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# Environmental features of interest for tourism in Romanian rural destinations

L. Velea<sup>1,2</sup>, S. Puiu<sup>3</sup>, M.T. Udristioiu<sup>4,5</sup>, A. Irimescu<sup>2</sup>, A. Gallo<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Humanities, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy; [Liliana.velea@unive.it](mailto:Liliana.velea@unive.it); [alekos@unive.it](mailto:alekos@unive.it)

<sup>2</sup> National Meteorological Administration, Bucharest, Romania; [Liliana.velea@meteoromania.ro](mailto:Liliana.velea@meteoromania.ro); [anisoara.irimescu@meteoromania.ro](mailto:anisoara.irimescu@meteoromania.ro)

<sup>3</sup> Department of Management, Marketing and Business Administration, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, University of Craiova, Romania; [silvia.puiu@edu.ucv.ro](mailto:silvia.puiu@edu.ucv.ro)

<sup>4</sup> Department of Physics, Faculty of Science, University of Craiova, Romania; [mtudristioiu@central.ucv.ro](mailto:mtudristioiu@central.ucv.ro)

<sup>5</sup> Georgia Southern University, Department of Physics and Astronomy, Stasboro, Georgia, USA.

# Motivation

- The climate and environmental features of the destination play an important role in tourism, as they contribute to build the destination image.
- The **link between climate, environment and tourism** is well acknowledged, as for example that some features are common to all destination types (e.g., low wind), others are specific for each destination type (urban/rural/mountain/seaside) or for specific tourism activities (e.g., trekking, surf).
- Little attention has been given to the identification of the **natural environmental features** of most interest for tourists when choosing a **certain rural destination**.

# Objective

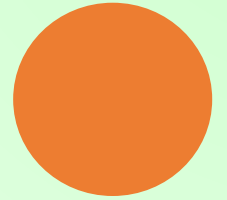
- Exploratory approach - aiming to provide an answer to the following **research question**: which are the most appealing natural features for tourists in relation to a **rural destination**?
- This issue has been addressed by using an **online survey** disseminated in Romania during January-February 2023.
- The **definition of a 'rural touristic destination'** is limited to the following aspects, following (Velea et al, 2022):
  - (i) to have an independent administrative status (e.g., village, city);
  - (ii) to have a population of fewer than 10,000 inhabitants if their administrative status was 'city';
  - (iii) not be associated with mountain sports facilities (i.e., ski slopes) or to be located in the seaside.

# Data and methods

A total of **70 answers** were received for the survey. As no personal data was collected, it is not possible to establish with certainty the provenience country of respondents. Therefore, all answers are included and treated equally in the analysis.

## Study design and population

- The survey was conducted during January 2023 - March 2023, online.
- Eligible participants were adults ( $\geq 18$  years old).
- The survey was available in **English** and it was disseminated through social media (Facebook groups) targeting mainly people associated with the **University of Craiova, Romania** and **Ca'Foscari University of Venice** (e.g., students, academic and non-academic staff).



# Data and methods

## Data collection

- The survey included **3 questions**; first question involve a **five-fold Likert-type** items, while two are **multiple-choice questions**.
- The survey **did not collect/require any kind of personal/identification data**
- The questions of the survey focused on the following aspects:
  - degree of tourists' interest on natural environmental features regarding orography, water presence and vegetation associated with a rural destination (e.g., Wartmann and Mackaness, 2020).
  - general tourists' preference for either built or natural landscape (e.g., Seresinhe et al, 2017). ;
  - importance of population density in the rural destination as a decision factor in the tourists' preferences.



