

THE ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN DOBRUDGEA

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Abstract:

The objective of this paper is to highlight the ecotourism potential in Dobrudgea. The research methods used are the inventory-type analysis of the usable resources in ecotourism and the cause-effect explanation of the investigated phenomenon. The analysis of the ecotourism potential of Dobrudgea is based on data and information obtained by bibliographic documentation. The investigation of relations that exist between the environmental and social factors, at local level, makes it possible to define the necessary mechanisms for the sustainable development of ecotourism activities that should contribute to the increase of the number of jobs and of alternative incomes, as well as to the increase of Dobrudgea area attractiveness.

Key words: *ecotourism, natural potential, development strategy, Dobrudgea.*

JEL Classification: L83, R10.

1. Introduction

In the last years, tourism has become one of the socio-economic sectors which registered a major transformation, being a diverse and complex activity. Although the mass tourism remains the predominant form, there emerged preferences for other tourism forms, which are satisfying the need to be close to nature, to exercise outdoors, to explore and to learn new things linked to plants and animals.

Green tourism or nature lover tourism is a relatively recent phenomenon and a segment of the tourism industry which is often referred to rural tourism, agro-tourism and ecotourism, the participation of tourism resources ensuring adequate capitalization while maintaining their ecological integrity. (Andrei et al, 2015)

The touristic activities developed under the aegis of ecotourism are offering to tourism industry, the tourists, authorities and the local people the possibility to cooperate for the organization and development of some responsible journeys into the natural areas unaltered by the anthropic activity, in order to admire the ecological richness, to study, to understand and enjoy both nature and the cultural diversity, in a manner which will take into account the impact upon the environment, in the idea of maintaining the viability in the respective area on an indefinite period of time. (Nistoreanu, 2006)

In Romania, activities with ecotouristic character were developed in the last two decades, when a series of national or natural parks started to develop projects having also an ecotourism component. Among the zones in which ecotourism programs are developed there is also Dobrudgea, historical province from the Romania's South-East extremity, with an area divided in two counties from the administrative point of view: Tulcea and Constanța and made of three geographical units: delta, plateau and sea shore. (Sima, 2016)

In this paper we present some aspects of the development stage of the ecotouristic activities within and around of the natural protected areas in Dobrudgea, as well as a set of proposals to orient the efforts of valorification through ecotourism of these destinations, in concordance with the requirements of the national legislation and the international conventions to which Romania adhered. The research methods are of the inventory-type analysis of resources in Dobrudgean ecotourism. The analysis of it is based on data and information taken from documentation and field visits.

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2. Dobrugea's ecotourism potential

Dobrugea's ecotourism patrimony is evaluated according to the normative acts. The protected natural area is defined as „the terrestrial, aquatic and/or underground zone in which there are wild plants and animals species, biogeographical elements and formations, of landscape, peisagistice, geological, paleonthological, spealean or any other nature, with a special ecological, scientific or cultural value, which has a special protection and preservation regime, established according to the law provisions”. (<http://www.anpm.ro/>)

To ensure the special protection and preservation in situ measures of the goods of the natural patrimony there is installed a differentiated protection, preservation and utilization regime, according the following categories of protected natural areas:

a) of national interest: scientific reservations, national parks, nature's monuments, natural reservations, natural parks;

b) of natural interest: natural sites of the universal natural patrimony, geoparks, humid zones of international importance, biosphere reservations;

c) of community interest or sites *Nature 2000*: Sites of Community Interest (SCI), Special Protection Areas (SPA);

d) of county interest or local interest: settled only on the public/private area of the administrative-territorial units, if it is the case.

In Romania's ensemble, Dobrugea represents an extremely important zone from biogeographical point of view, which determined the concentration of a number of flora and fauna species of conservational interest and also the interference of the floristic species in the Central European, Mediterranean and Asian areas.

The territory of the Tulcea and Constanta, from north to south and from east to west, is characterized by an important number of natural and seminatural habitats with a vast diversity:

- aquatic habitats (sweet water aquatic habitats, salt water habitats, marine and coast habitats),

- terrestrial habitats (forests habitats, stepp pastures and bushes, sylvo-stepp habitats, moors and peatery habitats) and

- subterranean habitats (caves habitats).

