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From Mining to Tourism: Assessing the Destination's Image, as Revealed by Travel-Oriented Social Networks

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Abstract: Mining communities often rely on tourism as a vehicle for post-mining territorial development. Sometimes, these expectations of the locals are justified by the natural setting and/or the well-preserved industrial heritage; however, these potential tourist destinations are disadvantaged primarily by their image, often associated with decay in the perception of travellers. In this paper, we treat travellers as stakeholders, able to decisively influence the image of a destination by uploading content (photos, reviews and ratings) on Google Maps and TripAdvisor, and we emphasise that user-generated content should be considered when shaping the tourism development strategies. Taking as case studies three former mining regions trying to capitalise on their tourist potential—Jiu Valley and Ștei, in Romania and La Louvière, in Belgium—this article proposes a method for assessing the image of the destination, also aiming to identify those aspects that require improvement.

Keywords: tourism destination; destination image; social networks; post-mining area; Google Maps; content analysis

1. Introduction

The development of extractive industries was often accompanied by a fast forward conversion of many rural areas into industrialised urban territories. When the extractive industries flourished and the mining territories attracted labour from everywhere, it was not much considered that there would be an expiration date for the prosperity of these communities and that mining must be seen as a temporary activity, the exploitation ceasing with the depletion of resources or when their use is no longer considered beneficial [1]. The Paris Agreement signed in 2015 and the provisions of the Green Deal voted by the European Parliament in 2021 propelled decarbonisation as a mandatory measure to reduce the effects of climate change, triggering the coal phase-out process in the EU member states' energy mix [2–4]. The principles of sustainability provided for a just transition to other economic models, the industrial heritage, as well as the landscape of some of these regions, convinced many local actors that tourism could be the right economic activity to replace mining, and the literature recorded several successful models around the world [1,5–8].

This preference for tourism as a vehicle for sustainable development of a post-mining region is conferring on the landscape a key role in territorial reconversion, while local actors are giving up part of their influence over the outcome of the transition to external actors. The landscape is defined as the sum of the features visible on a certain surface of the Earth, an essential territorial asset considering its attractiveness potential, but the most important characteristic of the landscape is that it is a product of perception, an idea built by the mind and emotions [9–11]. Whilst exploring the potential of a territory to become a tourist destination, it was proved that the assessment of pre-existing resources is often biased due to an erroneous perception of local actors of their own territory [12]. Locals who evaluate their own landscapes view them from a subjective perspective, adding a sense of ownership to their evaluation, while foreigners pay more attention to landscape aesthetics [13]. Moreover, being often associated with long-term economic and social decay,

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the post-mining communities relying on tourism in their territorial reconversion have ab initio a big disadvantage to overcome: a bad reputation [14,15].

In this paper, we discuss three mining regions that consider tourism as an axis of post-mining development: (a) Jiu Valley, a coal basin in Romania where the four still active mines are scheduled to be closed by 2032 [16]; (b) La Louvière, in the Centre Region of Belgium, a "daughter of the Industrial Revolution" and once a coal production world leader until the closure of mining in the 70s [17]; and (c) Ștei, the city built in Romania between 1952 and 1956, by the orders of the Soviet dictator Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, to house the workforce from the nearby uranium mine, which was subsequently closed by the Romanian state in 1997 [18]. All three case studies belong to medium to poorly developed European regions (La Louvière—BE 32 Hainaut, Jiu Valley—RO 42 West, and Ștei—RO 11 Northwest), defined by a large heterogeneity (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/regions/statistics-illustrated, accessed on 5 July 2023); however, they are in different stages of their transition to other economic models, just as the assets on which their tourism development aspirations are based also differ.

In Jiu Valley, the landscape and climate favour winter sports, and there are several ski slopes. Petroșani (Figure 1) is the most important mining town in the valley out of six municipalities, the depression being the gateway to Retezat National Park, surrounded by the Retezat and Parâng Mountains (2500 m, highest peak) and crossed by the Jiu River [19]. The community of Ștei (Figure 1) relies on its proximity to several attractions such as the Vîrtop ski resort, or Bears Cave, and its architectural and urban heritage. Moreover, Soviet architecture led to the inclusion of Ștei in the ATRIUM network, a cultural route of cities preserving the architecture of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century in the urban memory of Europe [20].

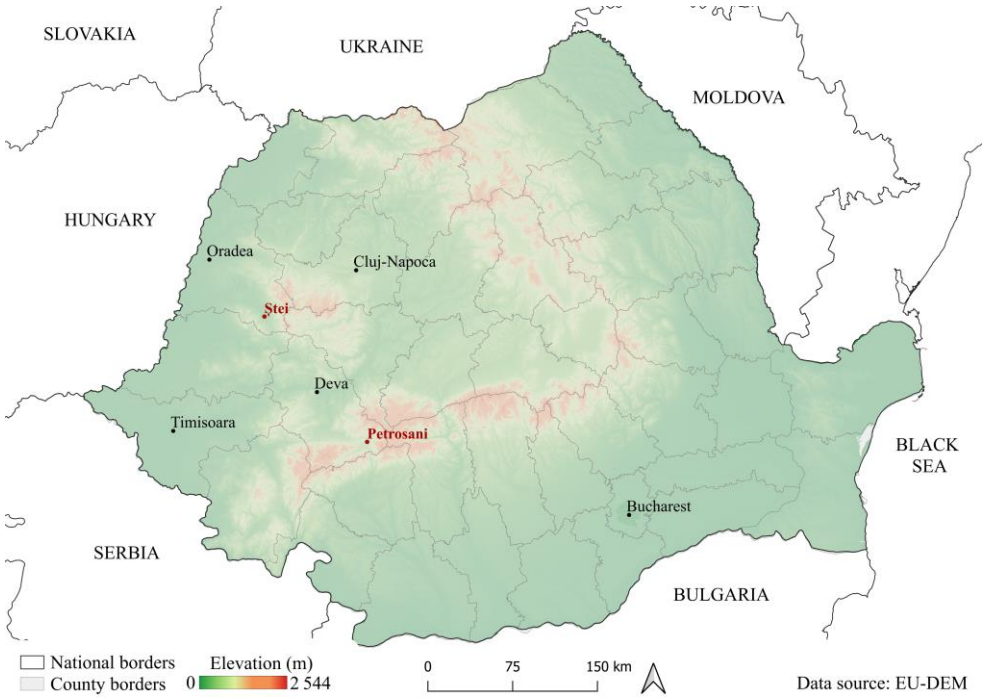

Figure 1. Location of the mining towns Petroșani and Ștei on the map of Romania.

La Louvière (Figure 2) is centrally located on the European highway E19 Paris–Brussels–Amsterdam, being directly connected to the most important cities of Belgium and the capitals of neighbouring countries. The town is surrounded by a rich industrial heritage, including two sites classified as World Heritage Sites: the historic canal and its boat-lifts and Bois-du-Luc mining, recognised by UNESCO among the best-preserved coal mining sites from the 19th and 20th centuries [21].

