

GUIDELINES FOR INCLUDING GORGES IN THE TOURIST OFFER OF THE APUSENI MOUNTAINS

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ABSTRACT – In any tourism development plans, the starting point ought to be the accurate assessment of the tourism resources that can be efficiently put to use. When evaluating the potential for the tourism development of karstic gorges, the most objective criteria were applied: the attractiveness of each gorge, the location and the competitive forms of tourism that can be developed in the area. As a result, we have identified four categories of gorges: primary, secondary, complementary gorges and those of less relevance for the tourism phenomenon. The next step that would have a direct impact on the development of tourism around gorges (building of infrastructure, access roads, etc.) is to consolidate and revitalize the brand of each gorge in order to define it as a unique tourist destination. Effective branding of gorges starts with establishing the unique selling proposition, consisting of those attributes of high specificity that determine certain dominant types of tourism. It is only after identifying the strengths that build up their own tourist brands that one can consider including these landmarks in thematic routes, creating synergy and adding value to the whole gorge ensemble.

Keywords: gorges, tourism, brand, unique selling proposition, Apuseni Mountains

INTRODUCTION

Although the tourism potential of the Apuseni Mountains is quite remarkable, consisting of many natural and anthropogenic tourism resources, it is still not sufficiently sustained by the development of the infrastructure, by the arrangement of landmarks or by services and facilities in general. This occurs as a direct consequence of the lack of a coherent strategy that would promote the tourism potential of the area in order to attract prospective investors and potential tourists.

The basis for an efficient strategy should be the selection of most suitable resources for the development of tourism in the Apuseni Mountains. Such an inventory is necessary, especially if considering that the main tourism resources of the area, both natural resources like caves and gorges and anthropogenic resources like the ethnographic heritage, come in a wide range of forms and elements. All of these features are certainly interesting, but still, not all of them have the same attractiveness.

The accurate inventory and assessment of these resources is essential to further identify the investment priorities at territorial or sectoral level. Even more so, “[...] if the attractive resources have not been correctly identified, support infrastructure planning will not generate the expected interest among investors and tourists” (Cocean R., 2010).

Thus, it is only after the thorough inventory and classification of tourism resources in terms of attractiveness and the identification of the main priorities for development that one can establish the main actions for promoting and increasing the brands’ visibility.

Consequently, the approach for evaluating the karstic gorges will have the following steps:

1. Creating a tourism typology of gorges in the Apuseni Mountains and identifying the priorities that should become part of the tourist offer. Priority will be given to those gorges that are regional or national landmarks, due to their impressive features and privileged position within the access road matrix.

2. Analyzing the gorges indicated as priorities, by highlighting individual strengths and opportunities that will later determine the type of tourism that should become the main focus of the

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marketing and development plans. Identifying the most competitive types of tourism is essential because it provides vital insight regarding the profile of prospective visitors. In turn, this will become the basis for future investing in infrastructures and facilities.

TOURISM TYPOLOGY OF GORGES IN THE APUSENI MOUNTAINS

The tourism potential of gorges has already been analyzed in numerous papers by several authors such as Cocean P. (1984, 1988), Ciangă N. (2001), Cocean G. (2011, 2013), etc. The novelty of this paper is that it proposes a classification of gorges from the tourism point of view, highlighting the priority points for action. By priority points, we refer to those gorges that, under current conditions (of attractiveness, positioning, favourability for various types of tourism), offer the right premises for concrete actions. They can be included in tourist routes without becoming depended on other kind of tourist sites, each of these landforms having its own strengths and specific features. Thus, investments in these areas for the building of accommodation infrastructures and the development of services can prove to be quite profitable.