The main protected areas in Dobrugea are situated in:

- The *Danube Delta and the lagoon complex Razim-Sinoe*, with a great diversity of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, where there are real opportunities for ecotourism activity;

- The *Măcin Mountains National Park*, situated in the North-West of the county Tulcea, with maximum 467 m (the peak Greci-Țuțuiatul) which is fascinating through its unique geo-morphology and bio-geography;

- The *Romanian Black Sea Coast*, with its specific ecotourism potential represented by Sites of Community Interest, as: sea dunes from Agigea and sea zones from Tuzla, Costinesti, Vama Veche;

- The *Northern Dobrudgean Plateau*, with an ecotourism potential, yet totally un-explored (large forests and a rich hunting fund).

Taking into account the floristic and faunistic importance of the Dobrudgean zone, some of the sites of the European Ecological Network Nature 2000 include in their limits more protected areas of national or local importance.

At present, on the lists of Nature 2000 regarding Dobrugea there is a number of 64 sites, of which 31 are Special Protection Areas (SPA) and 33 are Sites of Community Interest (SCI) (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of Romanian sites Nature 2000, in year 2016

Category of Nature 2000 site	Romania	Dobrudgea	Constanța	Tulcea
Special Protection Areas (SPA)	148	31	22	9
Sites of Community Interest (SCI)	383	32	24	8

Source: Data from the <http://www.anpm.ro/natura-2000/>

The Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation is the protected area with the greatest area in Romania, which has, at present, a triple international status:

- Biosphere Reservation,
- Ramsar site (humid zone of international importance) and
- site of the World Natural and Cultural Patrimony.

The Macinului Mountains National Park is a special and unique territory from Europe in which there are protected the ecosystems characteristics for the Pontic-Balkan steppe, the subMediterranean and Balkanic forests, within some hercynic mountains, oldest in Romania and some of the first formed on the Continent.

3. Touristic infrastructure and the ecotourist's profile in the Dobrudgea' area

In Romania, the ecotourism programs have a relatively recent history. The first touristic packages with ecotouristic character emerged around the year 2000, when a series of national or natural parks started to develop projects having also an ecotourism components. (Mihai, 2013)

Within the ecotouristic activities can be included:

- types of adventure activities(for example rafting, canoeing, on horse tourism on pre-established routes, tour skiing, bicycle trips on settled tracks etc.);
- trips / organized journeys with a guide;
- tours for nature observation (flora, fauna);
- experimentation trips for the nature preservation activities;
- trips to the local communities (visits to cultural objectives, visiting the traditional farms, viewing of traditional cultural manifestations, traditional food products consumption, acquisition of nonfood traditional products etc.).

The touristic accommodation structures are representing the most important component of the specific technical material basis, as it responds to one of the fundamental needs of the tourist, that of rest, and bedding. The lack of such organized spaces can be harmful for the environment.

The protected areas do not have a sufficient number of housing units (for example the Macinului Mountains National Park), though, in majority of cases this thing is compensated by the housing units from the very vicinity of the protected areas. The the Forests National Regie Romsilva considers that there are no problems linked to the reception capacity for the visitors by the parks under its administration and that there are enough places for the controlled increase of their number without endangering the environment.

A special role within the touristic infrastructure of the protected areas in Dobrudgea is held by *the visiting centers and information points*. These have an important role in promoting the management objectives of the protected natural area for the awareness of the large public to the measures of preservation of the natural species/habitats in the context of the sustainable management of the natural resources. In general, at present, protected areas in Dobrudgea are weakly equipped from this point of view.

Within the process of touristic valorification of the protected areas a special role is played by *the access specific infrastructure* (roads, paths, ammended tracks). The access inside the park can be realised, in function of the land area's configuration with varied means, including: walking, private vehicles, boats, small ships and bicycles.

In the category of "ecotourist" can enter also a person who, while the so-journ in a touristic resort buys an ecotouristic program for one day within a national park nearby, even if the activities developed in nature occupy only a small part of his so-journ. But, there not be considered ecotouristic activities the activities which, although are developed in nature, have an obvious negative impact upon thr natural or socio-cultural environment (for example the off-road activities).

