

CAPITALIZATION OF TOURISM RESOURCES IN OLTENIA (ROMANIA)

VALORIFICAREA RESURSELOR TURISTICE ÎN OLTENIA (ROMÂNIA)

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Abstract: Oltenia Region has a varied natural landscape displaying all major landforms. The classical tourist offer can be thus completed by introducing the spatial evolution of the territory, by describing the mechanisms of the processes that influenced the placement and further development of different settlements or sites. In this way, tourism acquires, besides a temporal dimension, which used to be prevailing, a spatial dimension, as well, that represents the present tendency in evaluating all the activities by means of eco-compatibility. By integrating these two dimensions in the offer, there can be better evaluated the carrying capacity of the region, the tourist offer leading to the maximization of the tourist activity without surpassing the sustainability limit.

Key-words: geomorphologic patrimony, tourism offer, carrying capacity, Oltenia region.

Cuvinte cheie: patrimoniul geomorfologic, oferta turistică, capacitatea de sustenabilitate, Regiunea Oltenia

1. Introduction

Tourism represents one of the most significant opportunities for sustainable development in Oltenia, a forcefully industrialized region during the communist period. However, present and future investors should clearly understand that they have to establish a strong link between natural potentialities and cultural and historical structures, without ignoring the ecological suitability assessment of landscape. Thus, the fundamental structures, able to support sustainable development, are the ecological structure associated to the natural resources (primary resources) and space and cultural structure (secondary resources) associated to mobility, built space and patrimony (natural and built).

The tourist attractions presently included in the current offer refer to both primary and secondary resources, but in terms of capitalization, secondary resources are better valued than the primary ones. Thus, starting from the rich cultural and historical patrimony and from the potential of the human habitats, we consider tourism operators should develop new tourism forms based on the

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attractiveness of the geomorphologic resources. We do not mean primary resources are not capitalised at all, but tourism has to acquire a spatial dimension besides the temporal dimension, without ignoring the carrying capacity of the environment. The tourism potential of the geomorphologic patrimony is given by its aesthetic, scientific, cultural/historical and social/economic values (Pralong, 2005). Most of the time, the geomorphologic landscape does not have only one such value, due to its complexity. Oltenia region, located in the south-west of Romania, displays a varied and well-proportioned landscape, which increase its tourism capitalization possibilities (Fig. 1). The main landforms of the region are the plain area represented by Oltenia Plain, part of the Romanian Plain, the Getic Piedmont, the Getic Sub-Carpathians, and the mountain area represented by massifs belonging to the Parâng and the Retezat Mountain Groups.

The vertical zonation of the relief according to the lithological structure and to the features of the climatic elements imposes a regionalization of the specific geomorphologic processes. Thus, within the mountain region, the climatic and sculptural forms are modelled by the present geomorphologic processes, which induce a secondary relief. In the Sub-Carpathians, the structural and petrographic landforms are modelled by gravitational and hydric processes in an area marked by tectonic mobility, friability, and high petrographic heterogeneity. The plateau region, which is a monocline structure with fluvial-lacustrine deposits and coal intercalations, displays an alternance of interfluvial surfaces and parallel North-South directed valleys. The plain unit, made up of the Danube's terraces and the piedmont plains, is an assembly with depression features and it is mainly affected by compaction and pipping; another specific element of the unit is the presence of the sand dunes, which tend to be actively modelled by wind in the context of the global climatic changes. The present natural relief modelling, under the direct influence of the external and internal agents, activating on a relief energy comprised between the extreme values of 2,519 meters (Parângul Mare Peak) and about 40 meters (The Danube Valley), as well as the man-induced modelling induced by the utilization of resources (construction rocks, salt, coal, oil, natural gases) is present within all the units and it brings to the formation of new landforms. Consequently, we consider that tourism operators should take into account primary resources, particularly the potential of the glacial and periglacial landforms, which are quite accessible in certain areas, of the karst areas that cover large surfaces of the region or of the sand dunes located near or within the Danube's floodplain. We also suggest the capitalization of the technogene relief, which is well developed within the piedmont area that does not have an increased natural or anthropogenic potential. The areas displaying the highest tourist potential in terms of both primary and secondary offer are represented by the mountain and Sub-Carpathian region, which also dispose of a better infrastructure than the lower regions, namely accommodation facilities and lines of communications. The main identified issues are about the training of tourist operators with regard to the potential of primary resources and to its integration into the classical offer and about adequate promotion activities. Thus, brochures