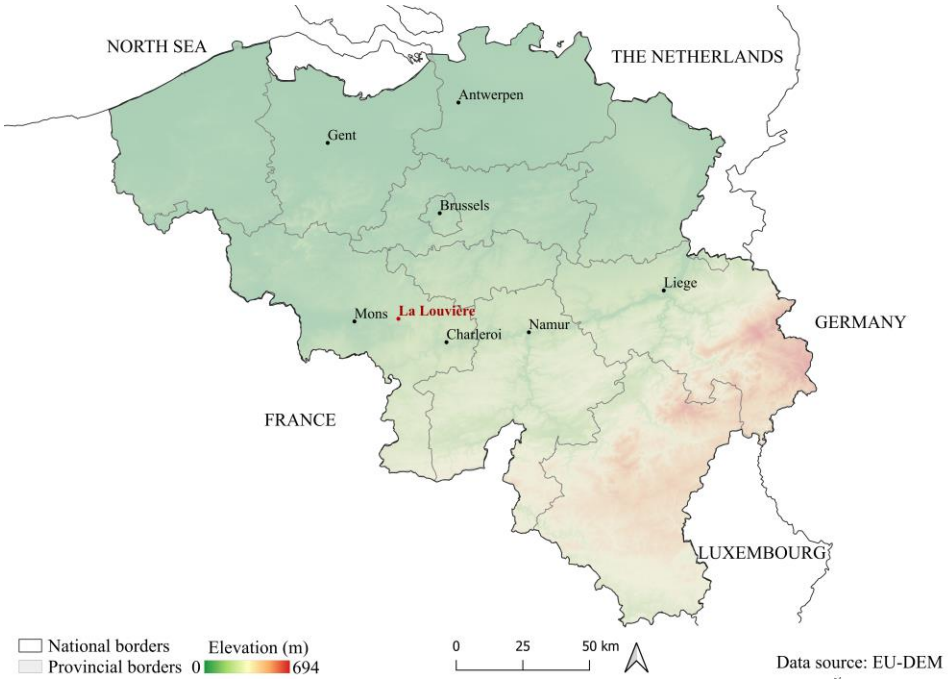

Figure 2. Location of the post-industrial city of La Louvière on the map of Belgium.

Although deindustrialisation proceeded differently in Eastern Europe compared to Western Europe and at different times, the affected regions encountered quite similar problems: economic contraction, increased unemployment and emigration, especially of the skilled workforce. Moreover, some development paths are seen as unviable in these territories, since they are often visibly marked by "decay, disinvestment and polluted industrial wastelands" [22]. We therefore consider it all the more necessary to carefully explore the tourist potential of post-mining regions, as well as the early assessment of the limitations in the exploitation of the industrial heritage and their image.

The image of a destination is increasingly influenced by the perceptions of travellers who choose to post on social media manifest content (explicit, referring to observable features of the images) or rather latent content (implicit, requiring "reading between the lines") [23]. Being situated outside the control of any authority, the opinions shared by travellers who have passed through a particular place have a significant impact on the destination's reputation. Looking at Jiu Valley, Ștei and La Louvière through the eyes of travellers who have passed by, we will test a method of assessing the destination's image, as revealed by two platforms relying on user-generated content: TripAdvisor and Google Maps.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Challenges in Transforming Post-Mining Regions into Tourist Destinations

In the literature on mine closures, Germany is often considered an example of good practice when it comes to image rehabilitation; however, it also raises the question of whether the reconversion model should necessarily include the valorisation of the mining industrial heritage, as was the case in the Ruhr region [24], or not. In the Lower Lusatian basin, for instance, the landscape is totally changed, with artificial lakes and vineyards instead of open-cast mines [25]. Evoking the deplorable image of the coal fields located in East Germany after the sudden closure of the lignite mines at the beginning of the 90s, Deshaies listed the quasi-general shortcomings of a post-mining region during the transition to another economic model: (a) degraded environment and landscapes, (b) high unemployment rates, (c) inadequate training of local people, (d) loss of identity among local communities, and (d) demographic decline. In the specific case of Romania, the inability to convert the post-industrial territories has already generated massive emigration, millions

of Romanians originating from deindustrialised areas finding a better standard of living in other EU member states [26]. As for those remaining in the increasingly depopulated regions, they are currently trying to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the sustainability policies imposed at the European level, tourism being considered by many local stakeholders as a viable post-mining development track [27]. Focusing on a case study from Andalusia (Spain), Bahamonde-Rodriguez et al. [28] highlighted the stigma that this region carried long after the cessation of mining and suggested that improving the image of such territories is a pre-condition to access new development paths. Since the 2000s, among the post-industrial regions of Europe, there has been an increasing tendency to rely on industrial heritage as an asset in the tourism development strategy, generating commendable initiatives to preserve former industrial sites [29]. However, the impacts and results of these attempts to create new tourist destinations around the industrial heritage are still insufficiently quantified [22]. Although in some places former industrial sites transformed into museums manage to attract visitors, the weak accommodation infrastructure cannot generate overnight stays; therefore, their impact is limited both in terms of employability and income [28].

2.2. Forming the Image of a Destination

Unlike big cities, with an already well-defined image and a recognised heritage, medium and small cities born with the sole purpose of serving an industry have particular difficulties in asserting themselves as tourist destinations. The tourism development strategies in these areas would be successful when they are based not only on the industrial heritage but also on events of wide interest, on the geographical proximity to other attractions, on the gastronomic and cultural traditions, etc. [30], offering a package of experiences that will determine stays longer than the time of a visit to a museum/historical site. Moreover, the enthusiasm shared by visitors on social networks after a good culinary experience at the destination might attract more visitors than an official promotion campaign of a historical site. Citing Gunn [31] in an analysis of the image of agritourism in Wallonia and Luxembourg, Dubois et al. [32] classified the image of a destination as follows: (a) the induced image, resulting from official communication and promotion, (b) the organic image, formed by consulting independent sources of information (such as word of mouth, social media, specialised websites) and, finally, (c) the modified image, based on one's own lived experience in that place. The present research pays increased attention to the modified image, since the lived experience of the traveller is the trigger for publishing reviews on the internet, thus contributing to the formation of the organic image of other potential travellers. In the democratised and accessible virtual space, but subject to mechanisms of control and verification of identity and bias, the real image of the destinations is revealed, often differing substantially from the one officially promoted.

Loyalty of tourists plays an essential role in maintaining the competitiveness of the destination and it is influenced by five factors: (a) degree of satisfaction, (b) quality of experience, (c) perceived value, (d) perceived quality, and (e) motivation [33]. The degree of satisfaction determines the decision to repurchase, thus ensuring survival on the destination market, and loyal tourists behave voluntarily as active advertising agents, attracting new customers [34]. Following the same principle, in the digital age, an unsatisfied tourist does not just mean one less customer; their testimonies about a negative experience posted on social networks can harm the image of the destination. The impact of public reviews on travel-oriented platforms has had a fulminant evolution in the last two decades. O'Leary and Deegan [35] were among the first to use travellers' comments about accommodation for analysis purposes, noting in their article that "only a few accommodation operators pay attention to travellers' comments on social networks". Closer to the present day, Yamada and Hayashida [36] found that user opinions expressed on social networks have become increasingly difficult to ignore; 40% of the travellers in their study took their information from the virtual community, while 27% made their shopping choices based on the reviews of other visitors.

