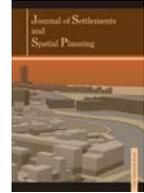




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Premises and Difficulties of Promoting Routes and Tourist Products in the Rural Areas of the Republic of Moldova

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ABSTRACT

In the Republic of Moldova, most tourist routes crossing the rural space will be recovered superficially and inefficiently. A higher degree of recovery is characteristic of routes that begin in Chişinău and have, as final destinations, more valuable touristic objectives, as Orheiul Vechi, Saharna, Hincu monastery and the “Codrii” Reservation, the wine objectives in the suburbs of the capital and in the southern part of the Republic (the Wine Road). This problematic situation is caused not only by insufficient and poor quality of transport, accommodation and leisure tourist infrastructure, but also by inefficient management of tourism business in rural areas. As a result, most of the revenues from visiting rural tourist objectives are transferred to tour operators and budgets of urban centres, but the social and economic situation of recipient rural areas has not improved.

1. INTRODUCTION

About 80% of our tourist resources are concentrated in rural areas, but they are exploited in a superficial and ineffective manner. The main difficulty in promoting rural tourism is the wrong approach to the phenomenon of tourism. Usually, tourism is designed only as visits to natural or anthropic tourist attractions. The promotion of tourist objects and routes, increasing the flow of visitors should be based on the development of tourist business corridors with all the characteristic components for the effective servicing of tourists [1].

In addition, most visitors from countryside are schools and students' groups, which spend little money in the visited rural areas. A lot of valuable touristic objects, which are located in the rural areas, are avoided by good or satisfactory roads and others are missing even driveways. Moreover, the existing road network built during the Soviet period is intended to establish the link between urban and industrial centres and often

passes by valuable tourist attractions, such as landscape reserves: Țâpova, Cosăuți, Rudi-Arionești, Naslavcea “La Castel”, and “Grădina Turcească” [2]. Usually, the promoted attractions are those which can be visited only on good roads. Most natural tourist attractions have no marked paths and trails or marking is insufficient.

Major portions of route are insufficiently equipped with fuel and service stations, motels, hostels, pensions and other accessible locations for parking, food and leisure accommodations, with centres for tourist information and for marketing crafts and local food.

Unlike Romania, Bulgaria and other countries in the region, accommodation in rural areas is much less developed. In most tourism rural areas there are no hotels, tourist pensions, and camping facilities. Most accommodation facilities are represented by camps for children [5], which are not intended for other categories of tourists. Most tourist routes in rural areas are not

functional and are not exploited by the necessary tourism infrastructure. This is a big problem of local rural tourism, because, as a rule, most tourists' arrivals are in accommodation areas, where the catering and leisure centres are.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this study, we analyzed the leverage of national tourist routes developed by the National Tourism Agency and by the accredited national guides. We also proposed five regional tourist routes, established both by the most attractive touristic objectives, by the configuration and status of the road network, and by the location and capacity of accommodation and leisure objectives at the destinations. The main methods used in this study are *the statistic, the analytic, the cartographic, and the analogic, as well as consulting* of authorities for identifying and examining environmental offences. We

used the statistical method widely to process statistical information about tourist flows in the republic as a whole, in tourist areas, and along tourist routes. The analytical method was used to identify the main difficulties in order to develop tourist routes and tourist business corridors and solutions for their optimization.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Tourist routes included in „The Wine Road”

For mobilizing and coordinating tourism flows in the country, travel agencies have developed a system of national tourist routes, seven of which are part of a national program named “The Wine Road” [3].

Tourist wine routes start from the capital city, through all the country's wine regions and include about 20% of wineries, 7% of protected areas, 25% of monasteries, and 16% of museums (table 1).

Table 1. The qualitative structure of tourist routes included in “The Wine Road” Program.

No.	Tourist routes	Wineries	Natural protected areas	Monasteries and churches	Museums, forts, historical monuments	Craft centres	Asphalt road (%)
1	Orheiul Vechi	5	1	10	11	-	100
2	Codrii Moldovei	5	5	7	1	3	90
3	Lăpuşna	5	2	4	5	-	90
4	Stepa Bugeacului	6	3	6	6	-	90
5	Purcari	6	1	6	8	1	95
6	Chişinău-Bălţi	5	8	8	7	2	100
7	Dunărea de Jos	5	2	4	4	2	90
8	Total	36	21	37	40	8	

Source: V. Miron. *Analiza diagnostic a sectorului turistic din Republica Moldova pentru anii 2003-2010.*

The main advantages of tourist routes included in the “Wine Road” are the following: 1) they include a variety of tourist attractions; 2) wineries are profitable tourist business; 3) travel agencies cooperate actively with wineries that are equipped to receive tourists, especially foreigners; 4) to the majority of wineries included in the routes of “The Wine Road” transport infrastructure is in good condition and satisfactory. At the same time, there are numerous disadvantages. Usually, routes are promoted as a trip of several hours, including transportation to a winery and stops short at the most valuable historical monuments on the route. In addition, wineries and tourist agencies cooperate insufficiently with regional, district and local authorities, who see in tourism a priority for development, but a way of promoting their image.

