Reintroduced bison.
Photo: Mihai Cațan.



Eurasian wolves. Photo:
Barbara and Christoph
Promberger.



Brown bear. Photo:
Foundation Conservation
Carpathia.



Lynx sitting on a rock.
Photo: Foundation
Conservation Carpathia.

Citations

Engel, M.T. and Bath, A. J. (2024). Visitors Attitudes and Motivations to Visit the Făgăraș Mountains, Romania. Bath and Associates, Middle Cove, NL. Final Report.

Kainz, S. (2019). Master's Thesis in M. Sc Environmental Planning and Engineering Ecology. Technical University of Munich.

Partners