User-generated content (UGC) has grown considerably since the 2010s and has been regarded mainly as a source of information for potential visitors, as well as a source of data for tourism and hospitality research [37]. By sharing their personal travel experiences, the tourist becomes a first-hand source of information; their perceived authenticity, fluency, openness and perceived value will impact the image of the destination [38]. Other recent studies, focusing on the importance of cognitive and affective images that affect the formation of the destination image, refer to Travellers' Generated Content (TGC) as a more reliable source than the official ones [39].

2.3. Diversification of Travel-Oriented Platforms

Marine-Roig and Anton Clavé [40] provided an extensive literature review about the influence of user-generated content (UGC) on the image of the destination, emphasizing the importance of destinations accurately assessing the impact of this content when developing their advertising strategies. Their study on the image of Catalonia considered several travel blogs and online travel reviews (OTR), published during a decade (2004–2014), proposing a semi-automatic analysis method, the authors, however, signalling that until their research was completed, the number of OTRs had grown at a dizzying speed. For processing the vast number of reviews published on platforms such as TripAdvisor, Booking, or Trivago, many authors suggested the use of Big Data technologies [41,42].

It has already been proven that social networks reduce travellers' uncertainty, giving them a sense of belonging to a community with similar interests; however, it is still in the realm of probability and not of certainty that social networks can directly and immediately contribute to increasing the number of visits to a destination. At the same time, it is acknowledged that social media is very powerful in building the long-term image of tourist destinations [43]. Content generated by users of tourist applications such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com, and Trivago have been included in tourism and hospitality research in the last decade [44–47], but the main characteristic of studies relying on new technologies and data from web scrapping is that they can become obsolete in a very short time. In recent years, the platform collecting faster and more user-generated content is Google Maps [48,49]. First known as a web mapping platform offering 360° interactive panoramic views of the streets (Street View), as well as information on real-time traffic conditions, Google Maps quickly gained users who plan their trips more easily whether on foot, by car, bicycle or public transport. According to the figures reported by the company, Google Maps is used by over a billion people monthly (https://www.enterpriseappstoday.com/stats/google-maps-statistics.html, accessed on 18 January 2024). The functionality of the application has expanded over time, and users access it not only as a GPS to reach destinations, but also to find information about opening hours and the quality of services.

2.4. Collection and Processing of Data Extracted from UGC

As it results from trial and error so far, the most important step in the methodology of a study based on UGC and OTR available on social media [40] is setting the selection criteria of the contents that will be analysed, the unit of measurement, and assigning a score to each review [50–52]. After the relevant comments are identified, a sentiment analysis can be performed through natural language processing [49]. Based on the extraction of certain phrases from reviews, the computational treatment of the texts allows for the analysis of infinite opinions, attitudes and emotions expressed on social media [53], but the automated aggregation of data is decisively influenced by the information feeding the algorithm. A powerful tool for social media sentiment analysis is the VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary for Sentiment Reasoning) model used by Pleerux and Nardkulpat [41] to evaluate London restaurant reviews on TripAdvisor. The advantages highlighted by the authors when using this tool are: (a) the online functionality, (b) its ability to identify emojis for the classification of feelings, and (c) it does not require training data.

With such rich information available on social media, researchers can and should capitalise on this advantage, but we are still fumbling for the right methods of data col-

lection and processing. Moreover, Lu and Stepchenkova [54] warned that tourism and hospitality research based on user reviews is often vague in terms of methodology, stressing that most data were collected manually, limiting the samples. The same consideration made other researchers question the reliability of these studies [55]. However, some studies showed that even the use of Big Data is not free from biases. Analysing hotel reviews on Booking.com and Tripadvisor, Schmunk et al. [56] proposed an automated sentiment analysis process using a web scrapping program. Johnson et al. [57] had also tried this method, admitting that the process could not be 100% automated and resorting to manual data cleaning; the software did not differentiate between comments about Nova Scotia and comments about other destinations published by users from Nova Scotia, integrating all the contents that mentioned the name of this Canadian province somewhere.

While promotion on official channels can be misleading, relying on professional photo and video services and catchy copy writing, reviews on social networks present the destination from the subjective angle of each user as they perceived it when they were there. Many unbiased reviews have the great merit of providing detailed descriptions and differentiated ratings regarding the natural setting, cultural heritage and aesthetically well- feeling. According to Antrop [58], these are the values of the landscape, and his classification inspired us to develop an assessment method of the external image of a territory, based on reviews posted on internet platforms with a destination rating system and geolocation. This research advocates in favour of the small sample and the manual selection of the content generated by users, depending on the purpose of the research: (a) advertising a destination; (b) utilitarian purpose for travellers; or (c) the purpose of developing a new tourist destination. The method aims to collect data that allow for a comparison between the perception of locals and the perceptions of foreign travellers regarding the same landscape, the main goal being to assess the viability of tourism as the main economic activity to replace mining.

3. Materials and Methods

The research started with the finding that in all three regions under analysis, local stakeholders consider the areas as having the potential to become tourist destinations, and this economic activity is already foreseen in the post-mining development strategies assumed at the administrative level. The research objective was to investigate the perception of external visitors of these potential destinations; therefore, we collected data from the most popular travel advisory platforms used globally: Google Maps and TripAdvisor. Both platforms exclusively grant the right to rate and publish reviews to users with an assumed identity. In their annual transparency reports, TripAdvisor notifies of the sanctions imposed on those who try to raise or lower the rate of a place by publishing biased reviews (https://www.tripadvisor.com/TransparencyReport2023#group-section-Review-Process-Yk0ne3hdQb, accessed on 29 July 2023). Google Maps also has a policy for detecting and removing inappropriate comments, while also providing access to the review history of each user, thus allowing a more rigorous assessment of their credibility and the relevance of their reviews (https://support.google.com/local-guides/answer/7400114?hl=en#zippy=,fake-engagement, accessed on 29 July 2023).

This study is based on an eight-step assessment method (Figure 3):

- Selection of relevant attractions: most reviewed places on TripAdvisor and Google Maps in a 30 km radius that locals regard as "tourist destinations", considering the number of reviews, the number of photos uploaded by users and overall ratings;
- Data cleaning: removing overly enthusiastic user comments or, on the contrary, expressions of complete contempt, expressed by users without a history of reviewer activity;
- Consolidation of a database containing reviews published by travellers on TripAdvisor and Google Maps between 2018 and 2023;
- Translation of all reviews from different languages into English;
- Processing the reviews in a word cloud generator;

- Sorting comments according to landscape values: natural setting, cultural heritage and/or aesthetically well- feeling;
- Assigning a Likert score: negative, rather negative, rather positive, positive;
- Data analysis.

