

Recent Trends in Tourism Activity in Dobrudja Region

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Abstract

Dobrudja, a region with ancient references (Dacia Pontica) is located in the South-East part of Romania, which comprises the Black Sea Coast and the Danube Delta, belonging to Tulcea and Constanța counties. The particularity and uniqueness of Dobrudja lie both in the vicinity of the Black Sea, the Danube Delta (a biosphere reserve under the UNESCO patrimony since 1991) and in the archaeological discoveries that prove the existence of ancestors on these lands. Due to these strengths of the region, Dobrudja is one of the most important and favorite tourist regions of our country, the tourist motivation being famous and unique. The aim of the paper is to analyze the influence of the attractions in Dobrudja Region on the tendencies of tourism development in this region. The analysis emphasizes the role of the identified attractions as vectors for the development of tourism in Dobrudja.

Key words: Dobrudja Region, tourist attractions, tourism

J.E.L. classification: Z30; Z32

1. Introduction

Dobrudja was the meeting, coexisting and twinning place for Romanians everywhere. The reigns of the voivodes Mircea cel Bătrân/Mircea the Elder and Ștefan cel Mare/Stephen the Great wrote history on the banks of the Danube and on the Black Sea coasts.

Until near the end of the 3rd century AD, the Romans named the current Dobrudja, Scythia Pontica. This land was part of Lower Moesia, and under Diocletian of the Dioecesis Thraciae/Dioecese of Thrace, it was known as Scythia Minor.

When he took over the territories of Dobrudja (1386-1418) Mircea the Elder added to his titles "Terrarum Dobroticii Despotus et Tristri Dominus". The province across the Danube, known as Dobrudja, was part of Wallachia during the reign of Mircea the Elder. Among his many titles, Mircea the Elder also had the title: "ruler of both banks along the Danube up to the Ocean (the Black Sea) and of the city of Silistra".

According to the historians' presentation of the region, it seems that Dobrudja was the first province in the country to enter, ever since the 7th century BC, the course of history as the oldest cradle of the Romanian people. The importance of the region is also proved by the attack of emperor Trajan on the citadel of Dobrudja, during the war to conquer the Dacians.

As Constantin Brătescu wrote in 1928, in the book "Dobrudja, 50 Years of Romanian Life", "without the mountain range and without the maritime facade, any political formation in the lower Danube is crippled", hence the great significance of Dobrudja for Romania.

Today, people are appreciating more and more spending their leisure time traveling and visiting new places that satisfy their need for recreation, rest and health improvement. Through its components, the plateaux - the former Hercynian mountains, the depressions, the gorges - the Gorges of Dobrudja, the coastline - the Black Sea coast, the delta - the Danube Delta, the large areas - the plains, the deserted places, Dobrudja is a tourist destination worth considering. The development and value growth of tourism activities in Dobrudja region are closely linked to

improving these resources and the development of the necessary infrastructure for tourists in order to become a point of interest. Moreover, the growth of tourism activities in this unique region, in terms of tourist resources, must be part of well-founded programs and strategies.

2. Theoretical background

Considering the uniqueness and complexity of the region's elements of attraction, Dobrudja is perfectly represented by the definition given to tourism by E. Guyer-Freuler, who, in 1905, stated that "tourism, in the modern meaning of this word, is a phenomenon of our times, which is based on the increased necessity of recovering our health and changing the environment, cultivating our sensitivity to nature's beauty".

Professor Edmond Picard, in an article titled "Travel industry", considers tourism ... "the range of its organs and its functioning, not only from the travelers' point of view, of the traveler himself, but mainly from the perspective of the values they carry with them and of the wealthy ones who, in the visited countries, directly or indirectly benefit from the expenses that travelers make to satisfy their needs for knowledge or pleasure"(Baretje, R., Defert, P, 1972).