should include scientific information about the formation and evolution of the landforms, climate, ecological system, etc. There should be also taken into account the placard system, which proved to be extremely efficient in spots without guiding.

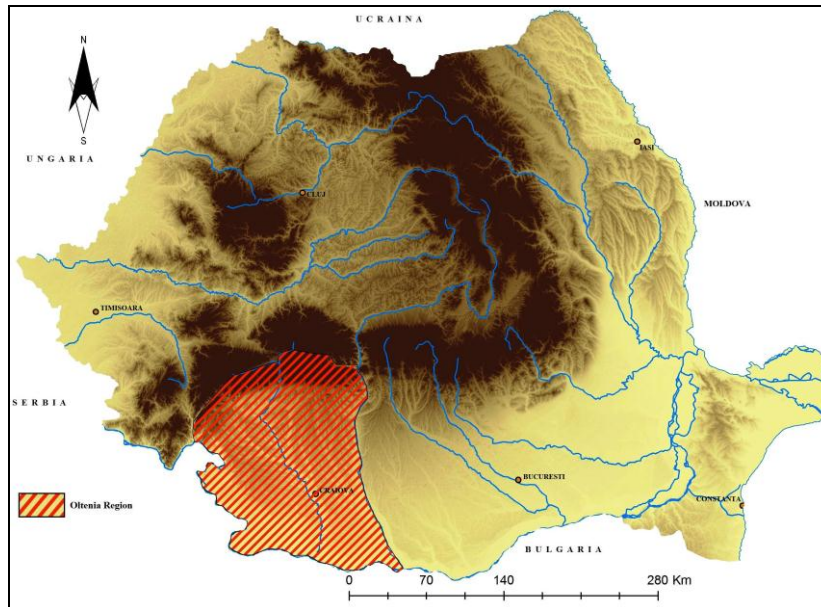


Figure 1. Geographical location of the Oltenia Region within Romania

2. Presently capitalized tourism resources

Oltenia is one of the most complex regions in Romania in terms of tourism potential, referring here to both natural resources and cultural, built patrimony, in other words, the primary and the secondary resources (Fig. 2).

2.1 Secondary resources.

By analysing the present situation of tourism in the area, we understood that using the traditional tourist attractions, which are part of the secondary resources, might represent a good starting point for introducing the geomorphologic patrimony in the offer.

Cultural - historical patrimony. According to the Govern Degree no 68/August 26, 1994, the cultural-historical patrimony includes – archaeological sites and monuments, architectural monuments and assemblies, architecture and urbanism reserves, memorial buildings and monuments, plastic art and commemorative monuments, technical monuments, historical sites, parks and gardens (Cândea, Erdeli & Peptenatu, 2003, p. 227). The region displaying the highest anthropogenic potential is represented by Subcarpathians, where there are numerous settlements famous for their monasteries, old churches, and monuments. Thus, Hurezi settlement represents the greatest assemble of medieval architecture from the former Walachia (Ielenicz & Comănescu, p. 260). Hurez monastery is a

UNESCO monument, built in 1694 by Constantin Brancoveanu, in a unique style named after the great ruler. In its proximity, there are also other old monasteries, such as Cozia, in the Olt Defile (1387, built during Mircea cel Batran reign), Arnota (1636), Dintr-un Lemn Monastery (the 16th century). Lainici Monastery is placed in the Jiu Defile, within an enlargement area and it was built in 1810. Tismana monastery is another important architectonic and cultural monument dating from the 14th century (1375-1378).