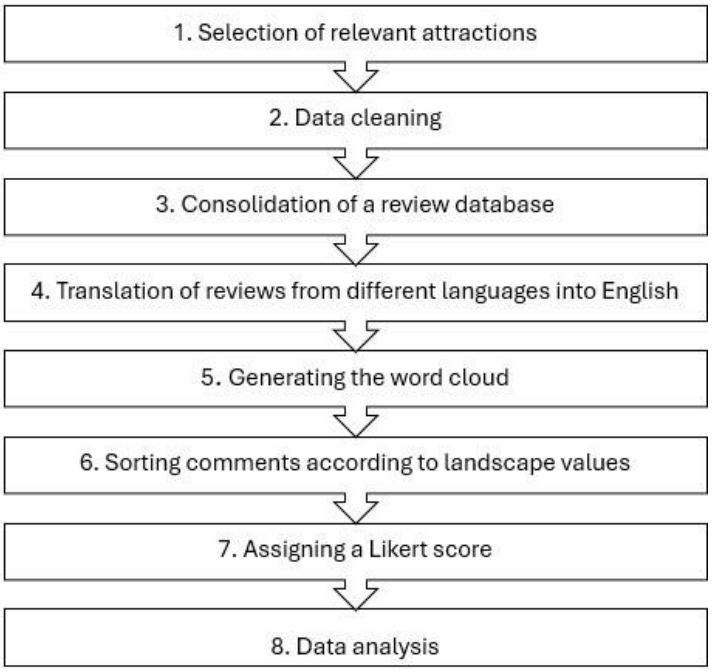

Figure 3. Methodological workflow.

Mainly collecting the comments of travellers with previous experiences in various territories and cultures and/or those with explicit utilitarian content, we consolidated a base of 60 reviews that we thoroughly scrutinised for the assessment of landscape perception. By placing the reviews on the Likert scale, we obtained not only useful information about the level of satisfaction amongst travellers, but also clues about the improvements to be made at the destination level.

4. Results

All three destinations have positive and rather positive favourability when it comes to natural framework and cultural heritage, but the anthropic components, the organisation and the quality of services (counted as values of aesthetically well-feeling) are often the subject of negative reviews. Obviously, some territories are richer in tourist attractions than others, so the aim was to have a comparable weight of reviews on each value of the landscape, thus obtaining evidence of the strengths and weaknesses, as they are perceived by visitors.

4.1. Jiu Valley

In our analysis, we included opinions that refer to the most reviewed ten attractions in Jiu Valley on Google Maps and TripAdvisor (Table 1): two mountain resorts—Parâng and Straja, two natural attractions—Bolii Cave and Banita Gorges, two museums—Mining Museum and Petrila Colliery, the three most reviewed hotels—Petroșani, La Belle Epoque and Rusu, and the most reviewed restaurant—Via Vinoteca (Figure 4).

Table 1. Most reviewed places from Jiu Valley on Google Maps and Tripadvisor (data extracted in July 2023).

Ctr.	Tourist Attractions	Reviews on Google Maps	Photos on Google Maps	Rating on Google Maps	Reviews on Tripadvisor	Photos on Tripadvisor	Rating on Tripadvisor
1.	Parâng Resort	1582	6072	4.7	7	10	4.5
2.	Bolii Cave	2558	13,226	4.7	28	130	4.5
3.	Petrila Colliery	40	224	4.4	-	-	-
3.	Petroșani Mining Museum	289	714	4.2	-	-	-
5.	Straja Resort	7004	27,966	4.3	-	-	-
6.	Baniței Gorges	1748	6520	4.8	4	31	4.5
7.	Petroșani Hotel	708	520	3.5	13	6	2.5
8.	La Belle Epoque	1049	1047	4.6	29	14	4.0
9.	Rusu Hotel	1685	3466	4.4	48	77	3.5
10.	Via Vinoteca	645	232	4.2	44	14	3.5

Figure 4. Location of tourist attractions from Jiu Valley included in our assessment.

Of the 60 reviews analysed, 26 opinions referred to the natural setting, 25 to cultural heritage and 33 to aesthetic appreciation (Figures 5 and 6). In several reviews, the positive or rather positive considerations regarding the landscape, the ski slopes or the unique cave are followed by a "however" introducing various shortcomings in the arrangement, organisation or quality of the services. Most frequently, people complained about the parking lots which were either too expensive (Straja), not cleared of snow (Straja) (Figure 7), or they did not exist (Banita Gorges).

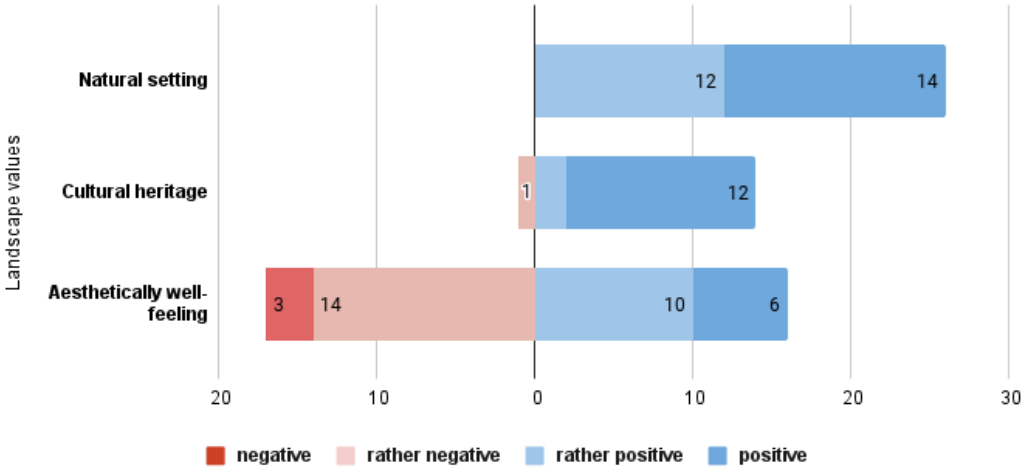

Figure 5. Reviews sorted by landscape values and favourability, Jiu Valley.

Figure 6. Fifty most used words in reviews about attractions in Jiu Valley.

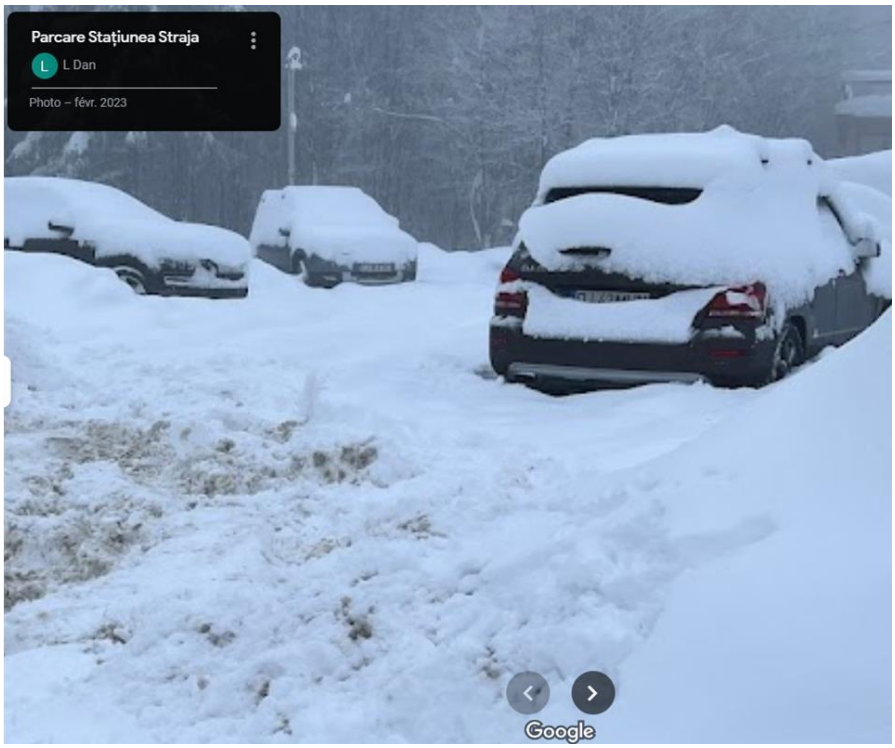

Figure 7. Picture from a parking lot in Straja resort uploaded by user L Dan on Google Maps in February 2023.