Gorges are, by definition, interesting landforms with an appearance positively perceived by the majority of tourists and certainly, the desideratum is to include as many gorges as possible in the regional tourist offer of the Apuseni Mountains. However, a short list of the most significant gorges is necessary because it indicates the priorities for a concrete action plan. Thus, a tourism typology of gorges has been developed using three key parameters:

- intrinsic attractiveness (marked on a scale of 1 to 10);
- opportunities given by the position of the gorge (marked on a scale of 1 to 5);
- possibilities for carrying out various tourism forms and activities (noted on a scale of 1 to 5).

Some important aspects were considered when estimating the intrinsic attractiveness of a gorge: interesting physiognomy given by the sinuous profile or various types of karren, rimstone pools, towers, pillars etc.; richness in microforms, such as caves, karst springs, sinkholes, waterfalls and the presence of some famous landmarks among them; the preservation of some proofs of an intriguing evolutionary scenario that are easily identifiable by tourists; lengths of interesting sectors, the ratio between the vertical display and the width of the valley and the presence of lookout points on the upper parts of the slopes. Gorges that have some unique features have been favoured because of the fascination that such items emanate. One can observe the selective application of some criteria previously used for the evaluation and inventory of geomorphosites, especially for the assessment of their morphological and aesthetic values (Cocean G., 2011).

In order to determine the opportunities provided by the position of gorges, their location in relation to the main roads and settlements was analyzed, starting with the proximity to roads with high traffic. However, location of gorges on possible tourist routes was also taken into consideration. If a tourism resource is situated on an alternative tourist route that would eventually return to the main access road, tourists will be tempted to make a detour in order to see it. However, the situation is quite different if a similar tourism resource is situated at a dead end, where the tourist has to travel both ways, to and from the gorge on the same road. Chances of it being visited drop dramatically, especially if it is the only tourism resource on that axis, like the Ocolișel or the Crișul Alb gorges.

Thus, a second issue must be addressed: the distance from other tourist sights. Priority has been given to those gorges located into gorge complexes (the ones in the Râmeț or Galda basins), gorges located next to the original caves (Someșul Cald, Galbena and Valea Cetăților gorges) and gorges located in the vicinity of some tourist landmarks of national importance (the Ordâncușa Gorge near the Scărișoara Ice Cave, the Aiud Gorge near the Trascău Depression and the Colții Trascăului ridge, the Mișid Gorge near the Crișul Repede Defile and the Vântului Cave, etc).

It should be noted, however, that sometimes, the closeness of two tourism resources can lead to the manifestation of an “[...] attractive outshine phenomenon” (Cocean G., 2011) that consists of one gorge being in the spotlight at the expense of the other. The Tureni Gorge is a very typical example. It has much to lose in terms of notoriety and visitor influx because of the proximity to the Turda Gorge, the best-known gorge in the Trascău Mountains. The situation, however, could be improved by intensive promotion of the gorges that are currently being overshadowed.

On the other hand, the complementarity and variety among resources located in a gorge's perimeter must be considered. Thus, gorges located near or even containing anthropogenic resources belonging to the cultural heritage (rural sites, monasteries, fortresses, etc.) will have a higher score. The gorges on the border of the Trascău Depression are favoured by the proximity of Rimetea and the Colțești Fortress, the gorges in the Râmeș Basin by the presence of the Râmeș Monastery and the traditional architecture in Valea Uzei and Fața Pietrei, etc.

The closeness to major urban centres is also relevant, because tourists coming from neighbouring cities represent the highest percentage of the weekend visitors. However, it should be noted that, most of the time, these tourists are precisely those that do not contribute to the economic component of tourism. Thus, a high percentage of travellers arriving at the Turda Gorge from Cluj-Napoca or Turda will set up a camp for the night, thus not using the existing accommodation units, or will not spend the night at the gorge and just return home. The same situation applies to most tourists from Aiud, Teiuș or Alba Iulia that visit the Râmeș Valley, and it also applies in other similar situations. In fact, for tourists arriving from other parts of Romania or other countries, the existence of accommodation units near gorges proves to be a plus, especially since the development of tourist infrastructure near some gorges in the Apuseni Mountains is rather poor (Cocean G., 2013).

