AN EVALUATION OF DEGRADED TOURISTIC LANDSCAPES

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Abstract. The widespread degraded tourist landscapes are a defining feature of Romanian tourism in the post-communist transition period. They are spread throughout all the development regions of the country, and are generated by common economic, social, legal, institutional and managerial causes. The analysis of such landscapes in the North-West Development Region required, as a major aspect of the analysis, the development of a visual evaluation grid. The establishment of this grid preceded the general evaluation operation which highlighted the main structural and functional features of the landscape, such as: the level of degradation, the relevant structural characteristics, the physiognomy, the functionality and the manner in which the landscape is perceived. Thus, regarding the extent of the degradation, four levels were established, namely: early, medium, high and excessive. They are directly correlated, in terms of landscape structure, with the gradual damage (from a minor damage to a generalized one), of physiognomy (from a difficult to detect stage to the obvious, derelict one), of functionality (from the permanent, minimal one, to the non-functional one), perception (from worrying to repulsive perception) and sensitivity (from insensitivity to variable sensitivity). A grid was also developed containing the quantitative and qualitative indicators of the level of degradation, the most important criterion of the operation. This grid highlights three assessment classes (A, B and C), which capture, from a quantitative point of view, the extent of the phenomenon (from complete disintegration/ destruction to some specific impacted elements) and the number of impacted elements (from all of them to a single element). In terms of quality, for each class, the level of degradation (excessive, high, medium and low/early, respectively) and the contrast with non-degraded tourist landscapes (from striking to lack of contrast) are indicated.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, research on landscapes in general, and on tourist landscapes in particular, has intensified like never before. This is convincingly illustrated by the bibliometric study conducted by Jimenes-Garcia *et al.* (2020), which inventories 3,340 articles published in 1,338 Web of Science journals between 1992 and 2020 concerning the relation between tourism and landscape. On the same subject, Meneghello (2021) identifies a strong upward trend in 238 studies dedicated to tourist landscapes between 1985 and 2020 in 14 WOS-indexed journals, with a peak ranking in occurrences (over 110 titles) in the 2016–2020 period, the latest reviewed timeframe. This trend is emphasized by the remarkable diversification of the addressed aspects, including the challenges in managing and utilizing tourist landscapes by considering them as "common pool" which suffers degradation if overexploited and lacks investment in their protection and conservation (Healy, 1994). Several analyses also focus on the relationship between landscape and tourism through the lens of the post-structuralist theory, where, for urban landscapes (townscape), the phenomenon of *retrophilia* is highlighted, centred on the inherited historical features of the built environment (Aitchison *et al.*, 2014).

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However, any type of landscape, regardless of its typology (be they natural or cultural), can exhibit, in certain evolutionary circumstances, a negative, unesthetic and unfavourable display in relation to the interests of the individual or the community. Such a display is positioned, through its effects, at the antipode of the actual landscape, practically opposing it. Thus, a distinct category of landscapes has resulted, which usually appear as a consequence of retrograde evolution, namely the *degraded, derelict, repulsive landscapes* (Cocean and David, 2014, 2016). There are several terms in the specialty literature that describe them: "marginalized landscapes", "ruiniform landscapes", "abandoned landscapes", "ravaged landscapes", "lost landscapes", "ordinary landscapes", "non-places", "anti-landscapes", "desolate landscapes", "devasted landscape", "brownfields (fisches)" (Vos and Meekers, 1999; Filip and Cocean, 2012; Schmitz, 2015; Chylinska and Kolodziejczyk, 2017), etc.

Thus, what makes up only one side of the story are the positive and favourable aspect of tourist landscapes, derived from structural and functional balance, generating attractiveness, specific to landscapes in a phase of optimal, balanced and integrated evolution. Tourist landscapes can also display opposite aspects, e.g., ugliness and repulsiveness, as a result of their physiognomy being affected by degradation (Cocean and David, 2016; Chylinska and Kolodziejczyk, 2017). Such features, specific to landscapes usually found in a stage of advanced evolution, of decline even ("*parastasis*", according to Tudoran, 1982), can characterize an entire tourist site. More frequently, however, they are specific to particular elements of the landscape, such as accommodation units (hotels, motels, inns, cabins, villas, guesthouses, campsites etc.), leisure or wellness facilities, access roads, orientation signs, and promotional or informational panels. Similarly, degradation can be noted at the actual tourist attractions (attractive resources), be they morphological, hydrographic, climatic, biogeographic, historical, religious, cultural, ethnographic etc.

