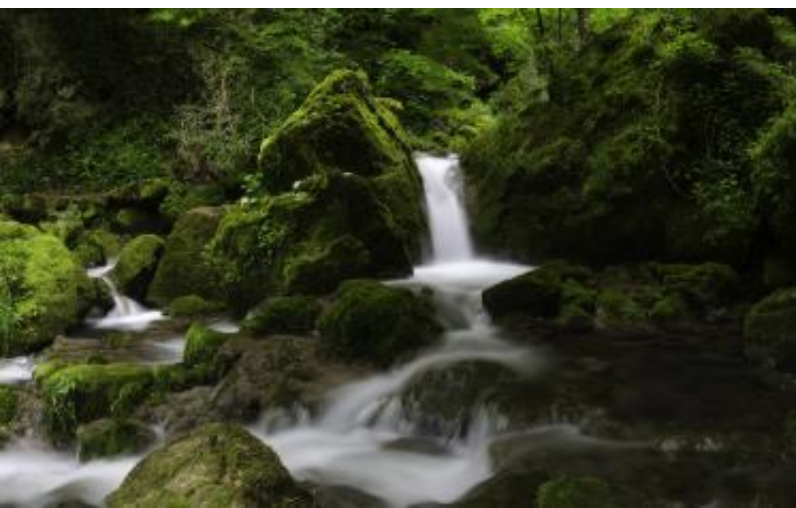


# ESCAPE FROM LOCKDOWN THROUGH THE ECO TRAILS

14th INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE **WOODEMA**



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## Goal of the study

To explore the shift in tourists' attitudes to move away from traditional mass types of tourism to forest-based activities like hiking on trails and footpaths.





# Methodology

- Bulgaria as target market
- 01 March – 10 April 2021
- Distribution through e-mail and social media groups
- Final sample: 203 respondents





# Sample Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Share
<b>Age</b>		
<i>18-30 years</i>	69	34.0
<i>31-40 years</i>	39	19.2
<i>41-50 years</i>	66	32.5
<i>51-60 years</i>	17	8.4
<i>Over 60 years</i>	12	5.9
<b>Gender</b>		
<i>Male</i>	53	26.1
<i>Female</i>	149	73.4
<i>Prefer not to say</i>	1	0.5
<b>Education</b>		
<i>Primary</i>	7	3.4
<i>Secondary</i>	54	26.6
<i>University degree</i>	142	70.0
<b>Marital status</b>		
<i>Single</i>	60	29.6
<i>Married without children</i>	101	49.8
<i>Married with children</i>	25	12.3
<i>Widow/Divorced</i>	17	8.4





