

THE ROLE OF RAIL TRANSPORT IN PROMOTING THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL TOURIST HERITAGE IN THE PRAHOVA VALLEY

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***Abstract:** One of the most famous areas of the country, Prahova Valley, has written many pages in the history of our people. Its tourist attraction and more is recognized both nationally and internationally, going around the world. Foreigners heard about this area for the first time due to the fact that, somewhere around 1857, oil began to be extracted from the richness of the soil, which led to the street lighting of Bucharest, the first city lit with oil. The purpose of the study is to show the importance that Prahova Valley can have today from a tourist point of view. The working method was the empirical one, of the questionnaire. In the analysis of the questionnaire, we followed the effects of free transport for students and the 50% discount for students, at the level of Prahova Valley, with the application of questionnaires both in trains that run on this route and in stations, such as: Ploiești Vest, Sinaia, Bușteni, Azuga and Predeal. The results of the study clearly highlight the effect that rail transport has in the tourism development of the Prahova Valley and the role it can have for the young generation.*

***Keywords:** landscape, railway transport, tourist heritage, tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Prahova Valley, has internationally known climatic resorts, such as Predeal, Azuga, Bușteni and Sinaia, but also localities (Comarnic, Breaza, Telega and Câmpina), which attract tourists through landscapes, historical memories of the heroic past, through tourist facilities, but and for the exploitation of the mountains that surround this geographical area of Prahova Valley (Velcea, 1965). The present work addresses a topic that is in a stage of development in Romania, railway tourism (Almeida, 2015). The study focuses on the analysis of rail tourism at the international level before, during and after the pandemic, but also on the analysis of rail tourism at the national level and, above all, on the study area of Prahova Valley (Postelnicu, 2018). The study area is delimited by the CFR Ploiești Vest Station and the CFR Brașov Station, an area where we analyzed the

role of the train, on the largest and best-known tourist axis in Romania, Prahova Valley, in promoting the natural and cultural tourism heritage it shows. Each geographical region offers a natural and cultural landscape whose analysis deserves to be carried out (Teodoresc et al., 2017, Szemkovics et al., 2018; Ziakas et al., 2016, Mazilu et al., 2023).

Prahova Valley has a double role from a tourist point of view. On the one hand, the material traces provide information to lovers of local culture (Teodorescu 2009; Jensen, 2020; Albalate, 2017), and on the other hand, it is a model for the implementation of tourism exploitation methods, including for rural areas (Ducman et al. ., 2021, Ilovan et al., 2019; Rădoi et al., 2020; Dumitrascu et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

Data types and sources

The types of data used in the creation of cartography materials are vector and raster. Vector data is represented by points, lines and polygons, being used to store the outline of objects, while raster data is used to store their content. The raster data are represented by the basemap within the QGis 3.12.0 with GRASS 7.8.2 work program

Two databases were created in Excel Office 2019 (Program from the Microsoft Office 2019 suite of programs), results from the two questionnaires, where the data were processed in graphic form.

Data processing

a. Choosing the study area

The study area is represented by Prahova Valley, between CFR Braşov and Ploieşti Vest railway stations. The identification of the area was made with the help of Google Earth Pro software.

b. Researching the main subject (the role of railway tourism in the promotion of tourist heritage). Data and information were collected about tourism, railway tourism at an international level (from scientific articles), nationally (from the official websites of railway transport companies operating in Romania), and regionally (on the Prahova Valley). The evolution of the number of tourists worldwide before the pandemic, during the pandemic and after the Covid-19 pandemic was also analyzed.

c. Data collection from scientific articles, official websites of railway transport companies, but also from the application of the questionnaire both

face to face and online. Data and information taken from scientific articles, official websites and questionnaires were stored and processed according to the subject of the study. (Paragraphs, graphics, cartographic materials).

d. Data storage and processing

The data were processed in the form of paragraphs (those in the form of text), graphics (those in the form of tabular data from Microsoft Office-Excel 2019) and cartographic materials (QGis 3.12.0 with GRASS 7.8.2).

RESULTS

In order to analyze the tourist phenomenon in Prahova Valley with and without the help of railway transport, we applied a questionnaire in this regard. The face-to-face questionnaire had a sample of 60 people, people who transited Prahova stations, being applied within them, and the online questionnaire which had a sample of 334 people. The face-to-face questionnaire is aimed at the evolution of the tourism phenomenon in line with the reduction or free rail transport tickets offered to both pupils and students.

