The Romanian Ports on the Danube Valley - An Emergent Tourism Destination

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Summary. Economic, political and military axis, the Danube is ‘one of our ethnic parts of the territory’ (after Benea, 2009, p.23). The Romanian Danube Valley lies on 38% of the total length of the River and has two important tourism sectors: Delta and the Iron Gate Gorge which are suitable for cruises, water sports and ecotourism development. This study is aimed to evaluate the level at which the Romanian towns-port are suitable for tourism and, at the same time, in what extent they can be touristic point of view put in value. The evaluation of tourism potential is made based on bonitation method used by PATN and Ministry of Agriculture for natural and man - made resources, on the demographic characteristics of urban population, on the tourism demand and offer. The results are revealing a concentration of the tourism heritage in two sectors and in several hotspots which overlap with towns, monasteries or fortresses, fact proving, once more, the opportunity to create ‘sophisticated’ tourism products on the entire Romanian Danube sector.

Key words: tourism destination, marketing planning destination, tourism heritage, Danube Valley, ports
1 Introduction

Should the Bucovina and Maramureș monasteries and the Transilvania Fortresses are well known on the international tourism market, Romania is and must be continuously promoted, especially in Europe by it’s two big natural elements (or, in a better way, ‘microdestinations’), the Carpathian Mountains and the Danube River, this latter, mainly by its Delta, are representing ‘the most valuable part which Natura has given to our country’, (Benea, 2009, p.19).

As a matter of facts, as the Danube Delta, as tourism destination, can be extended from Sulina upstream to Băziș (along with are 115 villages and 20 cities), many of the local developing strategies for the respective communities, may be based on tourism objectives, as well.

To meet the requirements of spatial development as European country, the Romanian Government issued the National Territory Arrangement Plan (NTAP), having a guiding character, but comprising the developing directions and priorities on the Romanian territory, included in long run sectorial strategic programs (www.mdr1.ro). In this respect, the VIII session of NTAP offers the framework for tourism development, envisages analyses being made by specialists, so in the protected areas, starting with The Iron Gate Natural Park, Balta Mica of Brăila Natural Park, Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, as for many of the sites included in 2000 Nature Network.

Along with these documents a number of scientific papers are centered on evaluating the tourism potential, travel accessibility, characteristics of the communities in tourist destinations.

Due to the landscape value and to activities of preserving and protecting the environment, the Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation and Iron Gate Natural Park, especially, have constituted themselves as scientific research subjects. Thus, the Danube Delta was studied by hydrologists (Găștescu & Știucă, 2008, Vespermeana, 2000), geographers (Romanescu, 1995, Timotin & Glavan, 1999, 2001), elements of branding, supporting tourism image studied by specialists in tourism marketing (Stânciucu et al., 2011) etc., while the gorge sector formed the basis for certain tourism analyses (Dumbraveanu, 2004, Albulet, 1982) hydrology (Trufaș, 1982), geomorphology (Cvijic,1908, Popescu, 1966), or environment (Manea, 2003, Matei 2004) etc. But all over 1075 km of the river length are suitable for tourism? Local authorities’ projects or research reveal that water sports, fishing and cruises can be developed between Băziș and Sulina and the 20 towns ports can be adapted for tourist ships berthing. So, the present study tries to underline the spreading of tourism heritage and extracts, the main parameters for the 20 Danube’s towns – ports, such they are: the viability of their population, the characteristics of tourist flows and tourism offers.

2 Methods, data and tools

In order to evaluate the possibilities to develop the entire Danube Valley, we focused on defining the potential for tourism and on the methods to calculate it.

The tourism potential concept and its evaluation raised many debates in Romanian geographical literature. Thus, Ielenicz & Comănescu (2006), Cianga (2008) define it as a sum of tourist natural and man-made resources, as components of tourism heritage. But the potential itself, doesn’t work without tourism infrastructure and accessibility seen by transport system development, political, social and economic state (Iatu & Muntele, 2006).

An extreme challenge for tourism studies consists in methods used to count the tourism potential of an area. In ‘România, Potențial Turistic’, Ielenicz proposes a formula based on a scoring scale (by points):

\[ P = dt + n + m + d + s \] (1)

where \( dt \) = all touristic resources, \( n \) = index for international and national touristic points, \( m \) = index for transport accessibility, \( d \) = index of distances from over 100,000 inhabitants settlements, \( s \) = index of specific tourism services.

Government studies developed by National Institute for Tourism Research, Ministry of Agriculture or Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism (NTAP), use the same way to evaluate by scoring (bonitation), taking into consideration the natural components, cultural tourism resources, tourism infrastructure, technical support of tourism.

Using these data, two comparative maps were drawn-up to present the tourism potential of the Danube Valley settlements (fig.1). In order to obtain veridical results, we correlated indicators related to the dynamic of population, tourism demand and offer with the tourism heritage, in the case of the 20 towns and cities served by ports berthing facilities.