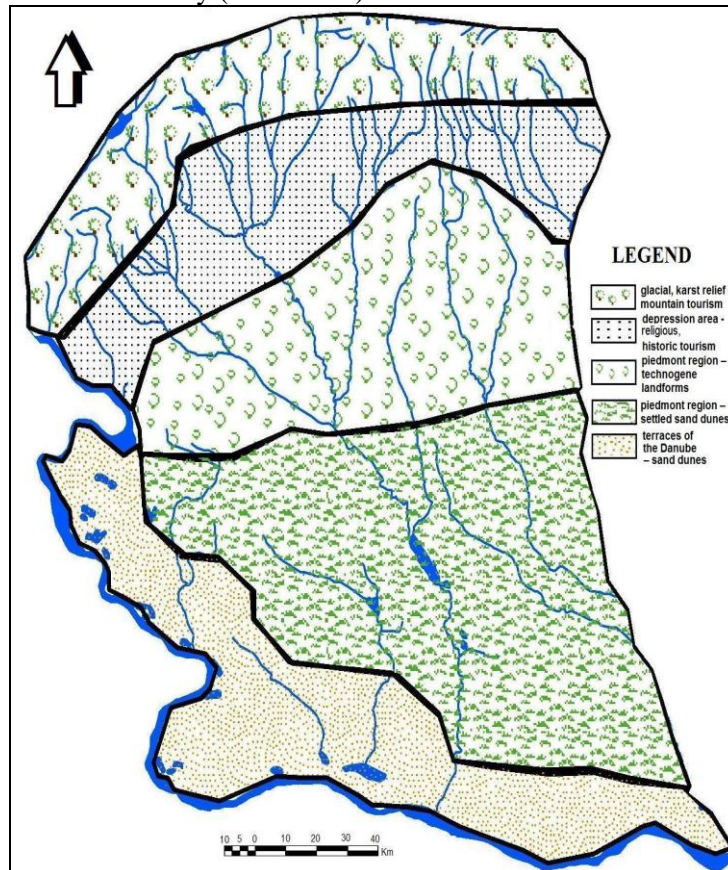


Figure 2. Tourist areas within Oltenia

Then, we mention the main cities of the region, some of them well-known for their ancient monuments that attract quite a large number of tourists. For example, in Tg. Jiu, we find some of Brancusi's most famous works – The Table of Silence, The Alley of Chairs, The Kissing Gate, The Dacian Table and The Endless Column, built by the famous sculptor between 1936 and 1938. Drobeta Turnu-Severin is well known for its Roman and medieval monuments – Traian's bridge (105, built by Apolodor of Damascus), the Roman camp and baths, the medieval fortress (the 13th century), etc. Even if Craiova has ancient roots (the Roman settlement of Pelendava), its monuments date from the 19th-20th centuries. We

mention Sf. Dumitru Church, which was first erected by the end of the 15th century, Obedeanu Monastery built in 1748-1753 (Bobarnac B., 1995, p. 57). As architectonic monuments, there stand out Băniei House erected by the Craiovesti boyars in the 15th -16th centuries and, then rebuilt by Constantin Brâncoveanu in 1699, the Art Museum (1907), which shelters some of Brancusi's works etc. There are other old, but less known religious monuments in many other towns - Slatina – Clocociov Monastery first mentioned in 1512, Râmnicu Vâlcea – Holly Paraschiva church (1554-1557). The south of the region also benefits from some ancient ruins – a Roman settlement at Hinova, a Roman Camp dating from the 4th century at Desa and another one dating from the 2nd-3rd centuries at Bistreț, all along the Danube River, but, unfortunately they are not well capitalized.