The third criterion of the classification, represented by the possible types of tourism, aims at identifying those gorges that can now attract a greater number of tourists. This can be done primarily by developing a broad spectrum of forms of tourism, which allow a wide range of activities and thus can attract a large number of tourists in search for different experiences. There are many examples of gorges offering these opportunities: the Galbena Gorge, where trekking goes hand in hand with geotourism, ecotourism, or speleotourism; the Aiud Gorge which is a destination for cycling, geotourism, paragliding, etc, the Mănăstirea Gorge where religious tourism, ecotourism, geotourism, recreational tourism (paragliding, hiking, climbing, cycling) can all find suitable conditions.

The situation is quite different for some gorges that have an out of the ordinary potential for one specific form of tourism and attract large numbers of visitors because of this precise potential. One example is the Turda Gorge that will remain for a long time the most important climbing area in the Apuseni Mountains because of the great number and wide variety of climbing routes. Special attention has been paid to the gorges where canyoning is popular, although this specific form of recreational tourism is still in its beginning in Romania. Nevertheless, considering the fact that there are not a lot of suitable locations in Romania, these destinations stand real chances for development (Cetii, Oșelu canyons, etc.).

Depending on the score of each gorge for these criteria, gorges have been divided into four categories, as follows:

1. The first group comprises the *primary gorges*, those gorges with outstanding tourism potential and with a very favourable location. These gorges determine, or could determine with effective marketing, a stable tourist demand. These areas are best suited for investments in building or upgrading accommodation infrastructure, rehabilitation of access roads and arrangements of the difficult parts of the hiking trails, etc.

2. The *secondary gorges* include those forms that, despite their great attractive potential, just cannot become representative landmarks of the Apuseni Mountains for various reasons. This is the case of Ordâncușa, Mada, Glod, Uibărești, Vălișoara and Feneș gorges. In terms of landscape, they are very spectacular and interesting, but when being compared to the primary gorges, one can see the differences.

Gorges that are outshined by other landmarks such as the Tureni Gorge by the Turda Gorge, or the Găldița Gorge by the Intregalde Gorge, Runc and Poșăga gorges by Scărița-Belioara, the Mănăstirea Gorge by the Râmeș Gorge, etc. are also included in this category.

The main directions to follow in order to introduce these sectors in tourist routes must start by removing the attractive outshine with better marketing strategies. It is necessary to promote these sites in the perimeter of the well-known attractions, placing informative panels containing access maps, pictures and brief descriptions highlighting their attractive features. Such a panel, entitled "Make sure to visit Tureni Gorge as well" placed in the parking lot of the Turda Gorge could lead more tourists to

the Tur Valley. Similar panels should also be placed in the Intregalde Gorge to draw attention upon the Găldița Gorge as well.

Gorges in the Metaliferi Mountains also need improvement in their promotion, especially since the Metaliferi Mountains are not generally known for their karstic landscape. A more intense promotion started in the Geoagiu resort and vicinities could bring more tourists to Mada or Glod gorges, thus creating a more relevant tourist flow in the area.

3. Complementary gorges do not stand out in terms of attractive potential, being generally known due to their location in relation to other tourist landmarks. That does not mean that they do not have interesting, specific features, or that they are not in any way attractive, but, still, it is the other landmarks that determine the tourist flow in their areas, leaving them with the sole role or contributing to the attractive heritage of the whole area.