## Results and Discussion

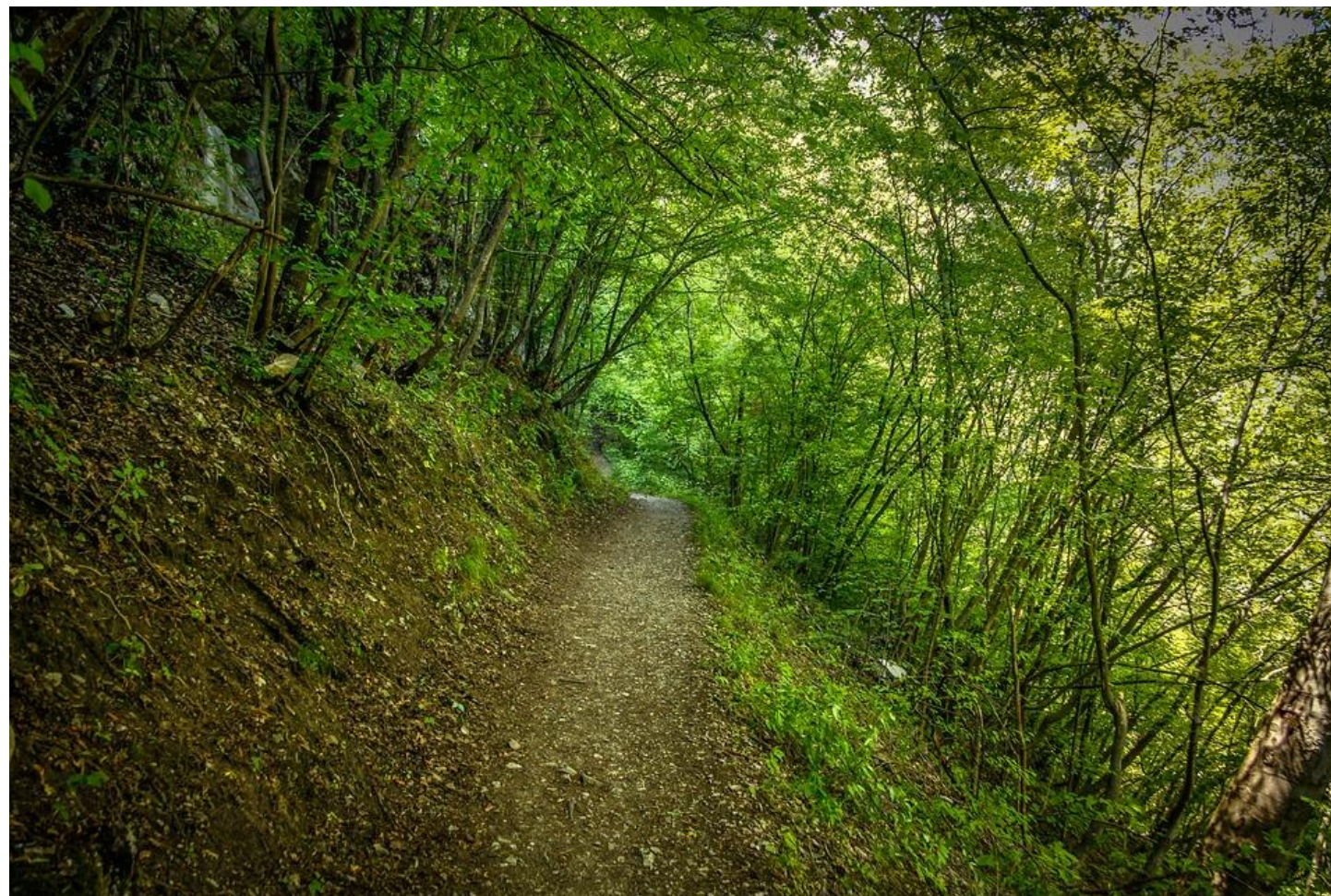


- Although respondents reported having visited eco trails 3-4 times on average ( $M=3.377$ ,  $SD=2.058$ ), still the number of visits in 2020 is very slightly above the number of visits in 2019 ( $M=3.18$ ,  $SD=1.250$ )
- The most cited motives :
  - *Relaxation in nature* ( $M=4.41$ ),
  - *Tranquility and peace* ( $M=4.39$ )
  - *Going outdoors* ( $M=4.13$ )
  - *Keeping physical distance* ( $M=2.78$ )
- The new social importance of outdoor tourism (Buckley and Westaway, 2020) was not unconditionally identified in our study



## Results and Discussion

- Two identified groups, according to the Factor analysis
  - ***Nature-oriented***
  - ***Socially-oriented***
- The two factors explain 36.986% and 22.189% of the variation of respondents' answers





## Eco trails Maintenance

Characteristics of eco-trails – need of maintenance	Mean	Std Deviation
Trail covering	2.94	1.294
Signage and information	3.57	1.156
Marking	3.58	1.120
Itinerary	3.21	1.231
Facilities (e.g. benches, gazebos, bridges, etc.)	3.67	1.136
Cleanliness	3.69	1.209
Safety amenities (e.g. guardrails, etc.)	3.53	1.279
Adaptation of the terrain to facilitate walking	3.06	1.257
Advertising and promotion	3.78	1.336