The causes of degraded landscapes vary and can be either intrinsic or extrinsic. The intrinsic ones derive from the specifics of tourism evolution in general and often appear in the upward evolution phase of the phenomenon, as a result of the increasing pressure on the environment when "tourism displays this curious paradox of degrading or even destroying the very resource that created it, the landscape" (Muntele and Iaţu, 2006, p. 282). However, they are quite visible in the stagnation phase of the tourist cycle (Murphy, 1995), with the onset of the process of "saturation of the tourist ace" by "*overtourisme* or „*surtourisme*"; at this stage, the tourist site's carrying capacity surpasses the point where the space can "sustain an activity without degradation" (Baud *et al*., 2022, p. 506). The phenomenon amplifies and diversifies, raising concerns due to its negative impacts, in the final, regressive phase of the same evolutionary cycle (Ryan, 1991; Cocean, 1996) when the physical and moral deterioration of facilities, infrastructures and services leads to a reduced economic efficiency and a lack of self-sustaining logistic levers.

Extrinsic causes stem from the outside of the tourism field but can have dramatic effects, a good example being the COVID-19 pandemic which reduced the activity in this domain by 84% in 2020 compared to 2019 (Baud *et al*., 2022). In the same timeframe, the number of tourists decreased from 1,460 million to 446 million people, while air travel decreased from 4,558 million to 1,809 million (Holden *et al*., 2022). The consequence was an acute tourism crisis, which manifested as a drastic decrease in the number of visitors, followed by the closure of numerous accommodation, leisure and spa facilities, even up to the point of insolvency (Cocean and Pop, 2020; Munteanu *et al*., 2022).

On the other hand, the functional reconversion of a landscape, carried out over historical time, can generate negative effects impacting its aesthetic values. As such, the change in land use of the mountain landscape, from agriculture to tourism, impacts its condition and structure through the placement of access infrastructure (roads and railways), the development of ski slopes and cable transport, the emergence of new settlements, or the intensification of resource use (Schirpke *et al.*, 2019).

For the Romanian tourism, the transition to the free market economy of the past three decades also represented a difficult stage of stagnation and setback, materialized in the closure of numerous units and the massive destruction of the tourist infrastructure (Peteley, 2013).

One must, however, keep in mind that tourism, an activity driven by three fundamental human needs – leisure (recreation), physical and mental recovery (health care) and cultural enrichment (Cocean, 1996) –, cannot thrive in unhealthy or unsightly settings that might pose risks and vulnerabilities. This is especially important when such settings are part of the touristic landscape itself (a part of its system), but it is equally relevant when they are found near tourist attractions or accommodations.

While many studies on tourism have traditionally highlighted the positive factors that drive its development, durability, and sustainability (a perspective entirely justified during phases of upward evolution, spatial expansion, and typological diversification), there is now an increasing recognition of its negative aspects. In this context, the risks and vulnerabilities of the tourism system (Cocean, 1996) are taken into account; some of which directly relate to the process of degradation of touristic landscapes or touristic landscape elements. However, we emphasize the fact that current studies predominantly focus on tourism's negative impacts on the broader environment (Sunlu, 2003; Sahota, 2016), with less emphasis on degradation within the tourism sector itself, particularly concerning touristic landscapes.

Since degraded tourist landscapes fall within what Rosenkranz (1984) defined as the "aesthetics of ugliness" through their physiognomic features, they are negatively perceived by the vast majority of tourists; with the exception of a fraction of the tourist demand, whose options are predominantly directed towards "dark tourism" (Lennon, 2017; Cocean and Pop, 2020, p.77) and those for whom "dissimilarity, size and history of the place" become reasons for the attractiveness of an abandoned landscape, through the striking physiognomic and aesthetic contrast in relation to the surrounding landscapes (Chylinska and Kolodziejczyk, 2017, p.27). However, most tourists perceive them negatively during their stay, particularly in terms of attractiveness, comfort, and the fulfilment of psychological and physical needs through leisure and healthcare.