The Pociovaliștea Gorge near the Runc Gorge, the Mișid Gorge in the Crișul Repede Defile perimeter, the Valea Cetăților Gorge near the Cetățile Ponorului Cave, the Valea Stanciului Gorge near the Răchițele Waterfall and the karstic area of Stanciului and Lespezi valleys, the Ampoița Gorge close to Pietrele Ampoiței klippes, the Valea Gârdei gorges on the way to Vârtope and Coiba Mare caves, are all included in this category. Alongside, the smaller or less attractive gorges situated in the karst complexes of some river basins are also included: Cuți, Albioara and Lazuri gorges in the Roșia Basin, Valea Oșelu, Valea Bulbuci, Boga gorges in the Boga Basin, Galda, Cetea, Turcu gorges in the Galda Basin, Pravului, Geogel, Pietra Bălții gorges in the Râmeț Basin, Bedeleu, Drăgoi, Pleșii gorges in the Inzel Basin, the Ribicioara Gorge in the Ribița Basin and Cib, Băcăia, Ardeu gorges in the Geoagiu Basin.

The solution for their integration in the tourism development plans is to establish an integrated plan for the valorisation of the entire karstic complex by creating thematic routes. Complexes containing gorges from the primary or secondary categories have more chances of development due to the attractiveness of such gorges: Râmeț, Galda, Geoagiu and Ribița basins.

4. Finally, the last category includes *gorges that are more interesting for scientists rather than tourists*. These gorges do not possess such appealing features that might generate high tourist flows. They are only visited occasionally and they have a rather local relevance: Strâmtura, Videa, Tecșești, Pleșii, Siloș, Borzești, Crișul Alb, Valea Morilor, Bobâlna and Ocolișel gorges. The fact that the Videa Gorge is included in this category was definitely not by mistake, since it actually scored relatively low, because its attractive features are quite modest. The rather difficult access and its location in relative isolation from both main access routes and other tourist sights also discourage tourists from visiting the longest karstic gorge in the Apuseni Mountains.

The Crișul Negru Gorge was not included in this analysis because of its position, behind the perimeter of the Băița exploitation unit. It has no tourism perspective because it has been irreparably damaged by the quarry and even its main attraction, the Porțile Bihorului Cave has suffered major transformations due to the disappearance of the watercourse and, therefore, of the waterfall.

Table 1. *Tourism typology of karstic gorges in the Apuseni Mountains*

Category	Points	Mountains	Gorges
Primary gorges	16-20	Bihor	Galbenei, Sighiștelului, Someșului Cald
		Trascău	Turzii, Râmețului, Intregalde
Secondary gorges	11-15	Bihor	Ordâncușei
		Trascău	Turului, Mănăstirii, Vălișoarei, Găldiței, Feneșului
		Gilău	Poșăgii, Runcului
		Metaliferi	Madei, Glodului, Uibăreștilor
Complementary gorges	6-10	Gilău	Pociovaliștei
		Pădurea Craiului	Cuților, Albioarei, Lazurilor, Mișidului

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		Bihor	Văii Cetăților, Mândruțului, Albacului, Văii Gârdei, Văii Oșelu, Văii Bulbuci, Bogăi
		Vlădeasa	Văii Stanciului
		Trascău	Ampoiței, Galdei, Cetei, Turcului, Pravului, Geogelui, Piatra Bălții, Bedeleului, Drăgoiului, Pleșii
		Metaliferi	Ribicioarei, Cibului, Băcăia, Ardeului
Gorges of minor tourism relevance	0-5	Pădurea Craiului	Strâmturii, Videi
		Trascău	Tecșeștilor, Pleșii, Siloșului, Borzeștilor
		Metaliferi	Crișului Alb, Văii Morilor, Bobâlnei
		Gilău	Ocolișelului

STRENGTHENING THE TOURISM BRANDS OF THE PRIMARY GORGES

In order for these gorges to become top destinations in the tourist offer of the Apuseni Mountains, they must be properly introduced on the market. This is achieved by efficiently promoting each item, strengthening its brand and its identity, and then including it in the tourist offer alongside other tourism resources.

Promoting landmarks such as gorges, especially the ones in this category, implies more than a display of features constituting their tourism potential. For it is already obvious that gorges such as Galbena, Sighiștel and Someșul Cald in the Bihor Mountains and Râmeț, Intregalde and Turda in the Trascău Mountains all excel in terms of attractiveness.