> "The resort is really great (. . .) the views are incredible; food is actually really good. The only issue I have is that, at the paid parking lot, they literally have no properly arranged parking spots, it's basically every man for himself (. . .)" (F C Cougar, on Google Maps)

> "The slope is long, and the snow is generally very good. The price of the ski pass does not seem excessive to me. One of the best slopes in the country! The only minus is that the parking lot is not cleaned, although you pay for it". (Olah Antonio, on Google Maps)

Bolii Cave and Banitei Gorges impress with their uniqueness, and the reviews abound with superlatives on Google Maps and Tripadvisor, where visitors have published almost 20,000 photos of the two attractions. Complaining about the lack of signposts, many users provide accurate information to guide those who will come after them.

> "Breathtaking landscape shaped by a river in a former cave. (. . .) Although it is probably one of the most spectacular tourist attractions in Hunedoara, there is no sign in the area that visitors are welcome". (Juzzumbo, on Tripadvisor)

> "They are located on DN66 (E79) road at about 10 km from Petrosani towards Hateg. When reaching the abandoned gas station, turn right and follow the stone road till its end. There is no parking area available and also there are no signs you reached the destination. Just follow the small stream. You will pass over a wooden bridge and walk on a concrete path to discover the amazing gorge. The stream is not deep, when we first entered it was about ankle high and towards the end of the gorges will get knee high". (Viorel Iosub, on Tripadvisor)

The mining museums in Petroșani and Petrila Colliery are for most of the visitors interesting discoveries about which they share positive and rather positive impressions.

> "The museum is very well maintained and has a good number of tools from the mines as well as information on their history. I think it's a good lesson about that place and that particular industry. We definitely recommend it! (i.e., the Mining Museum)" (Cătălin Prata, on Google Maps)

> "People from Planeta Petrila did an amazing job. Thanks to them the future generations will have access to something that otherwise would've disappeared completely". (Gabriel S., on Google Maps)

The only two negative opinions regarding the cultural and industrial heritage refer to the opening hours of Petrila Collery, the users engaging themselves in an exchange of remarks from which it is understood that the project is managed by an NGO with limited resources and, ideally, visits should be announced in advance to avoid situations in which travellers do not find anyone to meet them.

As seen in Figures 5 and 6, perception regarding accommodation conditions, facilities and the quality of services is considerably more negative than those concerning other aspects of the landscape in the Jiu Valley. Of the 33 reviews referring to aesthetic appreciation, 14 are rather negative, and 3 are negative, compared to only 1 rather negative review about the cultural heritage and none regarding the natural setting. Travellers do not vehemently complain about shortcomings related to equipment or design, but many report with disappointment situations in which they were cheated on the bill, met with inappropriate behaviour by the staff, or when the food was not up to expectations.

> "Our change never came back. I thought tip should be voluntary, but they just decided to keep it. Pity because the place is beautiful and nicely decorated". (Talisman_77140, on Tripadvisor)

> "Had a lovely lunch in the restaurant, food was absolutely delicious. A big minus for the waiting time and the waiter who needs to learn to smile a bit more. They were so unfriendly although it was not a busy day(. . .)" (Nicole P., on Tripadvisor)

4.2. La Louvière

In the destination image assessment for La Louvière (Figure 8), we included the attractions mentioned in the development strategy currently being implemented (Table 2): La Louvière 2050, Projet de ville (https://cells.lalouviere.be/public/940649, accessed on 22 April 2022).

Figure 8. Location of tourist attractions in La Louvière included in the assessment.

From the 60 reviews subjected to analysis, 15 referred to the natural setting, 21 to the cultural heritage and 44 report on aesthetic appreciation. A distinct characteristic of this case study compared to the other two is that the anthropic landscape stands out more than the relief and even than the cultural heritage, with the travellers' admiration for the arrangement of the canals, for example, resulting in added aesthetic appreciation. A total of 19 reviews address two or even three dimensions of the landscape, and 5 of them present contrasting perceptions between values (Figures 9 and 10).

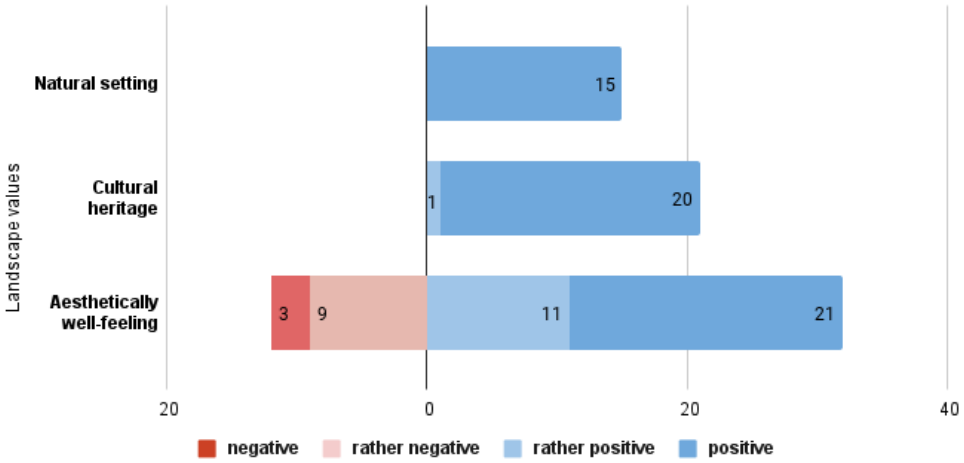

Figure 9. Reviews sorted by landscape values and favourability, La Louvière.

Table 2. Most reviewed places from La Louvière on Google Maps and Tripadvisor (data extracted in September 2023).

Ctr.	Tourist Attractions	Reviews on Google Maps	Photos on Google Maps	Rating on Google Maps	Reviews on TripAdvisor	Photos on TripAdvisor	Rating on TripAdvisor
1.	Bois-du-Luc mining site & museum	283	819	4.3	76	76	4.0
2.	The hydraulic lifts of the Canal du Center (UNESCO)	38	114	4.4	61	71	4.5
3.	Historic Center Canal	337	411	4.4	73	91	4.5
4.	Strépy-Thieu funicular lift—tourist site	2654	6942	4.5	249	199	4.5
5.	Keramis-Center of Ceramics	357	1057	4.4	66	43	4.5
6.	Royal Museum of Mariemont	555	1886	4.4	142	336	4.5
7.	Carnival and Mask Museum	524	2903	4.3	113	62	4.5
8.	Clairefontaine estate	725	572	4.0	21	13	3.5
9.	Seneffe Castle	1703	6389	4.4	177	225	4.0
10.	Le Point d'Eau aquatic center	1977	143	4.1	-	-	-

Figure 10. Fifty most used words in reviews about attractions from La Louvière.