# Data and methods

## Statistics analysis

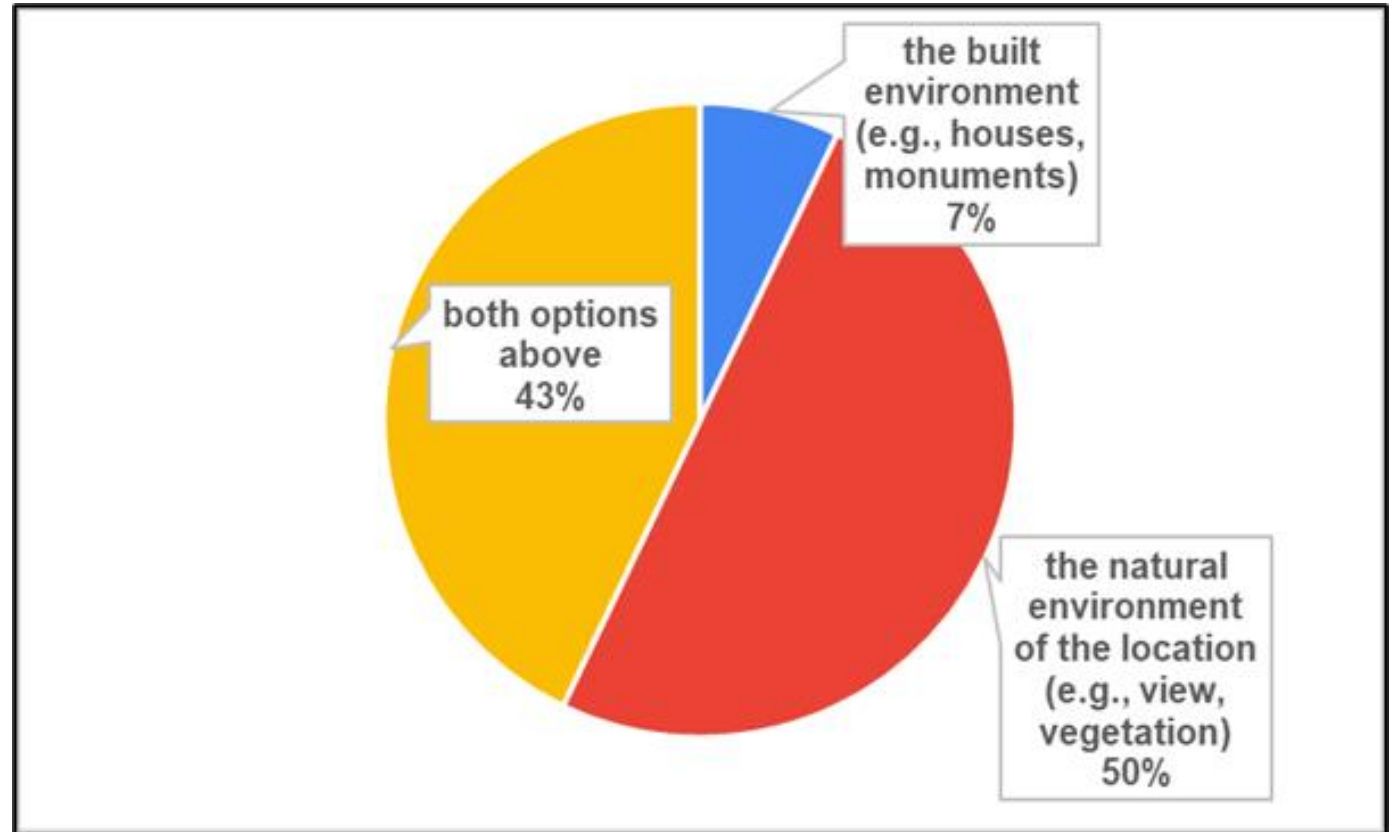
- The answers were analyzed using **descriptive statistical methods** (median, mode, frequencies) as considered more suitable in the association with the Likert-type items used (Boone and Boone, 2012; Guerra et al., 2016).
- For the **first question** the attention focuses on **answers receiving marks 4 and 5**, thus indicated to be 'important' and 'very important' for the respondents. This particular choice of analysis is based on the practical implications derived from the results, namely the identification of 'attractive' natural features (compared to others) of a rural destination with the final aim of developing a climate product based on these findings.
- The **answers to the multiple-choice question** are analyzed in terms of **frequencies** of each proposed choice.
- The sample size is appropriate for the type of questionnaire selected (i.e., based mainly on Likert-type items) (e.g., Guerra et al., 2016; Lund, 2021).
- In order to estimate the representativeness of the sample size used in the study, we approximated the **targeted population** as being around **1 3500 000** (i.e., approximative number of tourist arrivals in 2019 in accommodation units in Romania, according to National Institute of Statistics [www.insse.ro](http://www.insse.ro), table TUR104A in TEMPO database) and requiring a **confidence level of 90%**, with a **margin of error of 10%**. In this conditions, **the sample size provided by the answers to the survey is representative**, although this condition is fulfilled at its lower limit.