Their presentation is the real challenge, considering the fact that, after all, they are all tourism resources of the same nature; at first sight, tourists might assume that they all have the same tourist offer: narrow valley + vertical slopes => climbing + hiking. Of course, the situation is far from being that simple and promotion needs to remove such misconceptions, to arouse curiosity and, thus, to attract more tourists to the sites.

In the *Handbook on Tourism Destinations Branding* (2009), the following is stated “So, if a destination wants to attract tourists, it has to give them reasons to visit. And it has to demonstrate how it is different from all other destinations, or it will not be seen as distinctive and worth visiting”.

Therefore, we will identify the unique selling proposition for each of the analyzed gorges, which is that specific feature that differentiates the gorge from all the others and responses to the question “why is it worth visiting?”. One has to start, of course, from the assessment of strengths, represented by unique and novel features, its trademarks, of opportunities, hence the types and forms of tourism for which the gorge is an exceptional location and, if any, the specific tourist products. The correct identification of such unique selling propositions determines an increasing competitiveness and positions the gorges as distinctive and memorable tourist landmarks.

The Galbena Gorge is beyond doubt the *wildest* gorge in the Apuseni Mountains; “[...] not everyone dares to cross it, and not everyone succeeds in doing so”, according to Cocean P. (1988). Among the longest gorges in the Apuseni Mountains (6 km), the Galbena Gorge stands out with its particular physiognomy and the length of sectors containing attractive feature, monotony definitely not being the right word to describe it. One such sector that abounds in attractive elements is the one between the Galbena Karst Spring and the Luncșoara Valley, also subject to the trekking route of Galbena Valley.

The crossing of this sector, the only one in the Galbena Valley that has some arrangements to facilitate passing, can be quite challenging. Thus, this route leading towards the Galbena Karst Spring and the Evantai Waterfall descends from the high slopes after having led the tourist to the balconies where dazzling panoramas are opened. The route demands considerable effort and skills because there are three sectors in just one kilometre where the access is ensured by chains fixed to the wall, including the sector near the waterfall, which can be quite difficult. Along this trail, speleotourists reach a large number of caves including the well-known Cetățile Ponorului, the cave in the Vârseci hill, Focul Viu Ice Cave and Borțig pit cave (the last two are best known for the ice deposits). And the

attractiveness of the Galbena Gorge is not limited to these aspects. Due to its genesis, through karstic capture (Cocean P., 1988) and other geomorphological, hydrographical, biogeographical and aesthetic features, it is also one of the most important geomorphosites of the Apuseni Mountains, with a huge potential for geotourism. It is therefore obvious that the Galbena Gorge is a perfect location for the development of *versatile mountain tourism*.



Figure 1. Profile in the Galbena Gorge



Figure 2. Natural Bridge in the Râmeț Gorge

However, one must remember that this sector is only an appendix of the Galbena Gorge, which is actually formed by two sectors: the Jghiab and Luncoara gorges. The other sectors do not have any kind of tourist paths for crossing and they are not recommended unless the tourist has more experience, is well equipped and has skills that are more specific for climbing or canyoning. These other sectors confirm the Galbena Gorge's reputation for being the wildest in the Apuseni Mountains.

The Sighiștel Gorge stands out both aesthetically and geomorphologically due to two features: the terminal canyon and the large number of caves in the basin. Both elements have important tourism valences and it may seem relatively hard to choose only one representative feature.

On the one hand, the canyon is actually one of the narrowest valley sectors in the Apuseni Mountains. The passage from the narrow sector in which the water is still carving its way to the dry valley is unexpected and enchanting to tourists. In addition, the Valea Rea tributary shows great perspectives for canyoning.