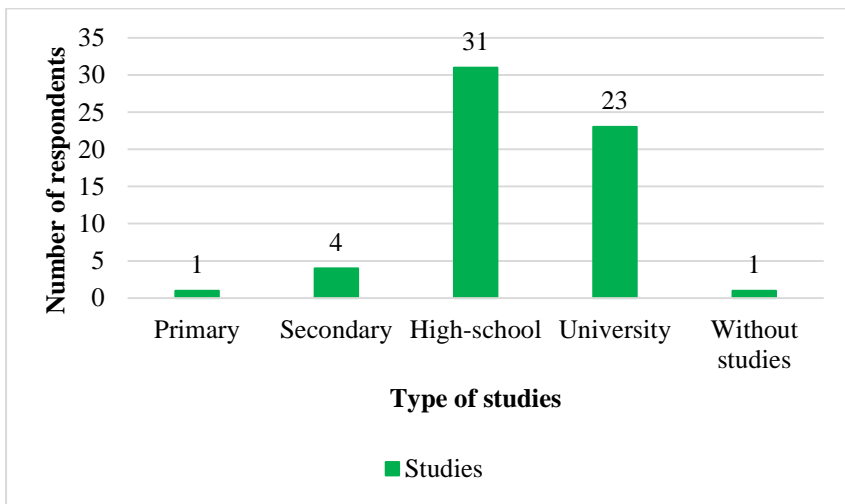


Fig. 1. The type of studies of the respondents

The purpose of the online questionnaire is to research the influence of the railway means of transport in the promotion and evolution of the tourist phenomenon within the Prahova Valley, but also the state of operation of the trains operating on this railway route.

Both questionnaires combine their aims to research the role of railway tourism in promoting the natural and anthropogenic tourist heritage of the Prahova Valley.

The respondent file is made up of respondents who study in a high school (31 respondents) or in a faculty (23 respondents), and others study in primary or secondary school, and one respondent has no education (fig.1)

At the level of occupation, given the fact that most of them are studying, they are students and only 8 are employed, and 5 of them have other occupations (fig. 2).

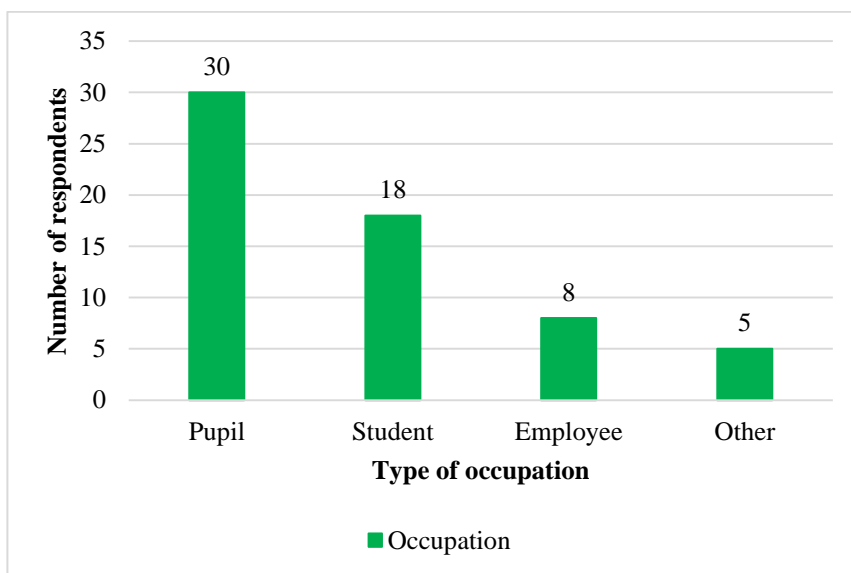


Fig. 2. Respondents' occupation

The surveyed tourists come from several localities in counties such as: Prahova, Bucharest, Constanța, Brăila, Galați, Buzău, Brașov, etc. Most tourists come from Prahova county (with a number of 23 respondents), followed by Bucharest (with a number of 14 respondents). Following the analysis, most of them come from Prahova, from localities such as the city of Ploiești, Sinaia, Câmpina, Comarnic or Breaza, commuting from high schools in the city of Ploiești (fig. 3).

