

## THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CYCLE TOURISM IN COVASNA COUNTY

MONIKA FOSZTO<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Department of Business Administration Sf. Gheorghe, Romania*

**Abstract:** *Cycle tourism is a leisure tourist activity, along which the trip and sightseeing is done on the bike. There is a strong link between mountain hiking and mountain cycling tourism. Cycle tourism is a combination of sport, nature, travel and culture. Covasna County began developing a system of bikeways in the 2010s and several trails in their system have developed into popular tourist draws and cycle tourism has been seen as a great success. This paper discusses the essential ingredients of cycle tourism and examines the role of trails in tourism development using Covasna County as a case study.*

**Key words:** *cycle tourism, economic development, cycle networks, cycle trails*

### INTRODUCTION

Bicycle tourism is increasing in popularity because of its appeal to aging populations and the manner in which it can straddle the boundaries between heritage, adventure and sustainable tourism. Cycling also provides a tourism experience that allows for the participant to enjoy the journey as much as the destination, thus addressing the manner in which modern travel in airplanes and on uniformly designed highways “provides little pleasure or substance” (Siddall, 1987).

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Bicycle tourism can be defined as “recreational visits, either overnight or day visits away from home, which involve leisure cycling as a fundamental and significant part of the visit” (Sustrans 1999,). This definition encompasses various forms of cycle tourism including mountain biking and daytrip cycling.

#### **Types of cycling:**

**Daily (commuter) cycling** integrates cyclists commuting to work, school or shopping, or running other errands by bike. It is the intention of such cyclists to reach their destination as effortless, fast and safe as possible. The bicycle is used as a means of transport. Experts have calculated that in cities as much as 75% of the distances now made by motorized vehicles could be travelled by bikes or on foot.

**Sports cycling** (road and mountain) comprises various practice and competition types of cycling, such as road cycling and mountain biking of different types (downhill, climb, parallel slalom, stage race, acrobatics, cross-country, adventure orientation race), track cycling of different types, as well as duathlon and triathlon cycling.

**Trip cycling** does not exceed a single day. The intention is to spend time in the natural environment with relatively modest intensity. What matters to cyclists is the experience, comfort and safety on the road. The length of daily recreational cycling ranges between 25 and 50 km, and does not exceed 80 km. Trips can be made in combination with other means of transport (e.g. car, bus, train).

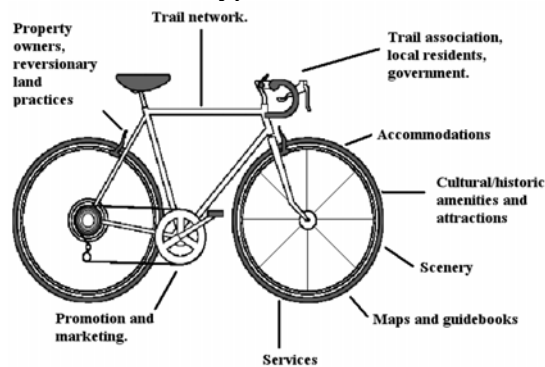
**Bicycle touring** extends over several days. The destination and path are defined by cyclists before the start. When choosing the path, what matters is tourist infrastructure, natural beauties and various attractions and specialties of sites. It is important for cyclists to have rest areas along the road (water supply), lookout spots, tourist information, cycling

maps and guides available as well as information about the difficulty of different options, and about cycling-friendly accommodation.

It is typical of **Mountain biking** to take place in forest and hilly area, with cyclists being particularly attracted to unspoilt nature, irregular terrains, increased difficulty and a great choice of possible locations. An interesting option is the so-called single trails, where sometimes you have to hire a local guide. Mountain bikers are usually young men and women, who are interesting for the tourist industry for being sports cyclists, recreational cyclists, trip cyclists, bicycle tourers and adventure cyclists.

**Tourist cycling** is basically a combination of different types of cycling (trip cycling, mountain biking, bike touring, etc.). In this type, cyclists are tourists, either domestic or foreign, experiencing natural beauties, cultural attractions, and ethnological specialities of certain places and tourist regions.

**Family cycling** is an important type of cycling as it enhances internal family ties, mutual understanding and a healthy lifestyle. Families with children look for safe and easy cycling trails. Because of differing wishes, needs and time available, it is reasonable to prepare different programs for different types of families.



*Source: Jeff Pratte: Bicycle tourism: on the trail to economic development, University of Winnipeg, Prairie Perspectives, page 67*

**Figure 1 The essential elements of bicycle tourism development**

Perhaps the best way to view the necessary ingredients for successful development of bicycle tourism is to use the imagery of a bicycle (see Figure 1). The trail network serves as the basis of the physical infrastructure and can be seen as the bicycle's frame. Trail associations, government agencies responsible for funding and development, local residents and public-private alliances steer the direction of tourism development and can thus be thought of as the handle bars. Supplementary services, cultural and historic amenities, secondary attractions and other factors are vital to the process and can be seen as the wheels. Promotion and marketing efforts drive the development and can be visualized as the drive train of the bicycle. Finally, the negative momentum of reversionary land practices, uncooperative landowners and forms of government "red tape" can be seen as the brakes.

There are numerous examples of successful bicycle trails in Covasna County:

- "Sfântu Gheorghe" cycling tourist trail - *Route:* Brasov, Sânpetru, Bod, Araci, Vâlcele, Sfântu Gheorghe, Ilieni, Dobolii de Jos, Podul Oltului, Hârman, Braşov.