The following trends in tourism development have been identified:

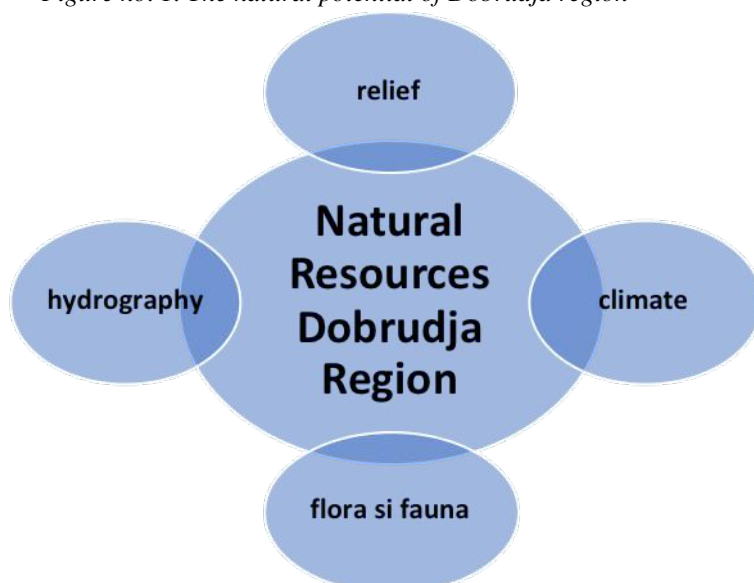
- Niche tourism;
- Diversifying the identity of the tourist objectives;
- Development of cultural and historical tourism (CINAQ, 2015).

The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as being conceived for the "management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems".

3. The uniqueness and celebrity status of the tourist attractions in Dobrudja region

The existing tourism resources in Dobrudja region make up a complex, diversified tourism product, with a great potential for contributing to the satisfaction of the needs and reasons for travel. That is precisely why, for this region, tourism can represent an economic activity with a strong potential for growth and job creation. The tourist resources are composed of the natural and anthropic, material and immaterial heritage of the area, of the built, economic or symbolic capital of the region summarized in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

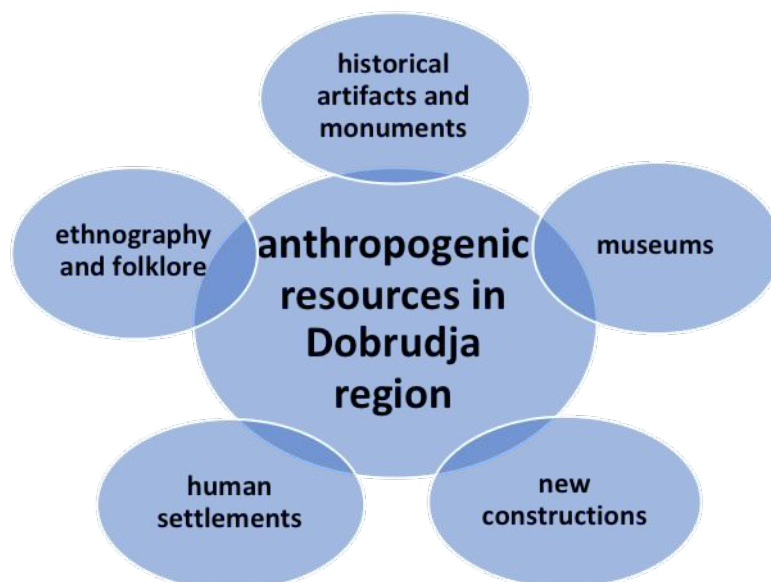
Figure no. 1. The natural potential of Dobrudja region



Source: Adapted after Minciu (2001, p. 161)

The relief of the region is special due to the uniqueness of some of its components, such as the Danube Delta and the Black Sea coast. Also, further attractions for the visitors are the Dobrudja Plateau, the Măcin Mountains, Limanu Cave. The hydrographic heritage made up of the Black Sea and the Danube Delta is the main vector in attracting tourists. The "Danube Delta" Biosphere Reserve, Letea Forest, the wildest wetland on the European continent and the only delta in the world declared a biosphere reserve, represent a true natural museum of biodiversity, with an area of 3446 km².