Human habitat. Romania is a country where there still are villages that preserve traditions or traditional preoccupations. Thus, Northern Oltenia preserves ethnographic and folkloric elements better than the southern part of the region. We mention Horezu, Peștișani, Glogova, Novaci, Vaideeni, Vlădești, Glodeni, Ponoare, etc. Oltenia is well known for pottery, each center having its own characteristics – Vlădești (Gorj), Șișești (Mehedinți), Oboga (Olt), Horezu (Vâlcea). At Horezu for example, the ceramic objects are usually painted in blue and the most used symbol is the rooster. In fact, an old saying in the region mentions that a good potter must be agile as the rooster, skilful as the snake and patient as the fish. There are also some settlements that display an increased balneoclimateric potential - Călimănești, Căciulata, Olănești, important spas, the springs of which have been used in the treatment of numerous diseases since old times. They are also known for the specific 19th century architecture. We also mention two ski resorts, one on the southern slope of the Parâng Mountains, Râncea, and the other on the northern slope of the same mountains, Parângul Mic, which are presently used mostly by tourists coming from the Oltenia region.

Economic and technological sites. Among the economic objectives, there are presently included in the tourist offer only some dams and the adjacent hydroelectric power plants – Portile de Fier I (Iron Gates) on the Danube River and Lotru Ciunget (on the Lotru Valley). However, unlike the lakes and dams in the western countries that have capitalized not only the energy of the waters, but also the tourism potential, these two sights in Oltenia did not manage to generate important tourist flows.

2.2 Primary resources.

Among the natural elements, the relief plays a vital role for tourism since it supports all tourism activities. The mountains, with numerous glacial, karst, conglomerates forms and landscapes, not to mention the peaks and ridges, has the highest potential of all the relief forms, plains and hills having generally a rather dull landscape. The landscape is a fundamental tourism necessity, because all the publicity is based on images that reflect the typical landscape of a particular area (Muntele, 2000). According to the Spatial Planning of the National Territory elaborated by the Ministry of Regional Development and Housing, the highest potential of the relief is displayed by three of the Oltenia counties – Vâlcea, Gorj,

and Mehedinți, where there are many territorial administrative units considered to have the best natural environment, with a total of ten points out of ten for this criterion.

Among the locations the natural potential is capitalized in a certain degree, we first mention the karst areas - Polovragi and Baia de Fier areas in Gorj county (Polovragi cave, within the Olteț basin and Muierii cave within the Galbenu Valley, the first electrified cave in Romania), Domogled-the Cerna Valley National Park, Piatra Cloșanilor, Corcoaia Gorges, Mount Oslea, Ponoarele area, Topolnița and Epuran caves in Mehedinți. These last two caves are among the most impressive in Romania, but they are protected by law since they were declared natural protected areas and the access of the public is very strict, requiring special approval. The Iron-Gates – the Cerna valley (Mehedinți County) is ranked the first for the value of the tourism potential. There are 20 caves, 6 gorges, over 20 peaks, escarpments and slopes, 11 fossil points, all of them declared natural protected areas. The high mountain area is visited only occasionally by young groups, but there are possibilities for introducing certain areas with glacial and periglacial landforms in the general tourism offers taking into account some aspects related to the present access facilities – accommodation facilities at 1,500-1700 m altitude, forest or sheep roads, favourable climatic conditions in summer, etc.

3. Analysis of the natural tourism potential

After thoroughly analysing the landscape potential of the region, we arrived at the conclusion that there are three main types of landforms the capitalization of which should be taken into account – karst relief, glacial and periglacial landforms, sand dunes and the Danube's floodplain.