The studies made showed that those interested for a real experience in ecotourism are demanding, generally, more than the average of the classical tourists. As result ecotourism is destined, mainly to the tourists with a medium or high incomes' level, with a culture oriented towards nature's knowledge, who are tending to practice a healthy way of living, in order to remake his health and vitality, any tourist needs a better and better quality of the environment in which he chose to spend his holidays: fresh air, unpolluted waters and placesnice landscapes, etc.

Also, tourists have started to appreciate more and more the so-journs in places in which the natural resources are protected in an institutionalized manner, but this is yet an adiacent point of interest and does not constitute a concern of the majority of tourists.

At present, as long as there is no taxation system for the tourists at the parks' entrance, there is no evidence of the visitors' number, this being only estimated. According to the data of the National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism Bucharest, until now, in the Dobrudgean protected areas there were realized systematic actions for monitoring and registration of the visitors only in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation and in the National Park Macinului Mountains.

In the Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation, at level of 2008 year, were housed (including in municipality of Tulcea) 96,090 tourists of whom 82% were Romanian tourists and 18% foreign tourists, and among the foreign ones 29.8% are German, 9.6% Italiens, 8.0% Spanish, 7.3% French 6.9% Austrian, 38.4% are of other nationalities; 70.5% are housed in hotels, and 60.4% choose a unit classified at three stars with an average so-journ duration of 1.8 days (both for Romanians and for the foreigners);

In the National Park Macinului Mountains approximately 10,000 de visitors are majority Romanians from the zones near the Park (the local communities or the municipalities of Brăila, Galați, Tulcea, Constanța), with an average duration of the sojourn as for one day (and a minimum economic impact upon the local communities); the main visitors groups are local people in the localities near the park (for a picnic), bird-watchers, rovers in small groups (2-10 persons), organized groups of 20-40 persons who ask for a guide from the park's administration, cycling tourists, climbers, families with caravans and personal cars.

Although the estimated number of visitors within the natural and national parks is high enough, we must have in view that only a small part of them has as motivation the ecotourism's practicing.

4. Factors with implication potential in the Romanian ecotourism development

There are a multitude of actors involved in the development of ecotourism in Romania. Some of them play a role more important than others, but each brings a special contribution in the development of ecotourism.

Key actors involved in the development of ecotourism in can be classified as follows:

- governmental institutions,

- local public administrations,
- administrations of the protected areas,
- members of the private touristic sector,
- nongovernmental organizations,
- local communities,
- financiers,
- university environment,
- tourists.

According to the data of the Romanian Ecotourism Association and the National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism Bucharest, the economic impact produced by the ecotourism programs developed by the tourism operators – members of REA is in an obvious increase. But what is remarkable is the fact that the impact at local level is much over the average of the classical tourism. In the case of the REA members, around 80-90% of the expenses made by tourists are remaining in the zone of the development area of the touristic program, mainly in the rural zone.

The development of ecotouristic activities within the local communities and within the protected areas implies the following socio-economic advantages:

- it generates the emergence of jobs on local plan (directly in the touristic sector or in the connex sectors);
- it stimulates the local economy through infrastructure development and of touristic services (accommodation services, food transport, leisure facilities, crafts products and guidance services, souvenirs;
- it stimulates rural economy through the creation or increase of the demand for agricultural products necessary to ensure the touristic services;
- it gives impulse to infrastructure development, fact which brings benefits also to the local population;
- it stimulates the development of the peripheric regions through capital insertia;
- it stimulates the improvement of the intercultural relationships specific to an ethnographic region, and the host community is thus stimulated to revigorate the folk traditions;
- in the conditions of a normal development, tourism can lead to the self-financing of the development mechanisms of which could benefit the administrators of the protected areas as an instrument for their preservation;
- it supports the preservation activities, by convincing the Governments and the public of the importance of the natural areas.

The management plan of a protected area is the official document for establishing the objectives of it and the management measures which must be enterprised for an efficient, responsible managing of the respective zones. Smaranda This is synthesizing the information existent at the date of the plan making, establishes the major fields and the management objectives, as well as an action plan over a certain time horizon, as a rule of five yars.

The management plan is at the basis of the protected area's activity and is constituted as a reference document for the planning of all the short and medium term activities linked to it for all owners/administrators of lands and all wishing to initiat and develop activities on their territory.