Data used in this paper were collected from Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, Ministry of Agriculture, NIS, interrogation of Google engine search and processed in Excel© and the maps were made in Corel Draw14©.
3 Results
The tourism potential of the Danube River and its power are unanimously recognized to be an impulse to the local economies. However, studies conducted by government institutions demonstrate that the Romanian Danube Valley has two areas of high tourism potential (one overlies the Danube Gorge, and the other the Delta sector); beside these, there are three other sites with good attractiveness: the southwest of Dobrogea, the area situated between Ialomiţa and Brăila Pools and the Brăila-Galaţi sector (fig.1.).

However, having in mind that the economic use of the tourism heritage is related to several factors such they are: developing policies, investments volume, the accessibility to the tourism resources in the Danube corridor, the viability of population and, of course, mainly the tourism attractiveness, seen as tourism demand; they must be correlated and coordinated in the National Spatial Plan, which creates the framework to implement a coherent programs for local and sustainable development. Moreover, this is enforced by the existence of a legal system in terms of tourism, environment, transport, agriculture in general and the encouragement of the investment in tourism, particularly. Thus, local funds, European structural funds, private resources can be found in tourism infrastructure and, subsequently, in the purchase of urban facilities: water, sewer, gas network etc.

The watershed characteristics allow circulation of big ships in the river downstream of Braila and smaller ones upstream of it. In this context, given the presence of about 135 settlements and ports with different specializations, the easy, cheap and sustainable means of access to those is the river itself. Enlargement and modernization of existing ports for berthing ships by developing tourism facilities and developing programs for visiting the sights located on the Danube come in line with many of the development strategies of local communities.

The power of human capital is important and consists of almost 1.3 million people who live nearby the Danube River. The great part of population belongs to urban environment (82%) and few to rural area (18%). Demographically, high concentration is favoured by water transport means, which polarize some economic activities in Galaţi-Braila urban system, followed by Drobeta Turnu Severin - Orşova. Although, the population dynamic registered a downward trend in 18 of the 20 urban Danubian

Fig.1 The Romania’s Danube Valley. Tourism potential of coastal settlements
towns, caused by negative natural balance, but also by the migration of the population, especially of workers towards Western Europe, a tourism development could revive economic growth and the demographic default (table 1).

Urban population dynamic problems are related to high levels of mortality, due to an aged population, and departure of youth towards big Romanian cities or to Europe as well. The pattern of high decrease of population is specific both to recent urban settlements (Dăbuleni) or mono-industrial centers specialized in mining activity (Moldova Nouă) or industry (Turnu Măgurele).

Although the structures are distributed almost throughout the area, with some nuclei concentration still existing, the tourism offer expressed by the number of seats in tourism accommodation structures, in 2008, for all Danubian Romanian ports, represents only 5943 beds (NIS, 2009), while the tourism demand, for the same year, amounted to 284,846 beds, out of which, most of them are found in Galaţi (20%) and Tulcea (20%).

Table 1. Population balance of the Romanian Danube towns (‰), (2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Port</th>
<th>BR</th>
<th>DR</th>
<th>NB</th>
<th>MR</th>
<th>TB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moldova Nouă</td>
<td>9.49</td>
<td>10.69</td>
<td>-1.20</td>
<td>-12.6</td>
<td>-13.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orșova</td>
<td>7.77</td>
<td>10.56</td>
<td>-2.80</td>
<td>-10.25</td>
<td>-13.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drobeta Tr. Severin</td>
<td>8.99</td>
<td>8.23</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>-10.74</td>
<td>-9.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calafat</td>
<td>8.47</td>
<td>11.23</td>
<td>-2.77</td>
<td>-9.24</td>
<td>-12.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bechet</td>
<td>14.45</td>
<td>11.15</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>-10.65</td>
<td>-7.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dăbuleni</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>17.72</td>
<td>-11.66</td>
<td>-4.45</td>
<td>-16.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corabia</td>
<td>8.35</td>
<td>11.86</td>
<td>-3.51</td>
<td>-11.20</td>
<td>-14.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tr. Măgurele</td>
<td>8.05</td>
<td>12.41</td>
<td>-4.35</td>
<td>-15.21</td>
<td>-19.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimnicea</td>
<td>8.95</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>-5.33</td>
<td>-2.24</td>
<td>-7.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giurgiu</td>
<td>8.99</td>
<td>10.52</td>
<td>-1.53</td>
<td>-6.54</td>
<td>-8.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oltenița</td>
<td>10.50</td>
<td>11.34</td>
<td>-0.84</td>
<td>-5.52</td>
<td>-6.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Călărași</td>
<td>11.46</td>
<td>9.42</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>-6.23</td>
<td>-4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cernavoda</td>
<td>10.01</td>
<td>8.88</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>-1.56</td>
<td>-0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fetești</td>
<td>11.84</td>
<td>10.42</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>-5.88</td>
<td>-4.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hârșova</td>
<td>14.64</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>-4.78</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brăila</td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td>10.93</td>
<td>-3.49</td>
<td>-4.18</td>
<td>-7.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galați</td>
<td>8.34</td>
<td>8.51</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>-4.73</td>
<td>-4.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaccea</td>
<td>11.62</td>
<td>12.74</td>
<td>-1.12</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulcea</td>
<td>9.04</td>
<td>7.93</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>-8.56</td>
<td>-7.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulina</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>12.09</td>
<td>-6.05</td>
<td>-10.30</td>
<td>-16.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures can not be correlated with the tourist flow on the Danube, but rather with the business tourism and scientific travels. Average length of stay is 1.96 days, with more expansion for tourists arriving in the Delta (over 4 days) and Danube Gorge by 2.6 days. At the same time, taking into account the border position of certain ports, the statistic data referring to the tourists in transit is proving the important role those ports are playing in the tourist trips. Thus, of all the 20 cities and towns, only 16 have border crossing points; 1,193,781 tourists have transited in 2010, out of which 94% arrivals and 6% departures. Through the Danube frontier carries about 15% of all trips in Romania, which Bulgaria has the largest share with 13%. The point with the greatest ratio is Giurgiu, since the present road and rail bridge facilitates the departure to Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece as well. However the transit by water intake is very low. Of the total entering the country at the Danube border, 50% of arrivals and 2% of departures to and from Romania were by water, which means that from this point of view, the Danube is accessed more by foreign tourists than by domestic (fig.2). The most important ports are Giurgiu, Sulina, Drobeta Turnu Severin and then Zimnicea, Oltenita, Orșova.