3.1 Karst relief

It presents a great tourism potential due to its unique mark on the landscape. Important karst areas are located in Vâlcan Mountains, Mehedinți Mountains and Plateau, Buila Vânturarița Massif, mainly individualized on Jurassic and Cretaceous limestones and secondary on Paleozoic crystalline limestones and dolomites. They form narrow ridges in Cerna and Mehedinți Mountains and large summits in Buila Vânturarița and Piule Iorgovan Massifs. The intense fragmentation and the horizontal and vertical dispersion of limestone masses imposed differences in terms of karst modelling intensity, as well as in terms of resulted karst landforms. There predominates the transition type, intensely to moderately evolved (Posea, Popescu & Ielenicz, 1974, p.387). The vertical zonation of the modelling conditions led to the development of two distinct karst landscapes – the karst landscape characteristic to the summits exceeding 2,000 m altitude, with asymmetrical and barren tops, avens, dolinas, dry valleys; the second landscape is that of the summits located below 2,000 m altitude, which reveals an intense polycyclic Pliocene-Quaternary evolution, with both surface and depth karst forms. This last type, as compared to the first one, is mainly covered by soil and vegetation.

Although it is quite necessary to protect caves and to reduce human impact to the minimum, some of the small caves should be opened for the public, having proper guiding and following very strict regulations. The shallow karst forms are the most representative for the landscape of the low and medium mountains in the north and north-western part of Oltenia. There are large karrens fields, in different stages of evolution, such as those in the Mehedinți Mountains and Plateau (Poiana Mare, Stan Peak, Ponoare), dolinas, the most representative being Crovul Madvedului – the biggest in the country, 170 m deep and 1 km in diameter and Crovul Mare, 150 m deep and 500 m in diameter (Alexandru & al., 1981, p.55), the karstic valleys found throughout the Cerna and Cosustea hydrographic basins, karst springs (Izbucul Cernei, Izbucul Jalesului – protected area). There are also very picturesque gorges, such as Tesna, Corcoaiei, Cosustea, Sohodol and Oltet gorges, and steep escarpments formed on limestones with various levels of difficulty, sought by alpinism club members. The narrow sectors of the valleys greatly add to the tourism value of a particular location because of their spectacular aspect.

3.2 Glacial and periglacial landforms

Parâng represents the most massive mountains of the region (2,519 m maximum altitude). Consequently, glacial and periglacial landforms are well developed. According to the studies, there appear two types of glacial relief: the alpine type (sharp ridges, glacial cirques and valleys – located in the western side of the main summit) and the Carpathian type (characterized by flat and largely waved interfluves, conic peaks with small cirques, mainly located in the east). Within the higher sector of the mountains, there appear relict glacial landforms, and here we mention the associated glacial cirques: Gâlcescu, Găuri, Roșiile, Slăvei, Mohorul (Photos 1, 2) today a complex of lakes located at altitudes of more than 1,800 m. The present radial valleys the head of which is located in these cirques follow the former glacial U-shaped valleys. The striated rocks, ridges, moraines, saddles complete the image of the glacial relief of the area. There are 33 glacial lakes (13.1 ha), among which Tăul fără Fund or Roșiile has the largest surface (3.76 ha) and depth (Pișota, 1971). Gâlcescu is the most complex cirques, as there are located nine lakes (Photo 3).

Presently, crionival processes models the glacial landforms resulting a secondary relief represented by both surface and depth forms. If we take into consideration the slopes of the glacial valleys that evolved during the Holocene mainly due to periglacial processes, as denudation elements, there are periglacial ridges, such as the main summit of the Parâng, developed between the peaks Parângul Mare and Setea Mare. There are also nival karrens, nival ditches (within the interfluve Slivei-Roșiile, Roșiile I and II), 20-30 m long flat nival valleys (west of Roșiile cirque), periglacial niches, nival torrents, etc. As transportation elements, we mention rock fields, block streams, stone polygons, striated soils, small earth steps, earth hummocks, solifluxion forms, slides, etc. As accumulation elements, there were identified cryogenetic knolls resulted from the desegregation of the steep slopes under the direct action of freezing-defreezing process, nivation pro-

talus – located at the foot of the slopes; these are semicircular accumulations made up of side rocks of different dimensions.