Amid the unpredictable evolution of the field, marked by numerous unprecedented and long-term transformations in the tourism field, a "new tourism" with manageable risks and vulnerabilities has emerged (Cocean and Pop, 2020, p. 7). In this context, analysing the dysfunctions caused by the degradation of tourist attractions, sites, or landscapes as a whole becomes increasingly important. A key priority is the quantitative and qualitative assessment of this phenomenon, serving as a crucial preliminary step in developing countermeasures for the enhancement, protection, conservation, and, when necessary, functional reconversion of these areas; such solutions are proposed by tourism promoters, environmentalists, and local communities confronting these challenges.

The objective of the present paper is to outline a methodological approach for evaluating degraded tourist landscapes, using a visual assessment grid designed to quantify and qualify different levels of degradation. This study is part of a broader research project focusing on assessing degraded tourist landscapes in the North-West Development Region, Romania. Within this project, we aim to systematically evaluate various sites affected by degradation, using the methodology outlined in this paper. By applying tailored criteria and indicators, we seek to quantify the extent of deterioration and its impact on both the functionality and perception of degraded landscapes in the region. While the project encompasses multiple case studies across the region, in this paper we present one example – Băile Băiţa Resort – to illustrate the practical application of our evaluation method in identifying key structural, functional, and perceptual characteristics of landscape degradation. This case study serves as a preliminary insight into our approach, offering a clear understanding of how the assessment framework operates. By further detailing this approach, our aim is to also provide a framework that can be adapted for the future assessments of similar landscapes.

2. EVALUATION OF TOURIST LANDSCAPES AS A THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL APPROACH

The unprecedented global expansion and diversification of landscape analyses and the increasing application of scientific results in practice have created multiple opportunities in terms of the quantitative-qualitative evaluations of all types of cultural landscapes. This growth has also contributed

to the refinement of methodologies, which often align with those used in the assessment of geographical landscapes in general. On that account, Pătru-Stupariu (2011) successfully applied the method of landscape metrics, while Cassatella and Voghera (2011) proposed a method based on economic, ecological, historical and perceptual land use indicators. For Cocean and David (2014), the evaluation cannot overlook the highlighting of structural-functional characteristics of cultural landscapes, including the tourist one, such as: intensity of change, deviation from the standard, productivity, incidence of risks (vulnerability) etc.

Although the phrase "tourist landscape" was first used in 1978 (Ferraio, quoted by Skowronek, 2018), research has primarily focused on assessing the assets and strengths of its components, such as the attractive resources and existing infrastructures, due to their role in generating development opportunities. Significantly less attention has been given to the negative aspects, weaknesses and dysfunctions represented by structural and functional risks and vulnerabilities. Thus, in terms of the quantitative evaluation of tourist resources, several attempts had been made by developing mathematical formulas (Șandru, 1972; Ciangă, 1998) or by assigning standardized indicators and weights (Cazés *et al*., 1980). Several other researchers aimed at the attractiveness of certain types of tourist landmarks or spaces by developing analytical models (Goodrich, 1978; Gunn, 1994; Ferraio, 1979, Kalman, 1979 – quoted by Moreau, 2001 etc.). Notably, Kalman's model is the only one that includes the weaknesses of the evaluated tourist attraction in a criterion relating to its "integrity", whereas all other models overlook these aspects. There is also no shortage of approaches relating to the tourist circulation and designing of complex spatial models on the visitor flows (Campbell, 1967; Miossec, 1976; Lundgren, 1982; Pearce, 1993). Several other authors addressed the general tourist potential of various territories (Zimmer *et al*., 1996; Moreau, 2001; Cocean and Pop, 2020). Additionally, aesthetic assessments of landscapes and landscape elements have also been proposed (Pellegrini, 1991; Swanwick, 2002). In this context, Tangerini and Soguel (2004) provided a holistic quantitative evaluation that involves a physical evaluation of the landscape as an object with an anthropocentric evaluation of the landscape as a subject.

By conducting a holistic diagnosis and identifying a "stressed state" of the tourist landscape, highlighted by "the use of general metrics to gauge landscape degradation", Vlami *et al.* (2019) propose a Landscape Assessment Protocol (LAP) consisting of 15 metrics (indicators) designed to accurately capture its qualitative features: structural, visual, acoustic, olfactory, etc. The authors point out that degradation phenomena can reduce the weight of certain indicators in the final assessment.