All 15 of the reviews referring to the natural setting in La Louvière reflected a positive perception. Among the 21 visitors who recorded impressions about the numerous thematic museums, 20 are positive, showing the high degree of satisfaction with the preservation of the cultural heritage.

> "Excellent museum on the Carnival in the world, the carnival in Wallonia and the carnival of Binche. Lots of Masks from different countries and regions. Efficient staff, responding to customer requests and knowing their museum inside out. Shopping could be better. Parking on the square or in the free car parks in the city". (Barbaix Marie-Noelle, on Google Maps)

> "Standing at one of the cradles of industrialization. Both impressive and sinister. There is an entire city for the miners next to the facility". (Helge R, on Tripadvisor)

> "We visited with a group of 20, the guide was fluent in English (and Dutch) and was extremely good. He not only talked about the obvious things to see (well worth the visit) but gave a lot of historical background about the social conditions of the miners and their families. Everyone was absolutely pleased with the quality of the visit. Take 1 1/2 h at least, but worth every minute. If you are on your own, I would advise an audio guided tour". (jacques47188644, on Tripadvisor)

> "Canal with rural banks, ideal place for cycling... well-maintained trails... calm... very beautiful region. Locks in operation and always interesting to

see. Fishermen dot the bucolic landscape... restaurants and brasseries to land there... Guinguette, Mill Reach or the Aulne Abbey restaurant... go... down the track!" (Bindels Chloe, on Google Maps)

The rather negative perceptions and the negative ones are exclusively from the point of view of aesthetic appreciation, and they generally refer to (a) the price of tickets to certain attractions; (b) the dirtiness of certain parks and playgrounds; (c) services and facilities at the aquatic centre (in some days).

"Huge and impressive (i.e., The hydraulic lifts of the Canal du Centre) (Figure 11). On the other hand, €8 per person per visit for a 30-min film and a machine room is a bit expensive. At least we had the chance to see a barge go by". (Jean-Michel Laval, on Google Maps)

"Disappointing! It was way too crowded (i.e., Le Point d'Eau Aquatic Center), and the hot tub wasn't working. The water temperature wasn't as hot as previous times, but the price wasn't reduced, and they don't say the pools with hot water and the jacuzzi doesn't really work. Too bad!" (corinne andre, on Google Maps)

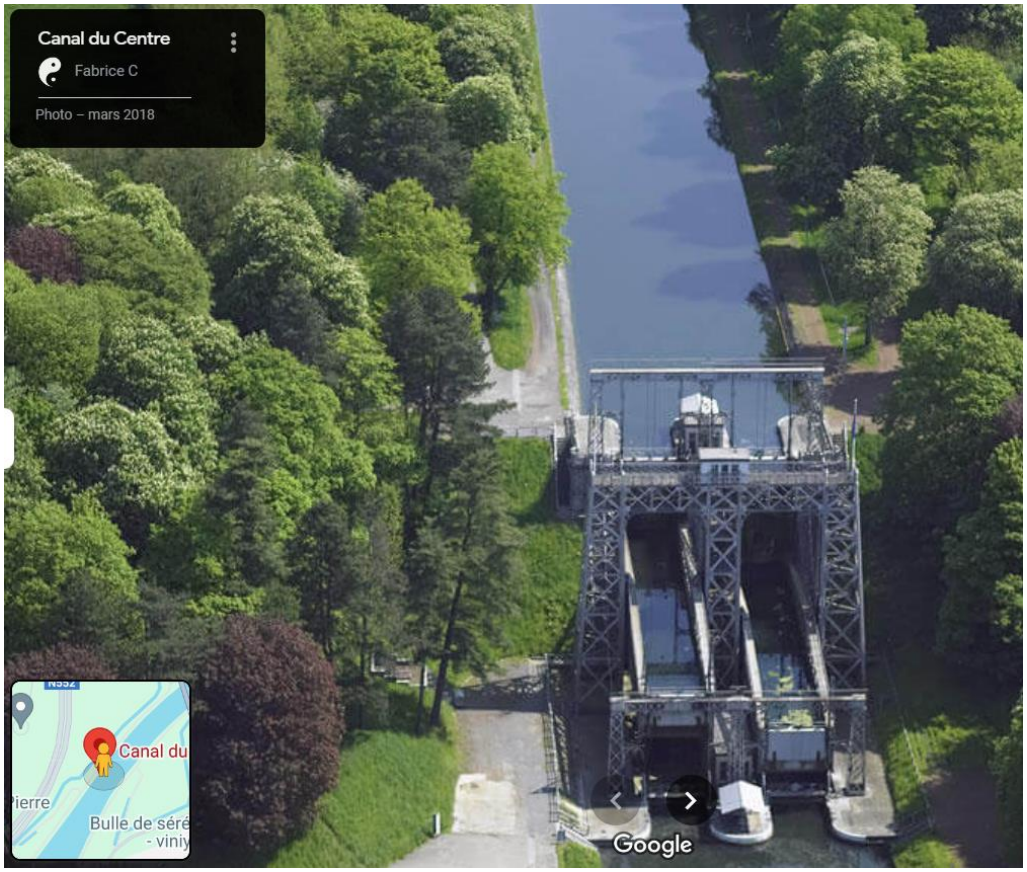

Figure 11. Picture of Canal du Centre uploaded by user Fabrice C on Google Maps in March 2018.

4.3. Ștei

The perception of the landscape in Ștei and its surroundings (Figure 12) is based on the ten most reviewed attractions in the city and in a radius of 30 km around the city (Table 3).

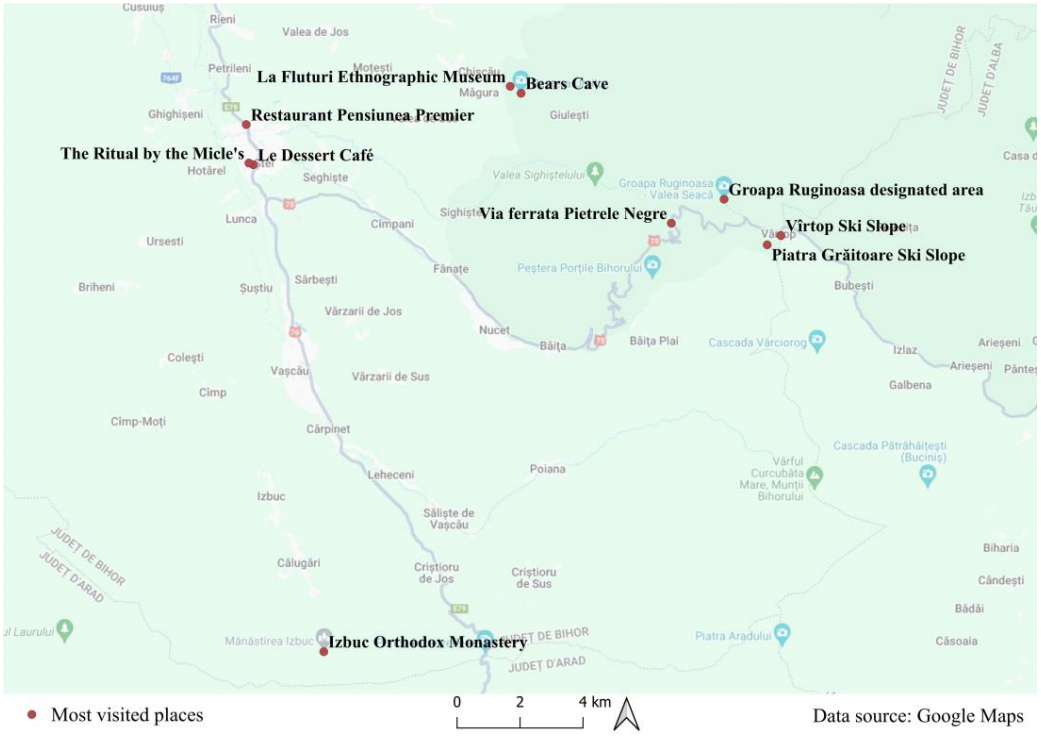

Figure 12. Location of tourist attractions from Ștei included in the assessment.