Photo 1. Transalpine saddle and Urdele Passage (2,228 m)



**Photo 2. Mohorul glacial cirque
(rock-streams, avalanche tracks, blocks field)**



Photo 3. Gâlcescu and Vidal glacial lakes

3.3 Sand dunes and the Danube's floodplain.

If the aforementioned natural resources are capitalized, even at an extremely reduced scale, the south of the region, represented by the floodplain of the Danube and its sand dunes, is almost unknown even at national level. There appear two distinct sectors – a strip along the Danube River, between Ostrovu Corbului and Corabia (about 200 km long and 3 to 30 km wide) and a strip located on the left of the Jiu River, north of Craiova to its confluence with the Danube. These areas cover the floodplain and terraces of the Danube (about 250,000 ha) and they are mainly sands formed in situ, while the sands from Leu-Rotunda Plain resulted from the subjacent Levantine formations (Coteț, 1957). The characteristic sand landforms are the longitudinal dunes, directed NW-SE (due to the predominant winds in the warm season), and other smaller dunes of the barchans type. Within the Danube Floodplain, the dunes display an irregular shape and they are not settled; as we get farther from the riverbed, on the terraces and on the left of the Jiu, the sand dunes get larger and larger, they are flatter and settled by vegetation. The length of the dunes varies between 3 and 4 km, the height between 1 and 15 m, while the width of the interdunes depressions oscillate between 20 and 800 m (Geografia României, 1983, p. 347).

Mobility of sands from southern Oltenia underwent a strong reactivation starting with the second half of the 18th century because of oak forest clearings and excessive grazing. The phenomenon increased in intensity after 1850, when the dunes moved with about 150 m/year, affecting Desa, Ciuperceni, Nedeea, Bistreț settlements (Tufescu, 1966).

3.4 Technogene relief

Although the term of technogene relief is not frequently used in the Romanian literature in the field, Oltenia region, especially its piedmont area, was subject to an intense industrialization during the communist period. Thus, there are some large coal fields – Motru, Rovinari, where natural landforms were totally modified, resulting a secondary type of relief represented by waste dumps and open pits. Surface exploitations suppose the excavation of the natural surface, namely the industrial activities transformed positive landforms into negative landforms. Consequently, they altered the natural geomorphologic system and led to the development of a new system characteristic to the coal exploitation terraces. The excavated material is mainly deposited along local valleys, which are thus filled up to the level of the interfluves, modifying the natural drainage system and alluvia carrying capacity. The second possibility is to deposit the resulted material within certain naturally concave slopes, but, in many cases, the slope stability threshold is surpassed and there occur spectacular landslides that often affect human settlements (e.g. Roşia de Amaradia – Alunu – Berbeşti coal field).

4. Results and discussions

The management, planning and development of tourism destinations is a complex action, involving more ‘interested parties’, numerous objectives and different timescales to be harmonized (Howie, 2003). The central and regional authorities should have a coherent policy for supporting viable tourism, and moreover, for a proper promotion of the region. It is also worth mentioning the possibilities for educational tourism, involving particularly the young generations, study trips becoming ever more popular. Lately, vacations are not only associated with fun, but also with a social achievement or an educational tool (Lohmann, 2004, p. 2). Tourism, as a form of capitalizing the natural environment and the anthropogenic patrimony, transforms the geography of numerous countries, spontaneously or following the decision of the public administration (Derruau, 1999, p. 311). The tourist attraction is generated by some natural or anthropogenic potential, with a permanent or only conjectural action. The natural tourism potential is a fundamental premise for promoting a region and for stimulating the tourists’ flows. It is the fundamental factor that has led to the initiation of tourism capitalization of some components, representing the primary tourism offer from the economic point of view (Cianga, 1997, p. 25).