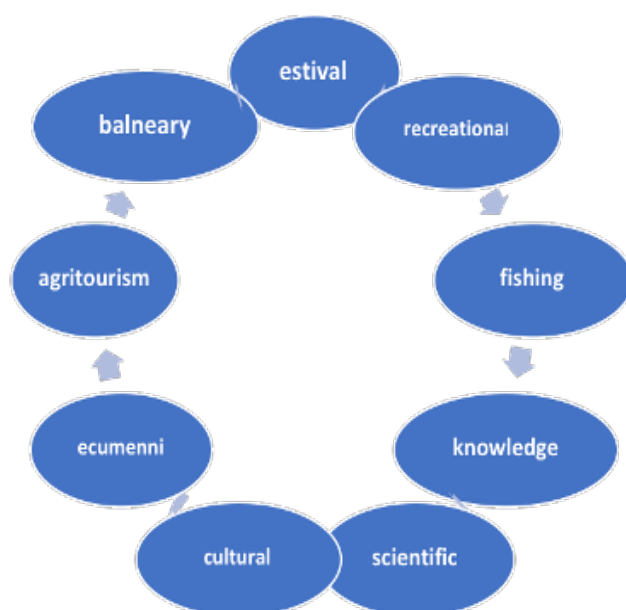
Figure no. 2. The anthropic potential of Dobrudja Region



Source: Adapted after: Tulcea County Council (2014)

As the tourist attractions encountered in this region are so complex and diverse, the main types of tourism that can be practiced in the context of current tourism trends are:

Figure no. 3. Main types of tourism practiced in Dobrudja region

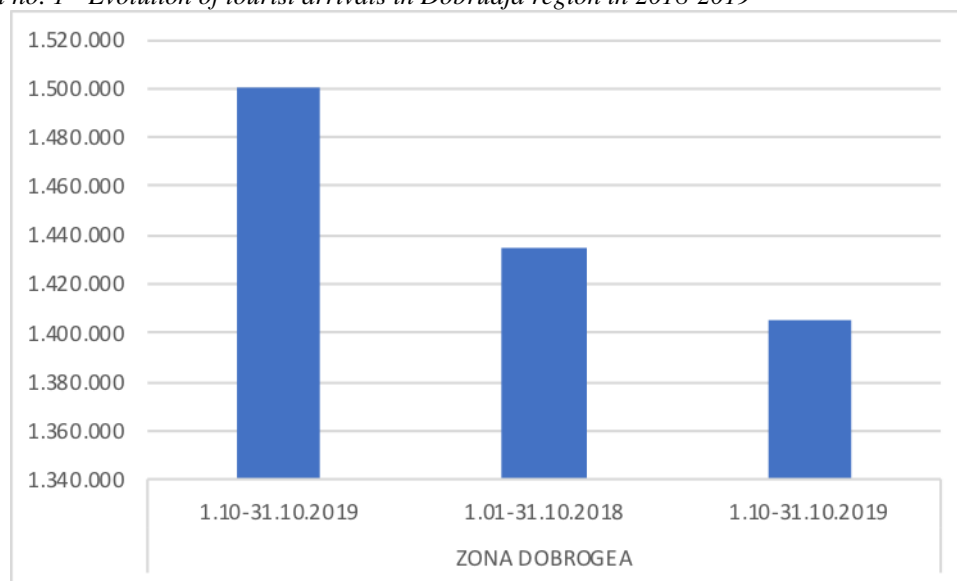


Source: Adapted after: Dobrogea Turistica, Cultural-Tourist Guide (2004)

4. Dobrudja region in statistics

The National Institute of Statistics reported record figures related to the increase in the number of tourists in 2018 and 2019. The statistical data show that during January-October 2018, 161,290 tourists were lodged in Tulcea County, compared to 91,020 in the first ten months of the previous year, representing an increase of 77%. Moreover, the growth trend continued in the following year, thus, the number of accommodations in the January-October 2019 period reached 161,657. The data published by the National Institute of Statistics show, for Constanța, during January-October 2018, 1,312,418 arrivals of tourists and 1,339,217 arrivals for the same period of the year 2019.

Chart no. 1 - Evolution of tourist arrivals in Dobrudja region in 2018-2019



Source: National Institute of Statistics, *Tempo Online* database

The statistical data conclude that Dobrudja region experienced a 4.5% increase in the number of arrivals for the January-October 2018-2019 period.