Table 3. Most reviewed places in Ștei and surroundings on Google Maps and Tripadvisor (data extracted in July 2023).

Ctr.	Tourist Attractions	Reviews on Google Maps	Photos on Google Maps	Rating on Google Maps	Reviews on TripAdvisor	Photos on TripAdvisor	Rating on TripAdvisor
1.	Bears Cave	9158	9776	4.7	86	107	4.5
2.	Vîrtop Ski Slope	3065	5762	4.3	-	-	-
3.	Piatra Grăitoare Ski Slope	1054	2115	4.4	3	20	5.0
4.	Groapa Ruginoasa Designated area	1396	5303	4.8	17	30	4.5
5.	Via ferrata Pietrele Negre	104	600	4.6	16	22	5.0
6.	Izbuc Monastery	1371	4854	4.8	-	-	-
7.	La Fluturi Etnographic Museum	823	3915	4.7	1	1	2.0
8.	Pensiunea Premier	396	173	4.6	-	-	-
9.	Le Dessert Café	70	83	4.9	-	-	-
10.	The Ritual	79	62	4.8	-	-	-

Of the 60 reviews that we considered relevant to our research, 44 referred to aesthetic appreciation, the natural setting was described in 41 occasions, and cultural heritage was referred to only 5 times. However, many reviews delivered relevant content for all dimensions of our analysis, addressing both the natural landscape and the cultural one, as well as the general well-being of the traveller as a result of the cleanliness of the places, the quality of the gastronomy and the service. 28 reviews addressed the natural setting and aesthetic appreciation in the same comment. When assigning a position on the

Likert scale to each comment (positive, rather positive, rather negative and negative), it turned out that in 20 situations, the users expressed contrasting perceptions in the same comment: referring to the natural landscape the perceptions were completely positive or rather positive, but regarding aesthetic appreciation the reactions were rather negative and negative (Figures 13 and 14).

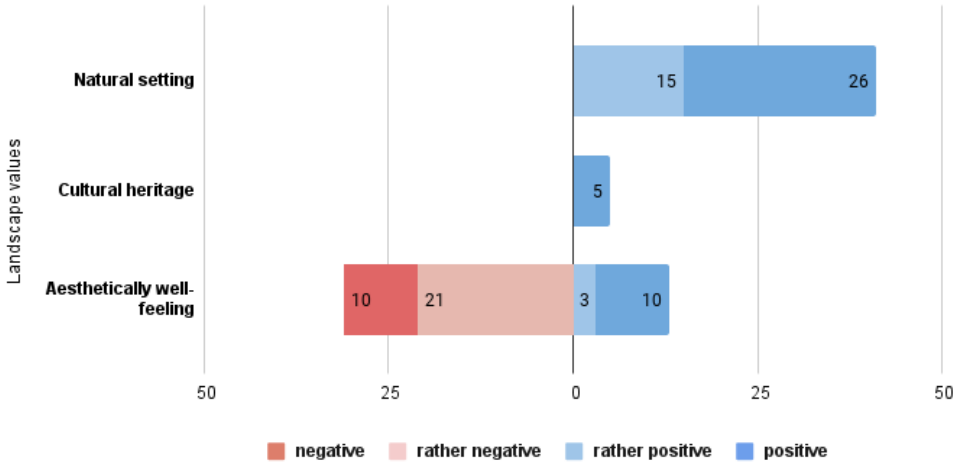

Figure 13. Reviews sorted by landscape values and favourability, Ștei.

Figure 14. Fifty most used words in reviews about attractions from Ștei.

> "Beautiful canyon, woe to savage tourists. The views are spectacular (Figure 15). Because the hike up is quite short, many people visit this place and spoil the pristine nature. For me it is infuriating to see so many wet wipes and tap in the forest near the marked path. I am all for free visiting natural attractions, but in some cases, there should be a fee and rangers monitoring people and making sure they behave". (Octav P, on Tripadvisor)

> "The view is spectacular, it's worth the hike. The first part of the trail when going up (last part when coming down) is a little technical but everyone can do it, you just need to be extra careful. Not giving it 5 stars because up there it could have been a little cleaner on the sides (a lot of used paper tissues between the trees, thrown on the ground) and also some benches would have been great just to catch your breath for five minutes". (Florin Blaj, on Google Maps)

> "The view is amazing. The climb takes approx. 30 min from the road. The first part is harder, but taking in consideration that the climb is really short it is worth it. Take time and enjoy the nature. Stop taking photos for a few minutes and just watch. Respect nature also. The nearby forest is full of toilet paper". (Marius, on Google Maps)

> "Magnificent cave to visit. Downside: a big lack of signposts to indicate the direction of the site". (Nono, on Google Maps)

> "We visited this cave in August 2018. The cave is amazing so many beautiful rock formations. The temperature in the cave is 10 degrees all year round. The tour guide speaks only in Romanian which is a downside of this visit probably will be great if they will have like an audio tour for the foreigners. There is space for parking at the bottom of the mountain, we paid 10 lei which is around £2 for whole day. After visiting we went for a meal (. . .). We went to a restaurant called Laura which had a nice traditional food with local products". (Ioana P, on Tripadvisor)

Two attractions have collected reviews referring to cultural heritage, the Orthodox Monastery of Izbuc and the Ethnographic Museum "La Fluturi", a private initiative of a local. If the museum is often visited by foreign travellers who find the objective on social networks during their journey in the region, the visitors going to the monastery are Romanian orthodox pilgrims who plan their trip in advance and might have other objectives for their trip to the area.

> "Interesting private ethnographic museum, unique in its kind in Romania, located in the village of Chișcău (County of Bihor). It contains more than 2000 objects (ceramics, sculptures, rare stamps, coins, paintings, clothes and more) typical of Romanian culture and traditions. Definitely worth the detour!" (Ary Bala, on Google Maps)

> "After about an hour from the Bears' Cave (. . .), we drove about 50 kilometres to the Monastery, on a road which could be better, taking into account that the Izbuc Monastery is a place very sought after by pilgrims, for the peace of mind it offers you, for the famous healing spring water, unique in Europe, for the Miracle-Working Icon and for the beauty of the 3 churches (. . .) We will come back in the summer again. God Bless!" (Dorin Cadar, on Google Maps)

Sifting through the reviews about Stei and its surroundings, we noticed a disinterest in Soviet architecture, which the authorities emphasise as an essential cultural heritage, yet which is so far not attracting the attention of travellers. An intriguing situation is highlighted by reading the reviews about the Vîrtop resort, where tourists have very different holiday experiences, depending on the slope they went on, as the slopes are managed by different enthities.