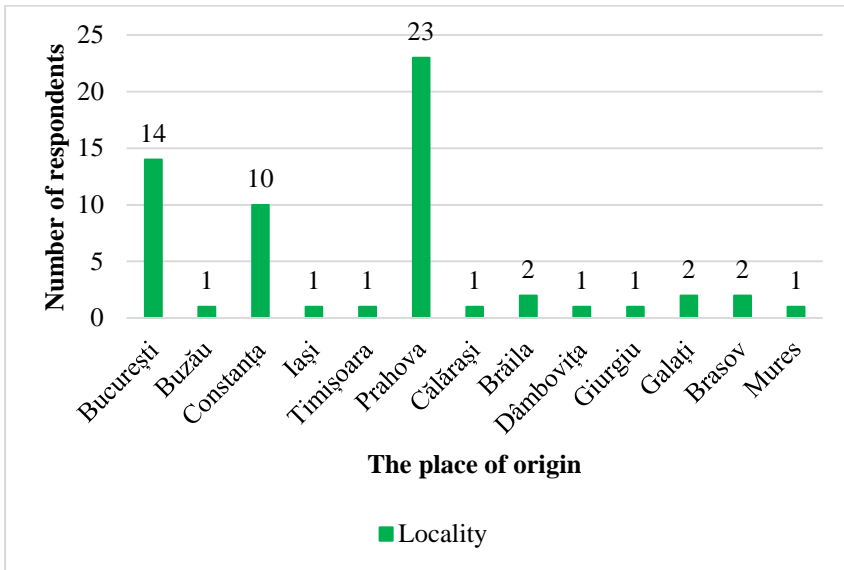


Fig. 3. The city of origin of the respondents

The tourist phenomenon practiced by young people in Prahova Valley is focused on tourist destinations such as Sinaia, Brașov, Bușteni, Câmpina, Ploiești Vest, Predeal, Timișu de Jos. The main tourist destinations on Prahova Valley, which also have the most tourists, are Sinaia and Brașov, a fact proven by the graph and map below (fig. 5).