Another method for assessing the overall tourism potential of a territory, proposed by Wozniak *et al.* (2018), considers its intrinsic and service-related characteristics although without quantifying the losses caused by degradation phenomena.

When evaluating degraded landscapes, the focus is on both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of retrograde evolution, a destructive process with significant theoretical and practical implications. Degradation causes any landscape, including tourist landscapes, to lose its distinct "identity", a parameter that some authors (Vos and Meekes, 1999, p. 13) consider essential for future planning and management. Moreover, degradation directly impacts the *genius loci* (Palang *et al*., 2001) by erasing physical traces of the past and casting uncertainty over intangible elements linked to previous stages of development, along with their cultural, mythological, and symbolic significance.

From a practical perspective, degraded landscapes – be they technogenic, agricultural, forestry, residential, touristic, or symbolic – are, through their unpredictable and uncontrolled evolution, "risk and vulnerability areas" (Cocean, Filip and David, 2020). Various attempts have been made to quantify and evaluate their impact on other components of the territorial system. In this regard, Golobic and Breskvar-Zaucer (2010) proposed a scalar model with five levels of impact intensity, as follows: 0 – no impact or negligible impact, 1 – low impact, 2 – medium impact, 3 – high impact, 4 – very high or destructive impact. Notably, these classes align with those related to the proposed assessment grid of degraded tourist landscapes, except for the initial *zero* category. Criado *et al.* (2020) note that the assessment must identify landscape units and then evaluate their intrinsic and extrinsic qualities

alongside their degree of vulnerability. The authors propose five classes of fragility and intervention for protection purposes, the lower ones (I and II) having a reduced negative impact, while the higher classes (IV and V) require diversified protection measures.

Finally, regardless of the applied assessment method, this process precedes the first phase of the "Holling Loop", which involves the *reorganization* of the landscape system after the destabilization inflicted by degradation (Cochrane, 2015).

3. METHODS

The methodology for evaluating degraded tourist landscapes differs to a large extent from the ones applied to general tourist landscapes that are in an optimal, balanced and integrated evolutionary phase. Thus, while in the case of the general tourist landscape, the criteria and indicators used in evaluation are ultimately aimed at estimating its aesthetic value and potential for development, in the case of degraded tourist landscapes, they are primarily intended to highlight the opposite – namely, the degree of worthlessness, abandonment, risk, and vulnerability reached through their regressive evolution. *Observation*, *inventory* and *typology*, serve as the foundation for the evaluation process and have correspondent stages in the analysis (Fig. 1). However, the content of these analytical stages varies, as their objectives differ from those of the initial phase.

Therefore, new indicators were required to quantify the degradation phenomenon, as those used in previous evaluation grids for general landscapes or non-degraded tourist landscapes are not applicable.

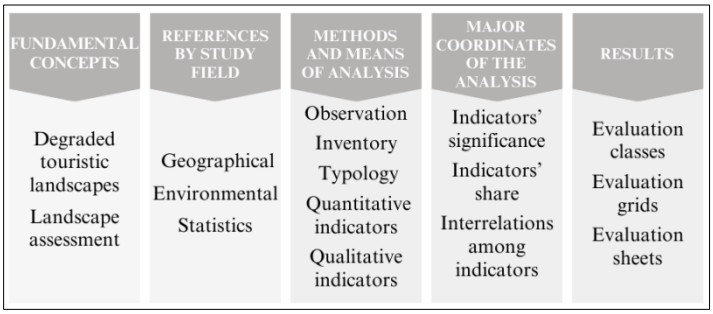

Fig 1 – Stages of the methodological approach.
Source: Gkoltsiou and Terkenli, 2012, modified.

Thus, following a review of the dedicated literature (Swanwick, 2002) and the theoretical clarification of the contrasting distinctions between unaffected and degraded tourist landscapes, the formulation of research objectives followed, starting from the analysis of the major tourist sites (the tourist resorts) and reaching the individualized tourist attractions. The process begins with identifying the main *characteristics* of degraded landscapes (structure, aesthetics, functionality, perception, and sensitivity), as well as the *criteria* through which they are analysed (integrity, stability, enclosure, scale, physiognomy, diversity, colour scheme, socio-economic use, and the pattern it generates). It concludes with the establishment of *indicators* used for their quantitative and qualitative evaluation (level of degradation, degree of enclosure, affected area, number of degraded elements, existing colour range, and types of present patterns).