- "Drumul Nemere" cycling tourist trail – *Route:* Tg. Secuiesc, Ojdula, Brețcu, Lemnia, Mereni, Poian, Sânzieni, Turia, Cernat, Albiș, Dalnic, Moacșa, Reci, Leț, Mărcușa, Cătălina, Tg. Secuiesc.
- "Sepsi Zöldút" cycling tourist trail – *Route:* Sfântu Gheorghe, Valea Crișului, Bodoc, Ghidfalău, Moacșa, Reci, Ozunm Ilieni.
- "Zeroo" cycling tourist trail – *Route:* Sfântu Gherorghe (Honvéd Fountain) – Gyertyanos Fountain – Sugas Băi – The peaks of Baraolt mountains – Vadas Peak.



**Figure 2 Successful bicycle trails in Covasna County**

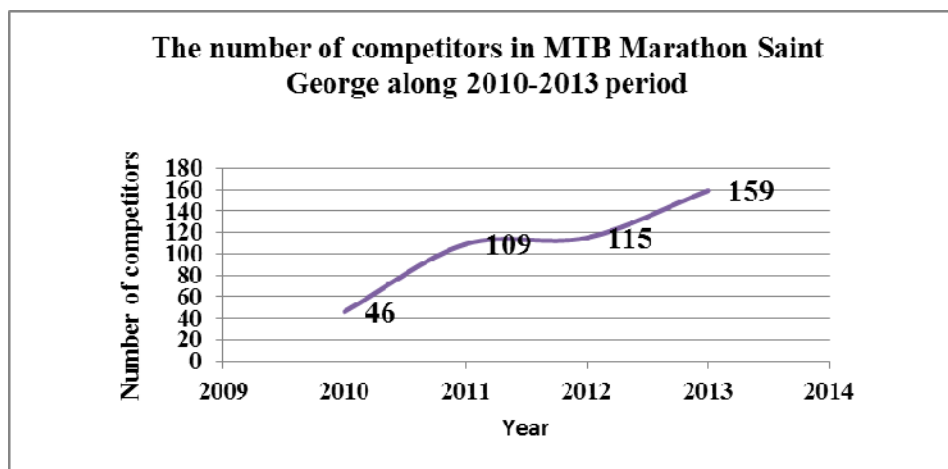
The purpose of this research was to determine the demand and growth potential of cycle tourism in Covasna county. The methodology will outline the use of primary data, which was gathered via consumer surveys administered by members of Transylvanian Carpathic Society, Covasna county.

Quantitative primary data was collected by distributing questionnaires to people who are active cyclists. Quantitative research was chosen for the study rather than qualitative research as it enables researchers to manipulate the data findings in order to determine patterns and relationships.

The questionnaire was consisted of 15 questions that took less than 5 minutes to complete. It included both closed and open ended questions. Closed ended questions are structured and fixed responses which are easier and quicker for respondents to answer, responses are easier to compare, and there will not be any irrelevant or confusing answers to the questions. Open ended questions are unstructured and free responses which will help respondents answer in detail and can qualify and clarify responses.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

In Covasna County Jaxtream Sport Club association has been organizing MTB mountain bike marathon in Sfântu Gheorghe since 2010. In 2013, at the 4<sup>th</sup> edition, competitors from 16 counties participated.



**Figure 3 The number of competitors in MTB Marathon Saint George along 2010 – 2013 period**

As it is shown in the above figure, we see that the number of participants in MTB Marathon Sfântu Gheorghe had an upward trend during the period under review.

Also in Covasna county the Transylvanian Carpathic Society, Covasna county branch, organizes every year, since 2009, bike tours called “Let’s know Covasna county”.

As a member and organizer of these events, mentioned above, I had the opportunity to do a study on the suitability of the bicycle as a means of urban and rural travel.

The results of the study show that most who answered the question referring to the type of bike, have city bikes and mountain bikes and they ride them at least 3 times a week. Regarding the gender of the participants to the study, most are male, but the females are also represented. As the group age, a large majority are between 25 and 34 years old.

Favourite places for biking are in the city, the lanes in the park, but respondents (as male and female) say they feel as comfortable on the street, as in mountainous areas. For them cycling is a way to do sport, but also a mean of transport and an alternative, environmentally sustainable urban transport facility.

The concept of challenge was often cited as a reason given to undertake a cycling holiday. There was a high degree of physical challenge, with references to hills, climbs and terrain being given as the source of the challenge.

The participants to the survey would like that the infrastructure to be improved, to get more respect from the drivers and traffic priority.

## CONCLUSIONS

Cycle tourism delivers. Whether this niche stands alone or supports other markets, it has proven to increase domestic and inbound tourism forecasts, provide a model of ecologically sustainable tourism, and bring social and economic revitalization to a region.

Marketing implications, promote cycling holidays as a chance to experience nature. Marketing literature aimed at cycle tourists should emphasise the idea of being immersed in scenery. Text should emphasise the multi-sensory nature of the experience by highlighting not just sights, but smells and sounds. Contrasts with travel by car will resonate with many potential cycle tourists.

Product implications, for example encouraging cyclists to visit attractions. Many visitor attractions are currently not visited to a large extent by cycle tourists. If cycle tourists are to be encouraged to visit, then secure, enclosed cycle parking provision is required. Cycle stands are not sufficient due to the perceived danger of luggage being stolen off bikes. Given the high use of drinking and eating outlets, attractions should consider en route signage promoting access to their restaurant/café rather than the attraction itself. In the longer-term, the development of nonlinear routes that encourage exploration of an area in more depth may be beneficial to visitor attractions.

#### REFERENCES

1. **JEFF PRATTE**, 2006, Bicycle tourism: on the trail to economic development, University of Winnipeg, Prairie Perspectives, page 67-68
2. **SIDALL W.R.**, 1987, Transportation and the Experience of Geographical Review 3, page 309
3. **SUSTRANS**, 1999 *Cycle Tourism*. [United Kingdom], August 19
4. \*\*\*– [www.bikeroute.ro](http://www.bikeroute.ro)