In order to evaluate and make an hierarchy of the territorial units, the Ministry of Regional Development and Housing, together with specialists from universities and other state institutions, used the tree method. This method is based on criteria and sub-criteria, resulting in a total of maximum 100 points, of which there were given maximum 25 points (natural environment ten points, therapeutic natural factors ten points and natural protected areas five points) for the natural tourism resources. Anthropogenic tourism resources (different historical monuments) acquired a maximum of ten of 25 points. As a conclusion, we may say that administratively speaking, landscape potential is well known, but investments

in promoting it represent the real issue. Publicity is one of the key issues in coining a new tourism destination. Proper media advertising would add to the region's positive image and perception as tourism destination.

From this point of view, Oltenia Region presents a varied tourism offer (landscape, spas, monasteries and churches, archaeological sites, piscicultural facilities, etc.). This classical tourism offer can be completed by introducing certain data about the spatial evolution of the territory, by describing the mechanisms of the processes that influenced the placement and further development of different settlements or sites. It was quite clear from the very beginning that the most increased tourism potential is held by the mountain and sub-Carpathian regions, but the purpose of our investigation was to make a detailed analysis of the present situation, of the way tourism operators understand the value of the ecological structure and if and how they integrate it in their offer. An important starting aspect is infrastructure – accommodation facilities, access roads, shops, etc. Vâlcea County has the greatest number of accommodation units, and, of course of rooms and bed-places, followed by Gorj and Dolj, according to the data supplied by the Ministry of Regional Development and Housing. This means that the forehead mentioned traditional tourism spots benefit from the proper infrastructure, at least from the accommodation point of view.

For a better view of the situation, we applied a ten-question questionnaire to 30 pension, hotel, or motel owners from the entire analysed region (Table no. 1). About 80% of the accommodation facilities are small family pensions (eight-ten rooms, generally double or larger), most of them being located in the mountain or sub-Carpathian area, which are traditional tourism destinations in the region. Consequently, the number of tourists per year oscillates between 150 and 300, the highest number per month being registered in December – February in the mountain region (mainly in ski resorts) or during Christmas – New Year and Easter periods in the sub-Carpathian area (there are numerous monasteries). There are some pensions and hotels, where the guests' number reaches 2,000 per year (Paradis and Tara Pensions from Rânca resort, Hotel Lexi Star from Tismana), but their percentage is extremely low. In the piedmont and plain area, the number of accommodation facilities is reduced, the most important ones being at Calafat and Bechet, near the Danube River, where we cannot speak about a "proper tourism", as the guests are just in transit. Most of the tourists come only for the weekend (about 75%), predominating either families or groups of young people. The main cities supplying tourists in the area are from the region – Craiova, Slatina, Drobeta-Turnu Severin, and from Bucharest. The conclusion is that the region is not known at an international level, promotion activities being quite poor. 'Promotion is the manner in which a company seeks to improve customers' knowledge of the services it sells so that those who are made aware may be turned into actual purchasers' (Page, 2003, p. 256). Without promotion, we can hardly speak of any tourism development.

Taking into account the present economic background, owners are extremely interested in promoting new tourist activities, and we make here direct reference to

the landscape potential, but according to their answers, they make no clear difference between natural and cultural values. Asked about the information tourists require about different 'natural spots', about 40% of them referred to monasteries, churches, monuments, etc., which means they are not informed at all and offer just accommodation; however, there are also some investors who recognize the high quality of geotourism. Thus, at Rânca for example, some pension owners have understood that the glacial and periglacial landforms may represent a potential new tourist attraction and they have already bought some field cars able to reach the area, but they do not have adequate information about the processes involved in the formation and evolution of these landforms. Better-trained and informed staff of the accommodation facilities is a 'must' for quality services on one hand, and for giving the correct information required by tourists, on the other hand. It is also important that they have communication skills in order to be able to give the tourists not only correct and updated information, but also the feeling of comfort and safety.