## Results and Discussion

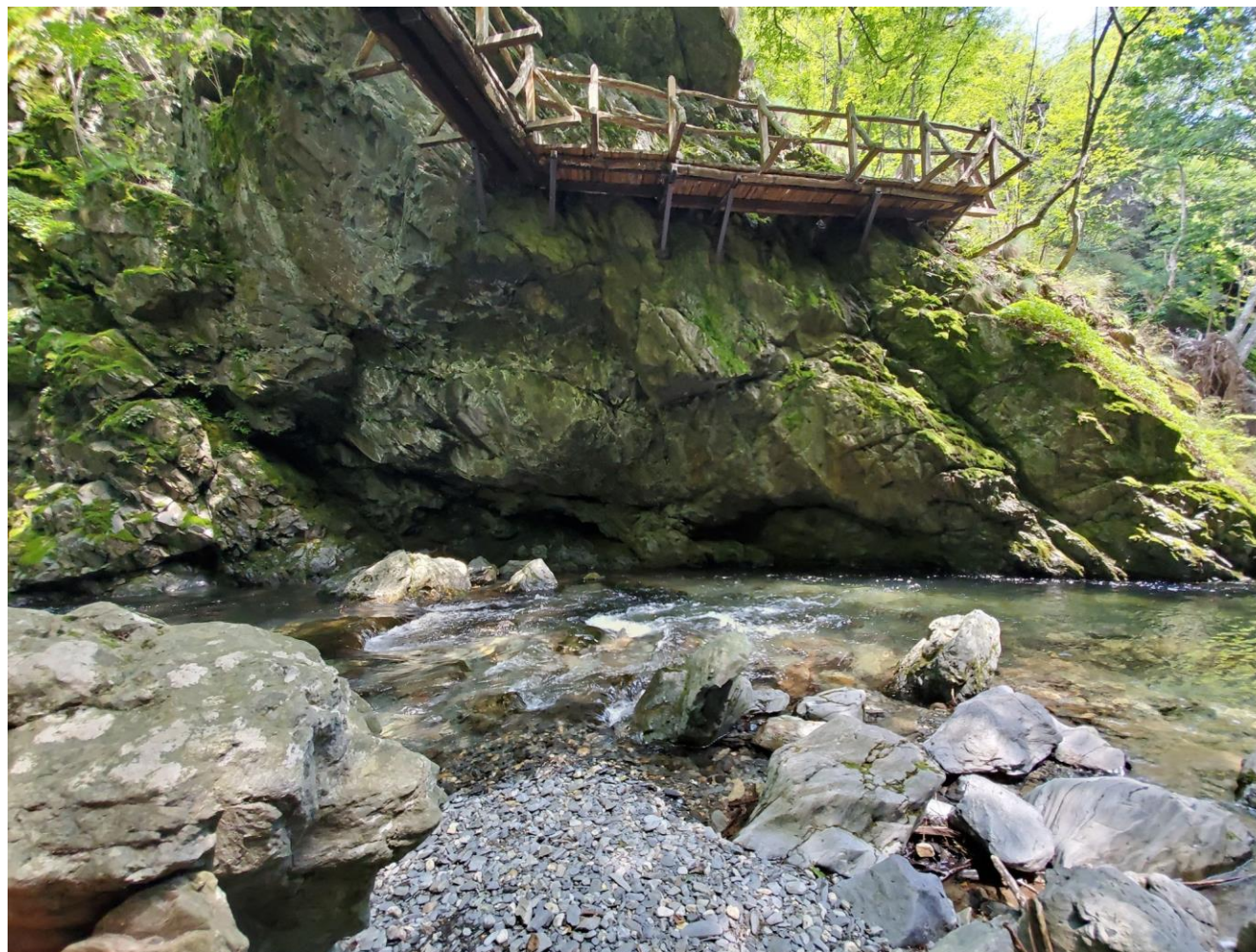


- Respondents are satisfied with the location and routes for hiking, but they rather insist on better popularization, cleanliness and facilities construction
- Respondents realise the importance of proper eco-trails maintenance, and are ready to go hiking more often, provided eco-trails are kept in good condition.



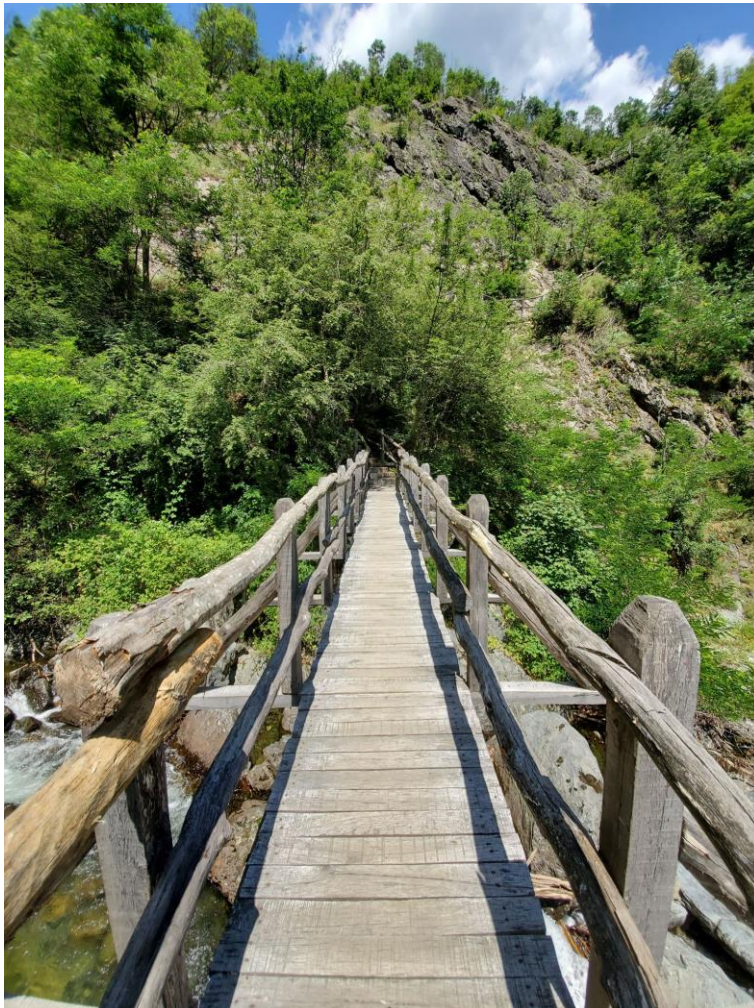
# Implications

- Frequency of hiking has slightly increased but motives remain focused on nature appreciation rather than on overcoming the limits of the pandemics.
- Still, Bulgarian tourists enjoy eco-trails and think their maintenance should be improved.
- A special emphasis is drawn to the need for advertising and promotion of eco-trails, because of their significance for the development of forest-based activities





## Concluding remarks



- COVID-19 changed our lives as well as our attitude towards nature and outdoor activities. Many people used hiking as an escape from the lockdown restrictions and an opportunity to relax yet keeping the compulsory physical distance
- The small sample is the main limitation of this study. Therefore, the main direction for future research is to survey a larger sample, in order to trace any dynamics in respondents' perceptions and to ensure better reliability of the findings.
- In addition, the scope might be enlarged to other outdoor activities, not only eco-trails



# THANK YOU



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