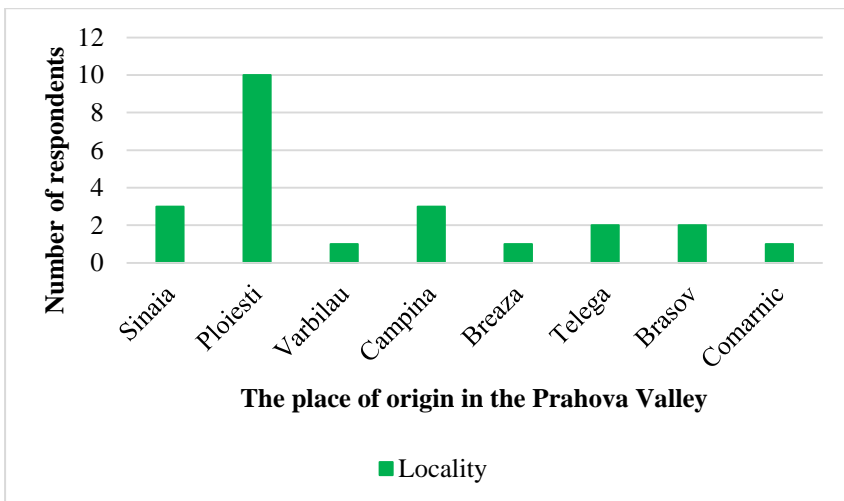


Fig. 4. The place of origin of the respondents within Prahova Valley

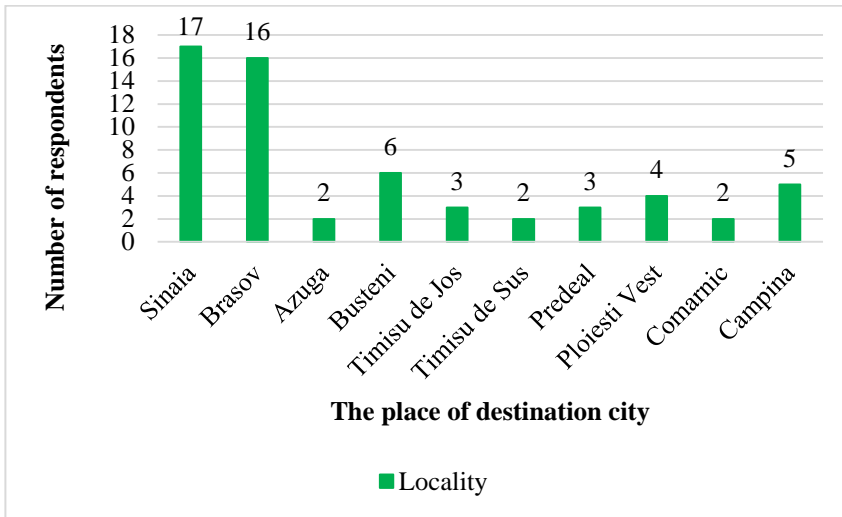


Fig. 5. Respondents' destination city

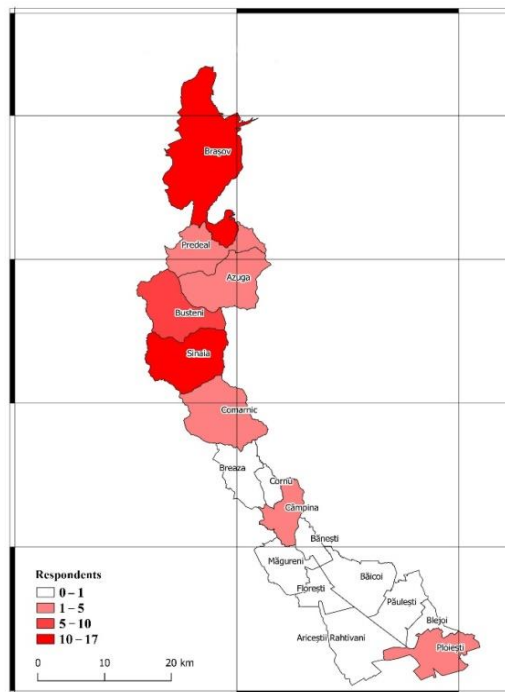


Fig. 6. Respondents' destination city

The surveyed sample appreciates the fact that rail transport on the Prahova Valley has a satisfactory efficiency, the ticket price is advantageous, the degree of comfort, safety, train equipment and train frequency are

satisfactory. The behavior of the staff is satisfactory, but the passenger cars are crowded (fig. 7).

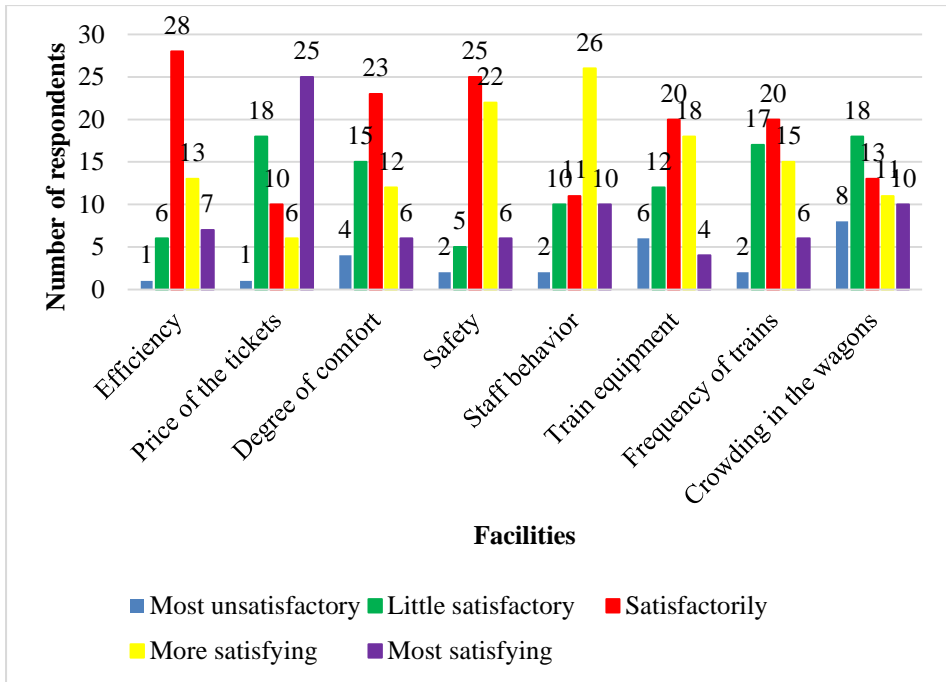


Fig. 7. The mode of appreciation of rail transport by the respondents

Pupils/students also say that they occasionally travel by train to practice hiking, weekend or event tourism. Most of the tourism is exercised by hiking on the trails owned by the Bucegi or Baiului Mountains, which delimit the Prahova Valley.