**Results:** Q1. Please rate how important would be for you the following natural features of a rural destination as contributors to an enjoyable time off (1= not at all important; 5=very important)'.

NO	NATURAL FEATURE	MEDIAN	MODE	FREQUENCY OF ANSWERS MARKED WITH 4 AND 5 (%)
1	presence of water surface (e.g., pond, lake, river, waterfall etc.)	5	5	75.71
2	presence of natural vegetation (e.g., forest, shrub, grass etc.)	5	5	90.00
3	a high degree of green vegetation cover (i.e., more than 75% of vegetation at its maturity)	5	5	82.86
4	small (less than 20m) terrain height differences in the view (e.g., only plain)	3	3	38.57
5	medium (20-50m) terrain height differences in the view (e.g., small hills)	4	3	55.71
6	high terrain height differences in the view (e.g., high hills, mountain walls )	4.5	5	71.43
7	a high degree of snow cover during winter (i.e., more than 75%)	4	5	64.29

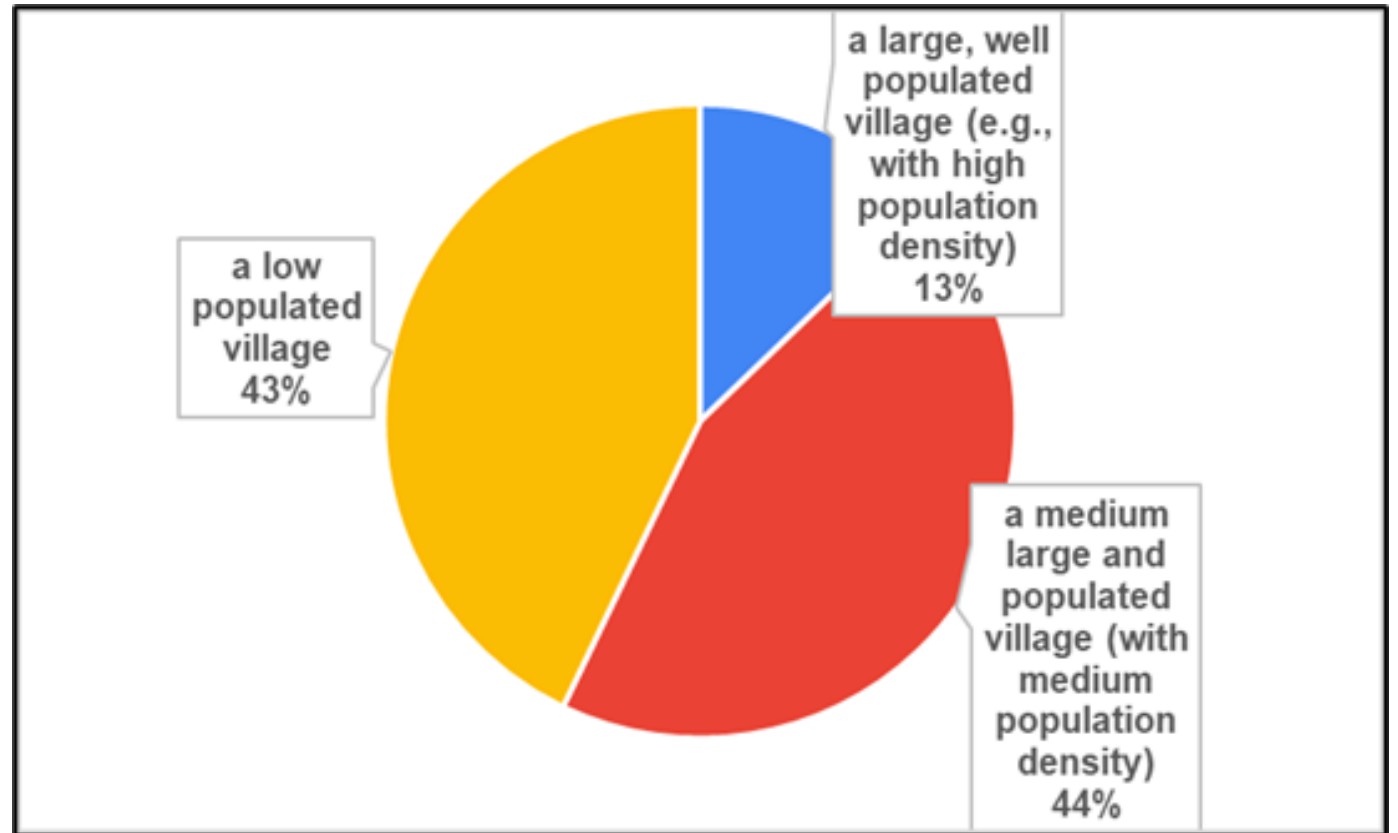
a climate product referring to the degree of green vegetation