"The increase in the number of tourists happened as a result of the marketing campaigns at national and international level, undertaken by the Danube Delta Tourist Management Association, in cooperation with the business environment and county and local authorities"(Cătălin Țibuleac). The Danube Delta Tourist Management Association (AMDTDD) also recognizes the role played by local craftsmen, tour guides, folkloric ensembles and some NGOs in the growth recorded by Dobrudja region.

Among the identified factors which contributed to the increased number of arrivals in the Danube Delta was the change of vision in terms of its promotion and the construction of an integrated tourism product, based on multiculturalism, traditions, crafts, gastronomy, biodiversity.

Dobrudja region is today the most important summer destination in Romania. There are plans and initiatives to reposition the region as a favorite destination for tourism throughout the year. Currently, the season does not, in fact, exceed 2-3 months.

Every year, Dobrudja region is visited by over half a million tourists and manages over 1.5 million overnight stays in tourist accommodation structures. These flows generate and sustain annual incomes of approx. 1.7 billion euros for the local economy, with expenses in trade, services and other related fields.

5. Directions identified for capitalizing the resources of Dobrudja region

Each of the attractions listed above, inexhaustible resources in a world of exhaustible resources, must become a vector for increasing the number of tourists interested in the uniqueness and diversity of this region. Even though, as we have previously pointed out, the statistics show a

steady increase of tourists in this region, the maximum potential is far from being reached, which is why the state and local administrations' measures and preoccupations for increasing the number of visitors need to be maintained and increased. By maintaining the increasing tendencies of the number of tourists, this region can become a means of protecting, preserving and exploiting the historical and cultural potential that it possesses. Some of the territories hosting tourist attractions are poorly developed from an economic point of view. By promoting and attracting tourists to these areas, the tourist objectives can become reliable sources of income for the locals, especially in the rural areas.

The assessments regarding the future positive evolution of the region are also based on a little exploited potential at national and European level. There is potential for developing the destination in the off-season for event and city-break urban tourism. Thus, a first direction identified would materialize in encouraging the extension of the tourist season in the area.

The second direction identified is the development of marketing programs for a better administration and promotion of these tourist destinations. This could be achieved by creating a DOBRUDJA INFO POINT as part of an EU-funded project.

We consider that a third direction is the continuation of the efforts to add as many airline flights as possible to the Danube Delta International Airport. The tourists who land in Tulcea have at their disposal the river or road infrastructure in order to benefit from any of the types of tourism provided by the attractions of the region.

A fourth identified direction is the interest of local elected officials in developing regional policies that would lead to the improvement in economic development disparities, employment rate, urbanization and environment. Also, research of the aspects related to the content of tourist services, their dynamics, the adaptation of tourist services to the new conditions regarding the improvement of the organizational structures.

Last but not least, the gradual modernization and innovation of the tourism product and of the integrated tourist offer (accommodation, meal, transport, leisure), in a planned and coordinated framework, at high standards, according to tourist indicators and demand.

6. Conclusions

The tourism potential of Dobrudja should be a priority for our country since this region accumulates different forms of relief, from the Danube Delta to the Dobrudja mountains, archaeological artifacts and the Black Sea resorts.

Dobrudja region has a great potential for delivering a complex tourism product, considering the consistent resources, in particular the historical objectives, the material and immaterial heritage, the coagulation of a diverse, mosaic and spectacular ethnic and cultural region (in terms of customs, gastronomy, artistic manifestations, etc.), an active and increasingly involved community, the power and dynamism of the local economy.

The growth tendency in visitors' numbers stimulates the vision of transforming Dobrudja region into a quality tourist destination, based on its natural and cultural heritage, gastronomy, specific customs and traditions, but also on the presence of ancient ruins.

With a superior capitalization and growth in the number of visitors, the region can become a means of protecting, preserving and highlighting its historical and cultural potential. Among these measures, the following stand out: the extension of the tourist season, the creation of a DOBRUDJA INFO POINT, an improved use of the Danube Delta International Airport.

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