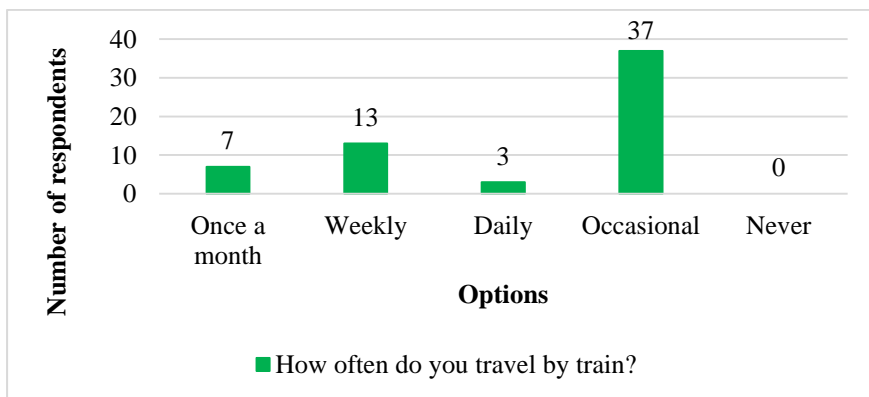


Fig. 8. Frequency of train journeys

To reach the resorts, young people choose the trains operated by CFR Călători and Regio Călători, which have the highest train frequencies. They appreciated the fact that they did not encounter delays in most of the travelers. But if they were, they totaled 5-10 minutes, maximum 30 minutes late.

In addition to these types of tourism, they also practice cultural tourism, in locations such as the Peleş Castle and its entire tourist complex.

Due to the fact that today, rail transport is increasingly frequented by young people, even if in the spring of 2021, free rail transport was terminated for students, and the respondent's form has the average age of completing the questionnaire as 20 years, with the male gender predominating, with a value of 68% of the sample.

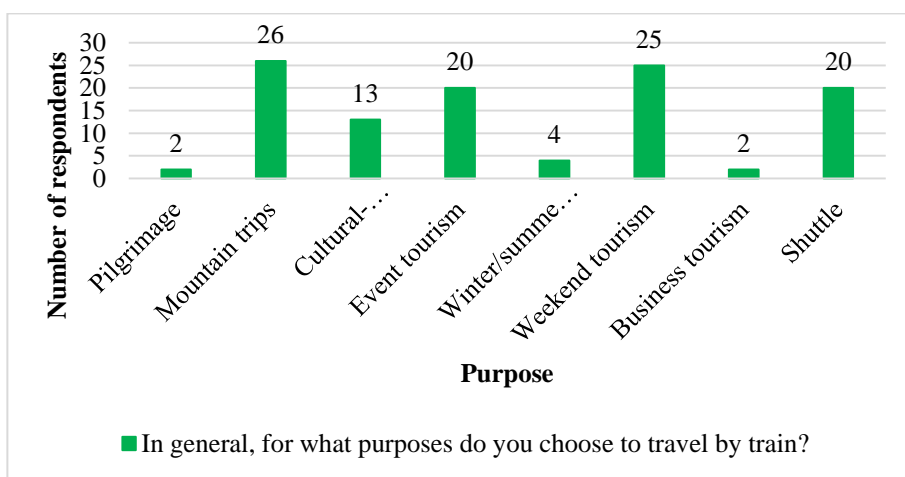


Fig. 9. The purpose of train travel

To practice these types of tourism, they stay in the location of tourist destinations for one day or 2-5 days.