In “The Wine Road” there are about 30 wineries, but only 1/3 of them are open to the public [5], especially underground wineries in Cricova, Mileştii Mici, Brăneşti, Cojusna, the famous wineries in Purcari and in Romaneşti, the modern wine complexes as Chateaux Vartely, and Bostavan. Prices for wine

arranged sightseeing are too high, so they are designed for a narrow spectrum of visitors, as VIPs, foreign delegations, and businessmen. Routes include numerous cultural and natural attractions, but visits do not involve tourists' consuming these tourist products and services. Except for the route “Orheiul Vechi” there are no accommodation and leisure facilities. Estimating tourism potential is based on the cultural and artistic value of objectives and not on the number of visitors and revenues derived.

3.2. Tourist routes elaborated by accredited national guides

In 2009, we celebrated 650 years since the foundation of the Moldovan state had appeared. In the context of holiday activities, local guides developed five national tourist routes [4]. These included a large number of natural objectives and monuments with visits that not involve any expenditure from tourists. They were intended for a narrow category of tourists, a priority for pupils and students. Thus, trips do not

involve consumption of tourist services in the territory, and in some cases, they have a negative effect on the environment. Moreover, they were not regulated by law and tourist objectives with very different historical significance and functionality were promoted: Soviet memorial complexes, monasteries, wineries, ethno-cultural heritage, protected natural areas, etc.

3.3. Tourist routes elaborated by the authors of this paper

In this study, we promoted five tourist routes: 1). Chişinău-Orhei-Rezina; 2). Codrii Moldovei; 3). Nistrul Inferior/The Lower Dniester; 4). Prutul de Mijloc/The Middle Prut; 5) Rezina-Naslavcea. We created these routes taking into account the functions of the most attractive tourist objectives, the main areas generating tourists, the configuration and status of the road network, the location and capacity of accommodation and leisure objectives within destinations.

1). The “Chişinău-Orhei-Rezina” route hosts valuable grouped natural and anthropogenic tourist resources, including underground wineries (Cricova, Brăneşti), cave monasteries (Butuceni, Țipova, Saharna) and grandiose monasteries (Curchi), historical and archaeological sites of the ancient and of the medieval period, caves, gorges, unique landscape, traditions and crafts in wood or stone. In this area there are 15 guesthouses: 12 in Orheiul Vechi, “Hanul lui Hanganu” in Lalova Village, Rezina District, the recreation complex of the wine company Chateaux Vartely in Orhei town, etc.

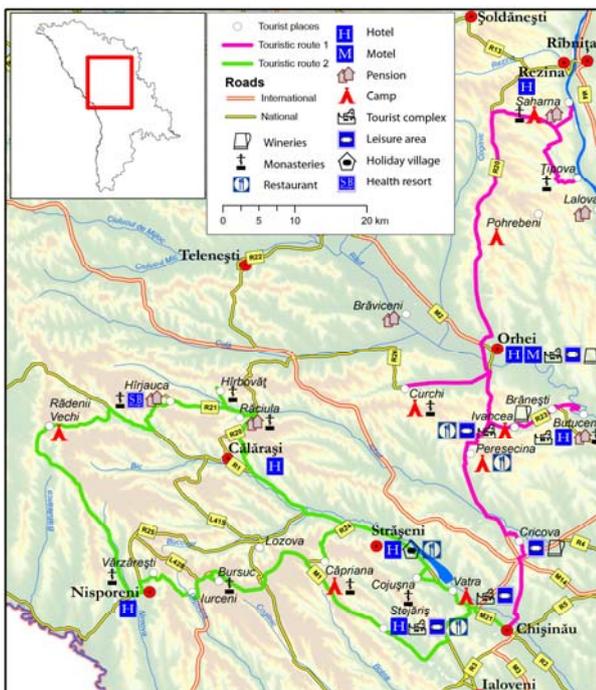


Fig. 1. The “Chişinău-Orhei-Rezina” tourist route.

The most requested tourist area is the natural and cultural complex Orheiul Vechi. It lies in proximity

of Chişinău (40-60 km) and of Orhei towns (20 km). The roads starting from the capital city are good. In addition, it hosts the highest concentration (12) of guesthouses in the country, but with only 60 accommodation places.