The main management objectives of the plan are grouped by the following themes:

- Bio-diversity preservation;
- Land utilization and utilization of natural resources;
- Preservation and promotion of cultural inheritance;
- Tourism and leisure management;

- Educatio and awareness;
- Park's management;
- Other activities specific to each park.

Another specially useful instrument in the touristic management of the protected areas is *the management plan of the visitors*. This one is directing the proper type of visitor to the proper zone in the park or its vicinity, creating the best oppoprunities for the fulfillment of the experience imagined by the visitor, to spend the leisure time in nature, producing a minimum negative impact upon nature and local communities and creating the best chances for local ecological businesses' development in the tourism sphere.

When we speak about *the financing sources of the ecotourism activity*, we must have in view both the financing capacity of the entities administrating the protected areas, and the possible financing sources of the other involved stakeholders. In the last years, approximately 85% of the financial funds at the disposal of the parks are coming from state sources, but not from the state budget, 12% from different projects and only 3% from own incomes (from access tariffs, sponsorships, trips with guides, housing etc.).

At present and for the next period there are many financing alternatives at hand of the administrations of the protected areas, of local authorities inside or near the protected areas, the economic agents involved in the ecotourism activity and of the NGO-s developing activities in the ecotourism field or environmental protection. We can distinguish the structural funds, one of the instruments with the help of which it is implemented the solidarity and cohesion policy of the EU.

The main operational programs with financing possibilities in the ecotourism activities are:

- The Sectoral Operational Programme for Environment, Priority Axis 4 "Implementation of the adequate systems of environmental protection management" co-financed from European Regional Development Fund (ERDF);
- The Regional Operational Programme ORP – Axis 5 The sustainable development and promotion of tourism co-financed from European Regional Development Fund (ERDF);
- The National Programme for Rural Development – financed/ co-financed from European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).
- The Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development will be co-financed through the European Social Fund (ESF) and will have in view the human resources formation and development.
- The Sectoral Operational Programme for Economic Competitiveness Increase – co-financed from European Regional Development Fund (ERDF);
- INTERREG IVC Programme, co-financed through European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Of this Program will benefit the public authorities and the public equivalent organisms, as partners in the common projects with the other participant states.

Among the investments there are projects regarding biodiversity preservation, protected natural areas administration, education and public awareness for environmental protection.

6. Conclusions

Dobrudgea represents an important zone from biogeographical point of view, with valuable ecosystems in scientific reservations, natural reservations, national parks, natural parks and the economic impact produced by the ecotourism programs developed is in an obvious increase.

The main protected areas in Dobrudgea are situated in:

- The Danube Delta and the lagoon complex Razim-Sinoe;
- The Măcin Mountains National Park;
- The Romanian Black Sea Coast;

- The Dobrugea's Plateau.

The Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation has, at present, a triple international status:

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Ecotourism in Dobrugea is yet a narrow segment of the touristic market, confronted with many problems as:

- the weak cooperation at local level,
- the modest promotion at national and international level,
- existence of a limited supply, weakly diversified,
- the weak development of the infrastructure specific for ecotourism at the level of protected areas,
- labour force migration,
- the reduced training level of those employed in this field etc.

There are a multitude of factors involved in the ecotourism development in Dobrugea. Some of them are playing a more important role than the others, but each brings his special contribution in ecotourism development.

In the present economic conditions, the great majority of tourists (even the wealthier ones), are concerned about the price of touristic services. Tourists have become very attentive to their expenses, the prices of touristic services being the main variable in the consumers' choices.

In majority of the protected areas in Dobrugea there were created networks of touristic routes, in majority homologated or on the way to be homologated. Most of the routes are for camping, but there were settled also cycling routes or on the water routes (in the parks settled in humid zones).

In the Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation, with an old tradition in tourism, there developed along the time also different other variants of access inside it, respectively transport by boats and different size ships.

Though, it is estimated that the internal accessibility in the natural and national parks is reduced (routes in bad conditions) but it should be improved (not so quantitatively, but qualitatively), taking into account the preservation needs, the needs for local development and the quality of touristic experience.

Once acknowledged the importance of this sector for the protection and preservation of the natural and cultural patrimony, for the economic and social development of the local communities in the natural rural zones and for the increase of the touristic experience, all efforts should be made for the efficient valorification of the rich patrimony our country is owning.

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