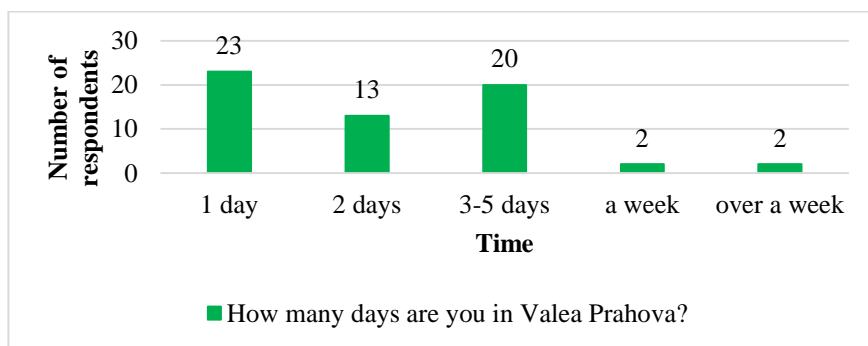


Fig. 10. The length of time spent in Prahova Valley

The train is a means of transport that is used for several purposes, depending on the needs of the passengers, as well as the context in which they are. Following the study, the respondents stated that they use the train, as a means of transport, to practice weekend tourism, to new places or to their loved ones. They also use the train for commuting, given that the sample is mostly students. In addition, they choose the train for mountain hiking, event tourism and cultural-historical walks.

When talking about the trains in Romania, people often tend to highlight only the negative things, given the fact that the situation of the trains in our country is not in continuous development.

The national transport infrastructure is deteriorating, investments are made very rarely, and development strategies are very long-term to see every effort to direct the transport infrastructure towards a springboard for development, for modernization. Thus, among the advantages of using the train are the following:

- a) Traffic can become stressful for tourists, so the train reduces this, and the travel time is sometimes shorter compared to the road.
- b) Types of discounts are made for travelers, depending on several aspects (age, status, etc.).
- c) The train is located on the first positions in the top safety in terms of means of transport.
- d) The transport rate is affordable for all travelers.
- e) Allows viewing the landscape without being stressed by traffic
- f) The convenience of traveling, the space is much larger compared to a car, more luggage can be transported, and travelers enjoy comfort.
- g) It is a non-polluting means of transport
- h) Has toilet, electrical charging sources, compared to automobiles that require a stop.
- i) It does not cause sickness, like the means of road transport
- j) Travel tickets can be purchased online
- k) Does not require a driver's license, as in the case of automobiles
- l) It allows carrying out activities, such as reading/learning, watching a movie/series, socializing, etc.
- m) It is possible to travel in large groups