There are some brochures and guides offered by the County Tourism Agencies, but they do not have much information about the landscape potential. The published papers about the geology and geomorphology of the area are very technical and they are not particularly useful to geotourists. Consequently, the major shortcoming, especially for casual geotourists, is the lack of populist booklets and leaflets dedicated to natural monuments together with a tourist guide to the natural parks. At the same time, placards are one of the most efficient tools in terms of conveying geomorphologic information to tourists in an adequate way. In Oltenia, the placard system is almost absent and we consider this is the best way to promote a hotspot without proper guiding. There are some relevant requirements in terms of information that have to be respected. Placards should contain basic notions regarding the exact location of the tourist spot, the geologic background and evolution, the mechanisms and processes influencing present landforms, climatic and topoclimatic features, river system, type of ecological system, general rules about environment protection, etc.

The content of a placard should depend on the site you promote. For example, in the high mountain region the accent has to be put on geologic background, climate evolution and their influence on the development of present geomorphologic processes, without neglecting ecological aspects – vegetation adaptation to the environment and specific faunistic elements. In mountain areas, it is also extremely important to emphasize the vertical zonation and thus, placards should contain information adequate to each altitudinal level. In karst areas, a short description of the processes leading to the development of surface or depth karst forms would be adequate, as well as some numerical data (e.g. the period necessary for the deposition of one centimetre of a stalagmite) in the attempt of making tourists more aware about the fragility of such areas. In the case of palaeontological sites, it is important to offer the tourist a perspective of the former environment and of the way fossils looked like. In other words, it is about conferring a scientific value to placards and, at the same time, about adapting scientific information to the

tourists' capacity of perception. This is why proper illustration should be added in order to make tourists understand the processes easily.

Thus, by overlapping the areas with increased natural potential and good present infrastructure, we consider that the best perspective for introducing the geomorphologic forms in the tourist offer is registered by the sub-Carpathian region. It is suitable most of all not for the mass tourism, but rather for the independent travels 'seeking in a destination both activities and experiences that are Rewarding, Enriching, Adventurous, and a Learning experience – the REAL tourism' (Howie, 2003, p. 1).

5. Conclusions

The varied landforms and accessible underground features make Oltenia Region ideal for the study of the relationships between geomorphology and tourism, which is the very essence of geotourism, a form that is gaining more and more supporters from the tourists' part. Due to its scenic, scientific, or cultural value, the geomorphologic patrimony within Oltenia is an important tourism resource, poorly managed so far. The region attracts mainly the people of the five component counties, having quite a minor role in the national tourist flows, despite its great natural resources. One of the major causes is the lack of proper promotion, the scarce publicity materials such as posters, flyers, brochures, advertisements, placards, and updated tourism web sites. The knowledge and skills of the operating staff in the hospitality sector for the settlements with the highest tourism potential in the region is also a disregarded aspect. Recently, the need for qualified personnel has increased due to the high number of hotels and other accommodation establishments recently built, all of them requiring trained staff, on the one hand, and to migration, on the other hand.

However, both tourists and tourism operators should not forget the fragility of the major geographical sites such as the karst areas (The Sohodol Gorges and the numerous caves in the area – the Valcan Mountains, the karren field and the natural bridge from Ponoare – the Mehedinti Plateau). Consequently, we strongly believe that tourists should be instructed with regard to the effects their actions may provoke to the environment. In the future, there are also required some measures to restrict the timing and volume of visitor ingress.

Nevertheless, we remain confident that the geomorphologic patrimony within Oltenia is a key point for tourism development. Moreover, since the number of foreign visitors is not significant, Oltenia tourism depends heavily on the domestic demand. The tourism in the region could also benefit from the current economic crisis, when most travellers are forced to cut down the holiday costs, choosing a holiday in the home country. In this way, tourism acquires, besides a temporal dimension, which used to be prevailing, a spatial dimension, as well that represents the present tendency in evaluating all the activities by means of eco-compatibility. By integrating these two dimensions in the offer, there can be better evaluated the carrying capacity of the region, the tourism offer leading to the maximization of the tourism activity without surpassing the sustainability limit.

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