As observed, the emphasis is placed on key features that immediately stand out upon the evaluator's first visual contact with the landscape, such as the integrity of its physical structures, stability, protection of enclosure, current use and its chromaticity. Their forms of manifestation reflect a gradient of degradation intensity, ranging from the initial stages of deterioration to the most severe and complex hypostasis.

The main goal of the operation consists in the development of a comprehensive evaluation grid of degraded landscapes, along with individualized assessment sheets for each evaluated tourist site.

4. EVALUATION GRIDS FOR DEGRADED TOURIST LANDSCAPES

Degraded tourist landscapes, having distinct structural, aesthetic, and functional features compared to general tourist landscapes, require a quantitative and qualitative evaluation using adapted criteria and indicators. Thus, while for general tourist landscapes the structural criterion focuses on the integrity and cohesion of the constituent elements, in degraded landscapes, the relevant indicators will be the level of degradation and disintegration. Similarly, for the aesthetics' criterion, indicators such as harmony, symmetry, and proportionality will be replaced with those that define the total or partial absence of these attributes. To assess the functionality, the decline of the utilization index will be quantified. For perception, the assessment will measure the progressive decrease in attractiveness, down to its extreme negative value–repulsiveness, while for sensitivity it will record its gradual decline until the point of complete disappearance.

In a logical sequence of the stages of the evaluation process, priority is given to visual perception, sight being the first sensor that comes into operation upon the evaluator's contact with any type of landscape, including the degraded touristic landscape. Thus, through the "findings" it facilitates, the visual evaluation of such a landscape paves the way to the perception of the landscape in other manners as well: by acoustic, olfactory or tactile perception, including, of course, the complex operation, of integral evaluation of the landscape, site or tourist attraction.

Direct evaluations of degraded landscapes are scarce and, even more so, for degraded touristic landscapes. However, a model for the visual evaluation of ordinary, non-degraded landscapes, whose indicators (through antonymization) can be applied in full or selectively to the analysed landscapes was developed by Swanwick (2002). Placing major importance on aesthetic aspects, which have a primary impact on the observer's (tourist's) perception, the author proposes a method for evaluating the general tourist landscape based on ten criteria (scale, enclosure, diversity, texture, form, line, colour, balance, movement, pattern), each having four specific indicators (e.g., in terms of colour, landscapes can be monochrome, muted, colourful, or garish).

Building on the grid proposed by Swanwick (2002), we removed criteria less applicable for evaluating degraded landscapes (texture, line, movement) and introduced new ones (integrity, stability, use), along with a series of previously overlooked considerations (Table 1). Additionally, for certain criteria, the manifestations are entirely different, for example, in terms of colour (chromatics), three states are identified: gloomy, dull, and decayed, while for pattern, the categories include ruined, disorganized, and contrasting.

Table 1

Visual assessment grid for degraded touristic landscapes

Criteria	**Manifestation Forms**		
Scale	Vast	Large	Small
Enclosure	Exposed	Opened (partially)	Enclosed
Integrity	Destructured	Fragmented	Sparse damages
Diversity	Complex	Diverse	Simple
Form	Vertical	Sloping	Horizontal
Stability	Unstable	Vulnerable	Some unstable elements
Use	Abandoned	Preserved	Minimal use
Chromatics	Gloomy	Dull	Decayed
Pattern	In ruins	Disorganized	Contrasting

Source: Swanwick (2002), modified.

The comprehensive evaluation grid for degraded touristic landscapes that we propose consists of five key indicators that highlight the quantitative-qualitative features of the degradation phenomenon while considering its intensity and impact on individual tourist attractions or entire sites. These indicators are: the level of degradation, the number of damaged structural elements, the resulting physiognomic features, the functionality and overall perception of the attraction or site (Table 2). Each indicator is categorized into four levels depending on the intensity of the process they define, ranging from simple/initial manifestations to complex or excessive cases. These levels are assigned scalar quantification weights of 2, 4, 6, and 8, reflecting the progressive intensity of the processes.