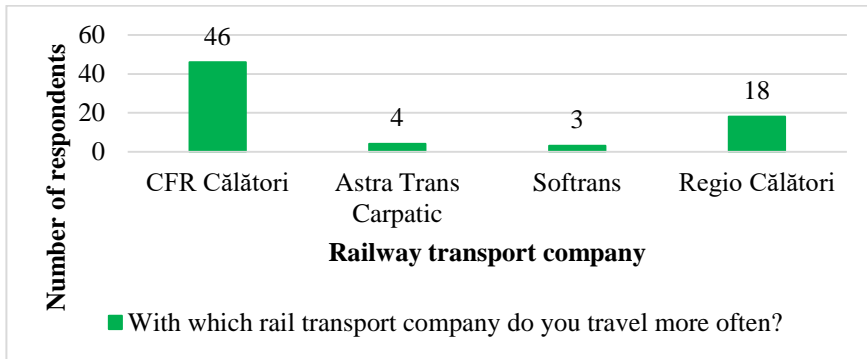


Fig. 11. Railway transport companies operating in the study area

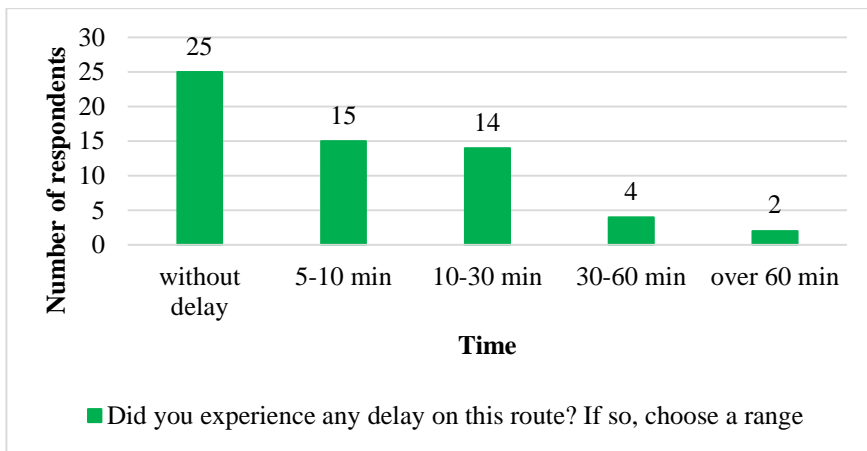


Fig. 12. Duration of delay on this route

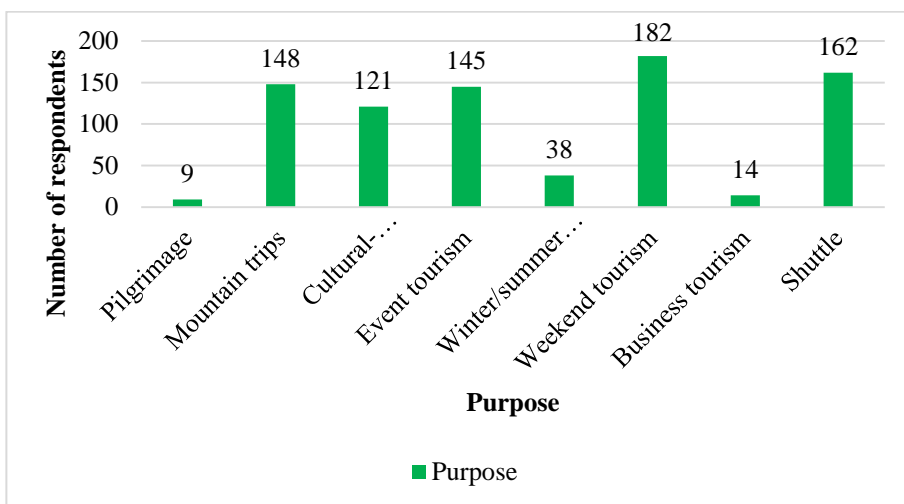


Fig. 13. The purpose of train travel

Therefore, travelers prefer the train because costs are low, comfort and safety are at the forefront, and railways offer views of the landscape.

The study focuses on the largest and best-known tourist axis in Romania, Prahova Valley, between the CFR Ploiești West Railway Station and the CFR Brașov Railway Station.

The chosen sample is now divided into three categories, those who went to Prahova Valley by train (165 out of 344 respondents), those who did not go to Prahova Valley by train (144 out of 344 respondents) and only 25 respondents out of 344 who no longer remember whether or not they went by train to Prahova Valley.

Traveling by train to Prahova Valley	
Benefits	Disadvantage
1. Discounts and the possibility of purchasing tickets online	1. There are delays
2. Faster than road traffic on DN1	2. It is not comfortable
3. Services: electricity sources, air conditioning, sleeping car, work table, restaurant car	3. It's crowded and people don't respect their seats
4. Travel safety	4. There is mess on the train
5. Group travel	5. Unfriendly staff
6. Does not pollute the environment	6. Insufficient facilities: there is no wifi, electricity sources, air conditioning, cleanliness
7. The possibility for tourists to enjoy the landscape	7. Old wagons
8. Interaction with new people	8. Undeveloped infrastructure
9. Frequency of trains on this route	9. Noise pollution of some trains
10. Ability to carry more people	10. Insufficient luggage compartment
	11. Travel speed is low
	12. The distance between the train station and the tourist attraction is long
	13. Queues when purchasing tickets
	14. The high price of tickets

CONCLUSIONS

Traveling by train is valued both from an economic and tourist point of view. In some countries, it is one of the main means of travel, and because of this, it is in continuous development. Countries with a high-level transport infrastructure use both national and international high-speed trains for tourism promotion.

In Romania, rail transport is carried out by the following transport companies CFR Călători, AstraTrans Carpathic, Softrans, Regio Călători, Transferoviar Călători, and in the west of the country by Interregional Călători. As in Europe, Romania promotes traveling by train through railway museums, through European travel programs (Eurail, Interrail Pass, Discover EU), through themed events or through the creation of international tourist railway routes.

Travelers have praised the train as a safe, comfortable, stress-free means of transportation that can offer spectacular scenery. It is also a non-polluting means of transport, and the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure is increasingly focusing on the development or rehabilitation of the national railway network.

In most cases, the train is accessed either by young people or by the group of older people, who want to discover new places, new cultures, but also who want to have new experiences.

Within the Prahova Valley, there are many pairs of tourist trains, which transport travelers from different parts of the country to exercise both mountain tourism (hiking) and cultural tourism (for example, Peleş Castle) or rest and relaxation.

Travelers appreciated the fact that the train on Prahova Valley is the most efficient means of transport. They also all consider the train to be a safe, comfortable means of transport that offers them beautiful natural scenery and where they have the opportunity to travel in groups.

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