However, the Sighiștel Valley is one of the richest areas in the country in terms of endokarst (Cocean P., 1988). Moreover, Goran reported in 1982 the presence of no less than 162 caves, among which the Măgura Cave (1885 m), the cave in the Secăturii hill (850 m), the Coliboaia Cave (1060 m), and the Corbasca Cave (300 m). From the trail, one can easily reach other caves such as Hidre Karst Spring, Peștera Mare din Dâmbul Colibii, Răsuflătoarea Blidarului, Gaura Fetii or Drăcoiaia caves. The great number of caves and their diversity create various opportunities for speleotourism on different difficulty degrees, from the complex aspects it has in the Măgura Cave, with its labyrinthine layout and impressive galleries (Valului, Gurului, Amforelor, Scăldătorilor, Urșilor, etc.) to the smaller caves, which offer visitors a first contact to the underworld.

Therefore, it is the role of geographer to determine which of the two attributes may be used when formulating the unique selling proposition. We recommend the endokarstic resources as they determine the development of *speleotourism*. In this decision, we have also taken into account another aspect: the Sighiștel Valley is separated from the Crăiasa Valley only by the Culmea Măgurii hill. The proximity to Crăiasa Valley, where the Urșilor, Fagului, and Micula caves are present is decisive for shaping a complex tourist offer based on the endokarstic resources throughout the area. The proximity of these two basins, and thus of the above-mentioned caves, opens opportunities for a speleotouristic route that could include at least four caves: the Urșilor Cave in Chișcău, which was the first cave in Romania arranged to match the requirements of modern tourist demands, Fagului, Măgura, and Corbasca caves (the last three requiring different arrangements). Micula and Coliboaia caves should

not be included due to their paleontological and archeological heritage that must be preserved. By creating such a route, the risk of disturbing phenomena, like an attractive outshine manifested upon one of the valleys is also minimized.

The ***Someșul Cald Gorge*** has a different kind of attraction, based on the ***changes of scenery***. Practically, the surrounding landscape changes as tourists move forward following the existing circuits, passing through the Cetățile Rădesei Cave and the Rădeasa canyon and going up on the slopes to the dazzling panoramic points on the slopes of Someșul Cald gorge.

The underground scenery in the Cetățile Rădesei cave is a very particular one. It is here that the tourist can perceive, like nowhere else, the dissolution, erosion and collapse of a cave top and its transformation into a gorge. When admiring the five windows opened in the ceiling of the cave, one can acknowledge its role as a “genetic laboratory” of a very important category of gorges, such as the karstic capture gorges (Cocean P., 1988). This scenario actually happened long ago, in the current downstream perimeter of the Someșul Cald Gorge, and it is intensely affirming today, in their last sector, the one situated upstream.

Once the tourist has surpassed the cave and the Rădeasa canyon, the trail leads him to the lookout points upon the Moloch Waterfall, the ones upon the Cuciulatei scarp or the one situated at the 1342 m elevation point. The horizon suddenly widens from these points situated over 100 meters above the valley and a great panorama opens over the valley and out to the Vlădeasa Mountains.

A series of famous caves are also located in the Someșul Cald basin, along some of its tributaries (Alunul, Valea Firei). Peștera Zmeilor of Onceasa, famous for the paleontological ossuary of cave bears, Altarului Cave, known for the variety of speleothems and the Humpleu Cave over 35 km long, having the largest galleries and chambers in the Apuseni Mountains. Their arrangement however is not recommended since it raises major ecological and scientific issues (the conservation of paleontological sites or the protection of rare speleothems) or technical difficulties.

The Turda Gorge is undoubtedly the most well known gorge in the Apuseni Mountains. There were numerous factors contributing to its tourist popularization: the easy access (since it is located near the town of Turda and the DN1 national road), its status of Nature Reserve since 1938, the arranging that made its crossing very easy, being accessible for a large number of tourists, and the long standing tradition in climbing, that started back in the 1940s.