Table 2

General assessment grid for degraded tourist landscapes

Level of degradation	**Damaged structural elements**	**Damaged aesthetics values**	**Intensity of use**	**Perceptual impact**	**Level of sensitivity**	**Score**
Excessive	Deeply and broadly damaged structure	Ugly	Not functional / abandoned	Repulsive	**Insensitive**	8
High	Partially damaged structure of most elements	Inaesthetic	Random, occasional use	Discomforting	**Minimal**	6
Medium	Selectively / sparsely damaged structure	Contrasting	Seasonal use	Not agreeable	**Dysregulated**	4
Low / early	Minor damage / visible signs of early damage	Minor changes in aesthetics	Permanent use	Worrisome	**Variable**	2

The level (degree) of degradation represents the key indicator of the evaluation method because it provides the first and most important aspect of the state of the tourist attraction or site, and the intensity of the degradation phenomenon that affects them. It defines the degree of impact on all the fundamental characteristics of the tourist landscape: structure, aesthetics, functionality, perception, and sensitivity. As a result, it has a cumulative connotation, all the other indicators connecting and correlating with it, directly or indirectly, in terms of their perceived effects. It captures the intensity of degradation through the four proposed sub-indicators, each with its own score, namely: excessive (8), high (6), medium (4) and low/early (2).

Acting as a key indicator, the level of degradation can be evaluated from a quantitative-qualitative point of view by defining three classes (A, B, C) using specific indicators (Table 3), namely: the damaged surface (from the whole premises to a localized impact), the number of degraded structural elements (starting from one element to all elements), the intensity of degradation (deep, medium, superficial) and the contrast with the non-degraded tourist landscapes (from striking to detectable).

Table 3

Indicators of the level of degradation

Class	**Quantitative indicators**		**Qualitative indicators**	
	Damaged surface	*Number of degraded structural elements*	*Intensity of degradation*	*Contrast to non-degraded tourist landscapes*
A	Whole premises	All the elements of the touristic unit (*n*)	Deep	Striking
B	Partial impact	Some structural elements	Medium	Discordant
C	Localized impact	One element	Superficial	Detectable

The second indicator, *damaged structural elements*, is intended to highlight the dimension of the destructive process, viewed as undermining the integrity of tourist sites or attractions. Thus, the generalized, profound damage of the physical structure of attractions or elements of tourist infrastructure (with missing component parts) is the most alarming situation, with the highest weight. The lower degrees of damage are those of partially degraded structures, of selectively affected elements and, the lower stage, of the initial process of superficial degradation.

The features described by the two indicators above are directly projected in the *aesthetics* of the tourist site which, closely related to the level of degradation observed, takes on four hypostases, namely: ugly, inaesthetic, contrasting and with minor structural and aesthetic modifications. In turn, the aesthetic features of degraded tourist landscapes, which have an immediate and decisive impact on tourists, are evaluated based on the nine criteria proposed in Table 1, along with their major, medium, and minor forms of manifestation.

For the indicator regarding the *functionality* of analysed elements, the hierarchy captures the most severe situation (non-functionality), followed, gradually, by random, occasional functioning, periodic functioning, and the permanent, subsistence one. This indicator is directly linked to the economic damages caused by the degradation of tourist landscapes.

The manner in which the degraded element is *perceived* by the majority of tourists is another synthetic indicator. In correlation with the intensity of the degradation, the perception is catalogued from repulsive, in the case of sites with excessive degradation, to discomforting, not agreeable and worrisome.

The *sensitivity* is the last indicator of the grid and illustrates the reaction to various degradation factors. Such reactions can appear to be fluctuating across different components and can have a rather erratic manifestation; finally, those landscapes that cannot be degraded further can have a minimal reaction, up to no reaction – insensitivity.

The *practical purpose of the proposed grids* is drafting an evaluation sheet for each attraction, site or tourist landscape in particular that we are analysing in our research project. Once completed, it becomes a clear expression of the state of the landscape or landscape elements, of their degree of physical and aesthetic damage, of the potential impact on tourist demand (through the repulsive, discomforting, unattractive or worrisome perception induced by it). The tourist site of the Băile Băiţa Resort, in the North-West Development Region, was chosen as an example (Table 4), where the degradation phenomenon extended to its entire structure, drastically affecting its functionality and, of course, aesthetics and the tourists' perception.