**Results:** Q2. *If you would have to choose from several rural destinations for your vacation, provided all the conditions are similar (e.g., prices, accommodation conditions, leisure opportunities etc.) what characteristics would be more important for you:*





**Results:** Q3. *If you would have to choose from several rural destinations for your vacation, provided all the conditions are similar (e.g., prices, accommodation conditions, leisure opportunities etc.) you would choose*



# Discussions

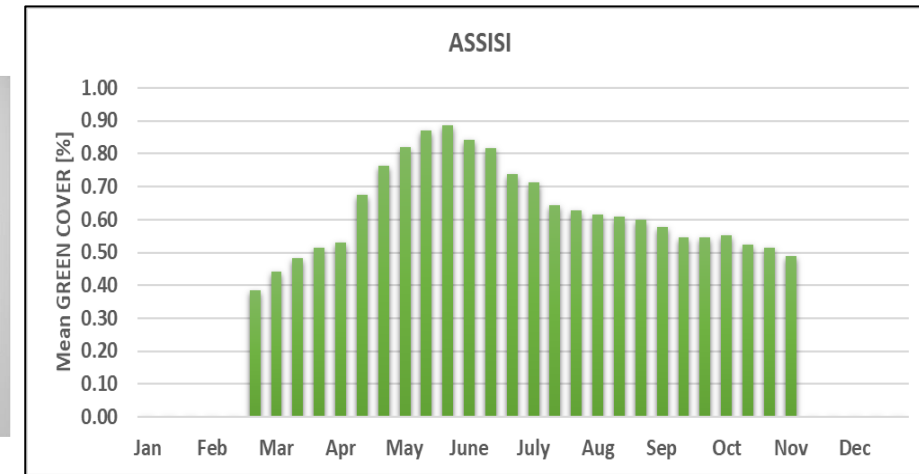
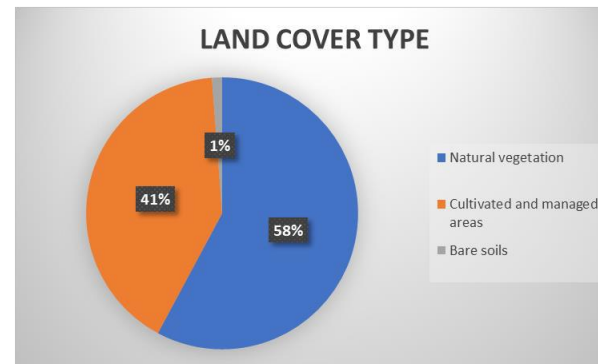
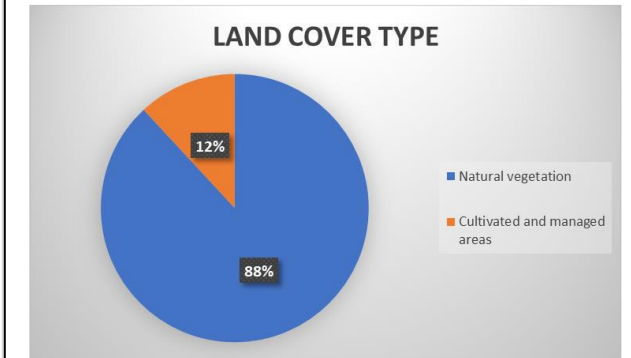
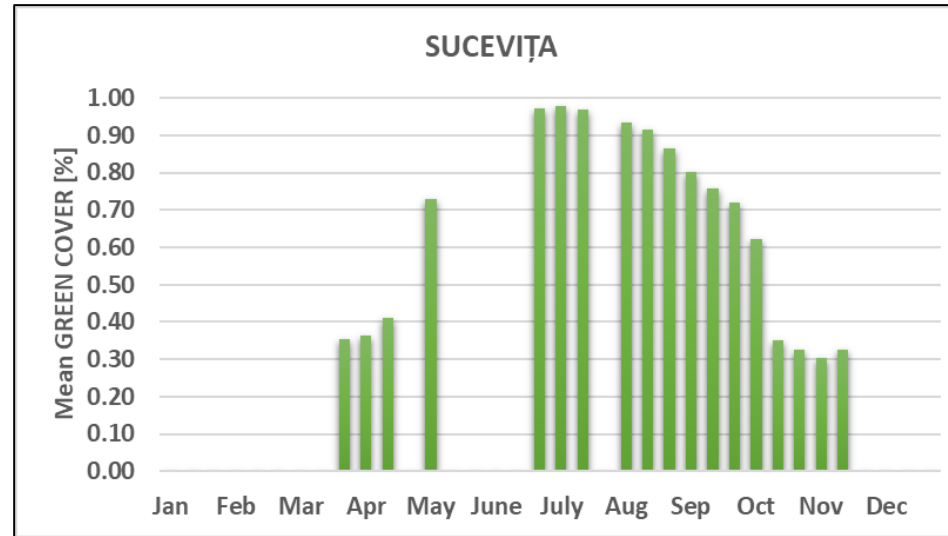
The relevance of the findings is limited by several aspects:

- **The number of the answers** - although assuring the statistical relevance of the results, may be interpreted as too low to be relevant large scale (e.g., national).
- As the survey has been **disseminated** in Romania and Italy, only in **English**, the number of answers may have been limited also by this aspect, as from all possibly willing people to respond, only those with good English knowledge may have undertaken this effort.
- **Lack of information on personal aspects** (e.g., country/region of provenience, age, social status etc.) provides another limit to the insights offered by the survey.
- Furthermore, a later analysis of the relief height for the surroundings of Romanian touristic destinations indicated that **differences in relief height within 5 km around the locality are usually much larger than those indicated in the survey** (i.e., less than 20m, 20-50m). Nevertheless, this deficiency in the selecting these thresholds in the survey are likely to have been surpassed by the additional use of the relief units as examples: 'only plain', 'small hills', 'high hills, mountain walls'.

# Conclusions

- The survey provides useful information on the hierarchy of the natural features appealing to tourists in relation to a rural touristic destination, contributing to the research oriented to rural tourism.
- The **green natural vegetation cover** is in the top of tourists' preferences for a rural destination, which support **the development of tourism-oriented climate products based on this feature**.
- The **presence of water surfaces** and the **vicinity of high relief** are also important natural assets of such a destination.
- Overall, the **natural features** are of major interest for **44%** of the respondents, while **43%** are equally attracted by **natural and built environment** in a rural destination.
- The **population density of the destination** may also play a role in tourists' decision regarding the choice of a particular rural destination, with **87%** of the respondents preferring **middle-low populated localities**.
- These findings may contribute to explain, even partially, the relatively higher tourism flow in some rural touristic areas compared to others.

# Climate product related to the degree of green vegetation cover for 10 rural destinations in Romania and Italy



- Freely available from the WeCENT project website <https://pric.unive.it/projects/wecent/home> along with other climate products

# References

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