Survey of cruises on the Danube is still uncertain. According to data provided by the media every year there are about 400 ships involved in travel cruises on the Danube, ensuring the movement of over 140,000 tourists (www.gandul.info).

Table 2. Top tour-operators and cruise ships on the Romanian Danube River

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tour-operator/Cruise ship</th>
<th>Package ship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Tour</td>
<td>Beautiful Blue Danube Passau-Danube Delta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure Tour</td>
<td>Danube Gorge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Moldavi</td>
<td>Passau- Danube Delta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avalon Waterways</td>
<td>Oltenita-Budapesta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GG Gociman</td>
<td>Danube Delta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flamingo-Orșova</td>
<td>Danube Gorge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dierna</td>
<td>Danube Gorge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pânzarul Moldovenesc</td>
<td>Galati-Black sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hercules Tour</td>
<td>Danube Gorge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johan Strauss</td>
<td>Amsterdam-Sulina</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Google.com accessed on 12 August 2011

Sulina town hall statistics show that yearly about 65,000 tourists arrive aboard of ships to this port (www.primaria-sulina.ro). Extrapolation of these data with those of the Ministry of Spatial Development and Tourism,
except for business, scientific and educational tourism, in cruises on the Danube foreigners are mostly implied.

The Google.com search engine query of tourist packages by travel agencies on the Danube, in Romania, shows that there are offers from several local operators: Orșova, Drobeta Turnu-Severin, Sulina, Tulcea and Galați, (Table 2).

Cruise packages appreciated by foreign tourists in Central Europe by water routes are between Germany/ Netherlands/Austria and Sulina, with stopovers in Vienna or/and Budapest etc., as tour operators sell them.

The data given shows that in these packages, the Romanian Danube ports are not included in, main stops being for Bucharest, Tulcea and seldom in Braila and Galati.

Thus, projects aiming to building a Danube-Bucharest canal imposes stringently, but also organizing and promoting small ports, where tourists can practice specific activities (fishing, hunting etc.) can meet the local traditions (commemorations, churches’ patronage, towns’ days, Epiphany ritual, wine tasting in Calafat, Ostrov, Northern Dobrogea etc.), are of interest.

Fig. 2 The tourists’ transit characteristics on the Danube’s border.

Conclusions

Although the Danube disposes of a great tourism potential, both its areas being suitable to practice almost all forms of tourism, appreciated on the international tourism market (from cultural tourism, spa, mountain, leisure and recreation, rural, hunting and fishing, up to scientific tourism), its significance, tourism point of view, is undersized. This is due, inter alia, to the following aspects:

- syncope development and variable degree of dependence of towns-ports on the ‘opportunities that the Danube offers’, (Baltălungă, 2008, p 79);
- while the Danube is accessed mainly by foreign cruise ships (hence the international tourists), domestic operators are focusing on deltaic or gorge sectors;
- not all Romanian ports are included as stop points, being necessary ‘partnership strategies’ for the purposes of coupling the doublets settlements.
(Giurgiu-Ruse, Calafat-Vidin, Nikopol-Turnu-Măgurele, Galați-Reni) in trans-boundary projects with Bulgaria (Matei, 2008), Serbia and Ukraine, which certainly would increase the power of attraction for each partner;

- a lesser promotion than of the other microdestinations, both by Romanian agencies involved in (travel agents and tour operators are focusing more on outgoing than on the incoming) and the Tourism Ministry.

But even this promotion should be coordinated within the frame of a tourism planning, and, at the same time, to naturally result from a good marketing planning based, in other words, on a strategy for the whole Danube Valley.

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Resources
[9] Matei, Elena, Sustainable development scenarios of small towns on the Romanian Danube Corridor, border to Bulgaria, Conference volume, Faculty of Geology and Geography, University of Sofia “St. Kliment Ohridski”, 2008