Table 4

Example of an assessment sheet for the degraded landscape or landscape elements in tourist sites

Indicators	**Touristic site: BĂILE BĂIŢA RESORT**				**Score**
Level of degradation	Excessive	High	Medium	Low / early	
	–	6	–	–	6
Damaged structural elements	All elements	Majority of elements	N – 2 elements	One element	
	8	–	–	–	8
Damaged aesthetics values	Ugly	Inaesthetic	Contrasting	Minor changes in aesthetics	
	–	6	–	–	6
Intensity of use	Not functional Abandoned	Random, occasional use	Seasonal use	Permanent use with minor dysfunctionalities	
	–	6	–	–	6
Perceptual impact	Repulsive	Discomforting	Not agreeable	Worrisome	
	–	6	–	–	6
Level of sensitivity	Insensitive	Minimal	Dysregulated	Variable	
	8	–	–	–	8
				TOTAL	**40**

5. CONCLUSIONS

Degraded tourist landscapes, regardless of their typology – natural or cultural – are the result of a regressive evolution, driven by destructive factors that directly impact the former's attractiveness and potential for economic and social use. Such landscapes have been expanding territorially and undergoing significant typological diversification, due to the action of an increasingly wide range of economic, social, geopolitical and environmental factors. However, these landscapes have yet to be thoroughly researched and evaluated in terms of their intrinsic impact, within their own domain, and their extrinsic effects on adjacent landscapes. The accumulation of negative features in the elements of a degraded tourist landscape leads to the emergence, in the observer's perception, of a feeling of repulsiveness, equivalent to its exclusion from anthropic interest and potential utilization, an exclusion that can extend to other nearby elements.

Through their particular aesthetic, structural and functional features, degraded tourist landscapes bring together, as a unitary whole, the three types of evaluation most commonly encountered in the field, namely: the ecological one, oriented towards quantifying environmental aspects, the economic one, which mainly targets the use value of the landscape and the geographical one, focused on highlighting, by means of indicators, the complex role played by tourist sites in the analysed area (Facchini, 1994). This is because, in the ecological vision, the degraded landscape is regarded as waste that affects the environment and must be removed, in the economic one it is equivalent to a valueless, avoided product, and from a geographical perspective it is perceived as a destabilizing, drifting element of the territorial system.

The *quantitative evaluation* of such landscapes must be oriented towards highlighting their spatial distribution and the numbers or densities of the structures affected by the degradation. This is because the larger and more numerous the areas and structures associated with the affected tourist landscape, the greater and more diverse their negative impact on the environment and their relationship with other, non-degraded landscapes; and vice versa. On the other hand, the *qualitative evaluation* will have as a focal point the intensity of the phenomenon and the impact generated by the contrast between the degraded tourist landscape and the ones unaffected by the respective process.

By quantifying the scores displayed in the evaluation sheet that we have proposed for tourist sites, and by then comparing them, a hierarchy of degraded tourist landscapes or elements of the landscape can result for any given area. Tourism promoters from analysed regions can then use the resulting inventories and hierarchies in spatial planning and territorial governance actions related to tourism development.

We are currently applying this method to analyse degraded tourist landscapes in the resorts of the North-West Development Region, with the goal of creating a comprehensive inventory and hierarchy for the area. From our research, the case study of Băile Băiţa Resort was included in the present paper to exemplify the practical application of this evaluation method, demonstrating how degradation extends beyond mere physical deterioration to influence the overall functionality and appeal of a site. The assessment grid effectively captured the extent of damage, from widespread structural damage to localized aesthetic decline, and correlated it with visitor perception.

Beyond its immediate application, this study contributes to a broader understanding of landscape degradation in tourism research. The methodological approach outlined here provides a replicable framework for assessing other degraded tourist sites, facilitating comparisons across different contexts.

Moreover, our work comes to verify what Skowronek (2018, p. 81) noted: that degraded touristic landscapes represent a "loss of the authentic character and harmony of the place" and, as such, their quantitative-qualitative evaluation is the first step towards their reconstruction.

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