In the new marketing strategy for the Turda Gorge, emphasis should be on the latter aspect: the Turda Gorge – a location for ***escalade and climbing***. The justification is found in the particularly favourable conditions it presents for the development of climbing routes, being the area with the highest number of routes in the Apuseni Mountains. In 2010, there were 314 routes (Cocean G. and Anghel D., 2010), but new trails are opened each year.

Eighteen climbing areas have been outlined, among which Peretele Uriăș, Turnul Galben, Peretele Pripoanelor and Peretele Aerian stand out. As a direct consequence of the large number of routes scattered in different areas of the valley’s slopes, one can note a great variety of trails. Some of the most difficult routes in the Apuseni Mountains are located here, such as Coviltir in the Ungurească Cave (10-), Lassie on Turnul Galben (9+/10-), Milică on Peretele Cald (9+/10-), etc. Alongside, there are some very long routes as well, especially on the Peretele Uriăș scarp (Ave Maria -13LC, Madonna Neagră -11 LC, Quo Vadis -10 LC, etc.) or, on the contrary, some easy ones, for beginners, in the Școala Turdeană (Turda School) area. In addition, a Via ferrata was installed on the Grota lui Hili route addressing tourists that do not possess climbing skills, but still want to climb the steep slopes.

This specific recreational form of tourism is conducted throughout the whole year in Turda Gorge, fall or spring, summer or winter; during summer, suitable conditions can be found on the north-facing walls and the Ungurească Cave, and, during winter, on the south-facing walls, such as Peretele Aerian and Peretele Cald.

The Turda Gorge is also the venue for many actions conducted by local alpine clubs and for some sport competitions, such as the ATA Cup. With its two climbing sections, this competition had its fourteenth edition in 2013 while being one of the most important sporting events in the Apuseni Mountains.

The attractiveness of *the Râmeț Gorge* resides in some features of an entirely different nature. It all starts with its evolution scenario, widely discussed and differently interpreted by scientists. Testimonies of this scenario can be traced inside the gorge, awakening the curiosity of any tourist. “How did this portal appear here? Was there a cave here before?” are questions that the vast majority of tourists who visit the Râmeț Gorge definitely ask themselves.

In fact, this gorge is among the few in Romania that still preserve such evident testimonies of *karstic capture*, the most fascinating scenario for the evolution of gorges. Perhaps only the Grohot natural bridge, of greater dimensions, reflects just as strikingly the evolution of the Uibărești Gorge.

In the case of the Râmeț Gorge, the evolutionary odyssey is more interesting to decipher, due to the presence of the novel oval profile, which further confirms the previous scenario. In addition, the location of the natural bridge inside the gorge and its upper side suggest the existence of a cave developed on more levels. Tourists can easily ignore this fact; therefore, the whole scenario should be indicated alongside, on information panels that would draw the attention upon these elements.

Because of these emblematic elements, the Râmeț Gorge is one of the most important geomorphosites in the Apuseni Mountains, being an ideal place for the development of *geotourism*. This form of tourism could find wide perspectives in exploiting the entire Râmeț Basin, including the Mănăstirea, Geogel, Piatra Bălții and Pravului gorges as well.

Another type of tourism, of a similar educative nature is the *ecotourism* developed in the *Intregalde Gorge*, best known for the botanical endemism *Leontopodium alpinum var. intregaldense*. Although it can be found in other places of the Apuseni Mountains as well (Râmeț Gorge or Scărița-Belioara), it should be noted that at Intregalde, the *Edelweiss* descends at the lowest altitudes in Romania, under 500 m. The Intregalde Gorge provides a rich landscape in which ecologists can search and admire the endemism. The steep slopes, intensely modelled, rich in micro-forms like towers, pillars, arches and caves will certainly impress tourists.

CONCLUSIONS

These would be the unique selling propositions for the gorges identified as priorities for tourism exploitation. By using them, each gorge would have its brand strengthen and its identity more clearly defined. Thus, it would be easier to include them in concrete marketing strategies that would attract investors and tourists.

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