> "Piatra Grăitoare it's not Austria, but as close as possible. Nice slope, new chair lift, well maintained. On the way down, it almost stops (recommended also for beginners). Garbage bins everywhere, people queue in a civilized way. . . a little different than on Vîrtop Slope. Only 500 m apart, but the difference of civilization. . .I can't measure it". (Pataki Gyozo-Bela, on Google Maps)

> "The parking fee is high (20 RON), but the parking lot is never cleaned, it is covered with thick ice, so be careful when walking to and from the car, if you don't want broken bones. The same goes for the path from the parking lot. This kind of disrespect towards tourists is appalling, hence the 3-star penalty. The slopes themselves are ok. . .ish, but you need different passes/tickets for the two ski lifts which are otherwise close to each other. The ticket staff are unfriendly and/or annoyed by everything, their attitude is like "why are you bothering me?". The two ski lifts serve different slopes that are practically right next to each other and separated by a fence! This primitive rivalry is laughable. It's been 10 years since I was last here, nothing seems to have changed in the meantime. On the bright side, the ski instructors seemed friendly, helpful, and enjoyed working with the kids. I don't think I'll be coming back here in the near future". (Claudiu Balogh, on Google Maps)

Since Ștei is located on the European road E79, business travellers consider it the optimal place for a stopover, possibly for an overnight stay; therefore, we have included some hotels and restaurants in this analysis. With very few exceptions, the reviews regarding the quality of the food are positive and rather positive, although the service could be improved in certain places.

> "Really good food at The Ritual, excellent service, good coffee and a really nice, clean, modern place. Totally recommend it when you are in Ștei, or you pass by". (s k, on Google Maps)

> "Premier is located in Ștei, a good place to stop on the way to Oradea or Deva. Clean rooms, well equipped and good cuisine". (Călin Anton, on Google Maps)

> "Amazing place in a quiet neighborhood. The owner spoke good English and he was very attentive. Delicious cakes and Italian coffee". (Martin Vegner, on Google Maps)

Figure 15. Picture from Groapa Ruginoasă uploaded by user Soso Soso on Google Maps, July 2020.

5. Discussion

The three post-mining regions are relying on tourism to develop new economic activities. The analysis of posts on travel-oriented social networks describes the main attractions and how visitors experience them. This research has highlighted that the analysed destinations have potentially attractive assets, recognised by travellers, but they do not fully manage to meet visitors' expectations in terms of orientation, public transport, accommodation or dining conditions. The accommodation infrastructure is currently insufficiently developed to generate an important influx of tourists. This type of analysis has the advantage of providing precise information regarding tourist dissatisfaction and even allows us to profile travellers who would be particularly attracted to these areas. Providing accurate advice and tips for future tourists considering visiting the area, the posted comments are a free, valuable source of information about the strengths and weaknesses of the destination that tourism enterprises and public bodies should not ignore.

Our study reveals that the mining past is not a stigma, but rather an excellent opportunity to reflect on the Industrial Revolution and the technological progress resulting in the emancipation of Western societies. The reviews of those who visit the Bois-du-Luc

mining site in La Louviere nowadays are true testimonies of gratitude for this industry. At the other end of the European Union, those who visit the Miner's Museum in Petroșani describe the same feeling of respect and admiration for the people who, with rudimentary tools and without much protection, extracted from hundreds of meters underground the coal necessary to put the world into motion. However, beyond the emotional response to the harsh history of mining, our analysis found no evidence that this type of industrial heritage is a sufficient asset to tourist destinations, and, in this regard, our paper is in line with the findings of Bahamonde-Rodríguez et al. [28]

Our analysis reminds us that a tourist destination does not only represent the objectives of interest, but also, and increasingly, the services that support the experience. The food could be excellent, but if the waiter is rude, the dining experience becomes a negative one. An attraction can be great, but if the parking lot is defective and there is trash everywhere, the visitor is disturbed. Private and public services, local people and visitors make a place worth visiting. La Louvière attracts a large number of people who are passionate about cultural tourism, mostly families with children, but for rather short stays and without the clear prospect of recurring visits once the main points of attraction have been visited. During the winter, the ski resorts in Jiu Valley and near Stei attract skiers for short holidays, mainly from the western region of Romania; however, some negative experiences could discourage repurchase and, therefore, make it difficult to attract loyal tourists. Moreover, when the indignation of tourists is so great that they invest energy to leave negative reviews detailing the unpleasant experience, the consequence can only be damage to the image of the destination.

Analysing the reviews of the attractions on the Jiu Valley and Știei in Romania, we found a high interest of speleologists for the caves in the area, as well as hiking enthusiasts, and we believe that these features of the territories should be valorised. However, it should be noted that this is the most sensitive category of visitors, and if they notice a lack of care for nature, they are prone to immediately revealing the negative reality, as indicated by some reviews included in our assessment. Therefore, travellers' reactions to the landscape strongly recommend the promotion of such destinations among mountain hikers and cavers, but the dissatisfaction expressed by those who have already visited the places shows the need for better landscaping, conservation and maintenance of the attractions.

This assessment method highlighted the importance of understanding travellers' perspectives to improve destinations and drew attention to the wealth of data available today on social networks. In all three analysed regions, the natural setting is appreciated, and the cultural and industrial heritage is highly respected. However, as long as the destinations do not raise the level of satisfaction in terms of aesthetic appreciation, it is difficult to win the loyalty of visitors and word-of-mouth advertising, which would help in forming a good image of the destination.

The analysis could use web scraping techniques, but the representativeness of the sample must be examined. In all three cases studied, we find the same tendency to emphasise natural and cultural sites, monuments and attractions (primary product), while services (secondary product) are neglected in many places, as are organisational and social contexts.

This research shows that certain destinations have a much higher visibility on Google Maps than on Tripadvisor, a finding that raises the issue of user preferences for one platform or another not only when gathering information about a destination, but also when uploading content about a destination. User-generated content on Google Maps is considerably more quantitative than on Tripadvisor. The large number of uploaded unedited photos gives the potential tourist the feeling that they have received information from a more reliable source than official communications. Tourism studies would benefit if researchers integrated more content from Google Maps into their analyses. Also, a small sample of reviews can provide important insight into how tourists perceive destinations, the strengths that can be highlighted on the spot and in advertising, and at the same time,

indicate in which direction efforts should be directed to increase the degree of satisfaction and the quality of visitors' experience.

6. Conclusions

Analysing three post-mining areas seeking to develop tourism, this research shows how a qualitative analysis of travel-oriented social networks helps to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a destination and highlights points to consider for a better experience. The research also reveals the divergences between the aspiration to transform an industrial area into a tourist destination and how visitors have experienced a place so far. In addition to traditional travel-oriented social networks, Google Maps has proven to be a powerful tool for informing tourists and travel professionals. In all three post-mining areas discussed in this paper, the study stresses the need for improving several services, such as parking, waste management and staff friendliness, which strongly affect the visitor experience. This study also highlights the importance of complementing the insider's view with the visitor's view to address the gaps that should be filled to enrich visitors' experiences and, consequently, social media promotion strategies.

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