At the same time, the main difficulties of this route are the following: a) reduced accessibility (Out of the six ways to access the area, only one is functional – from Chişinău. The others are satisfactory local roads. Accessibility is difficult to Saharna Reservation and to Țipova Landscape Reservation); b) insufficient tourism information; c) deplorable condition of many natural and human tourist objectives; d) lack of water supply systems, sewage systems, and of natural gas supplies, lack of equipment for waste centralized collection and disposal; e) insufficient accommodation and entertainment. Most of the accommodation basis consists of rest camps for children. Only six pensions have official sites and only two are classified and as a result most hostels do not cooperate with travel agencies in order to be promoted; f) insufficient facilities for sports, for children’s playgrounds, for the elderly or for families who prefer a quiet and passive recreation; g) poorly promoted local tourist circuits for sports and cognitive leisure in the area adjacent to touristic pensions; h) authorities and local population is poorly trained in the delivery of tourism products and services; i) underdevelopment of public-private partnership in the field. For the other four routes, these difficulties are more significant.

2). The “Codrii Moldovei” route. It is situated in the proximity of Chişinău and Iaşi and it is crossed by two major highways: Chişinău-Iaşi and Chişinău-Leuşeni. Here are the most valuable monasteries in the country, including Căpřiana, Hâncu, Vărzăreşti, Răciula, Frumoasa, and Hârbovăţ. In this area original are forest landscapes, picturesque lakes and numerous therapeutic mineral springs, traditions and local crafts in wood.

The key problem in promoting this route is acute insufficiency of the accommodation and entertainment units. Most of the accommodation objectives are the rest camps for children. Hotels are located only in the towns of Nisporeni, Călăraşi, and Ungheni. There are only two rural guesthouses – “Casa Mierii” (House of Honey) in the Raciula village and the Museum House “Casa Părintească” (Parents’ House) in the Palanca village, both with small capacity (six beds each). Monasteries are not sufficiently equipped to accommodate pilgrims, except Hâncu Monastery, which has 50 places. Transport infrastructure is insufficient and in a poor condition.

3). The “Nistrul Inferior”/the Lower Dniester route has a favourable geographical position. It is situated in the proximity of urban centres, which generate important tourist flows, as Bender (Tighina), Tiraspol, Slobozia, Căuşeni, Ştefan Voda, and Razdelnaia (Ukraine). At the same time, it has a central

position between the cities of Chişinău and Odessa. Transport infrastructure is accessible and in satisfactory condition. In this area, the most requested tourist objectives are the famous wineries, as Purcari Carahasani, Salcuta, and Popeasca. Purcari Winery offers not only tasting of famous local wine, but it also has a modern and luxurious resort centre. In the Lower Dniester Valley, very spectacular are the original meadow landscapes, including Grădina Turcească (The Turkish Garden) Reservation - one of the first natural protected areas in Europe.



Fig. 2. The Nistrul Inferior/the Lower Dniester tourist route (3).

The most important objectives of religious pilgrimage in this area are the “Noul Neamţ” Monastery in Chiţcani, the “Adormirea Măicii Domnului” half-buried church in Căuşeni town, where they kept the only medieval frescoes in the Republic of Moldova. Among other valuable tourist objectives are Valul lui Traian de Sus (Upper Trajan’s Wall); the House-Museum of the poet A. Mateevici in Zaim village; the “Silver Pheasant” Hunting Resort near the Talmaza village, etc. Tourist flows to this area are small. This is because of the proximity to the conflict on the Dniester area [1], of insufficient accommodation, which includes only 2 camps for children and 2 Luxury accommodation facilities (the 5* “Purcari” Hotel and the 4* “Marion” Guesthouse), which are not accessible to most tourists, and because of the deplorable condition of many natural tourist objectives and because of the local roads [5].

4). The “Prutul de Mijloc”/The Middle Prut route. The most valuable tourist destination in the

Middle Prut Valley is “Pădurea Domnească” (Royal Forest) Scientific Reservation, which has a very rich biodiversity and ecosystem, a high abundance of birds, wild boars, and deer. In its proximity there are extremely valuable tourist attractions, such as “Suta de Movile” (The Hundred Knolls) Landscape Reservation, the Prut Reefs (Sarmatian Reefs) which monumentally rise on the surface near Cobani and Buteşti villages. In spite of these advantages, the tourism exploitation of these unique objectives is slowed down by insufficient development of eco-tourism infrastructure, by the lack or miserable conditions of access roads, by the deficit and mediocre endowment of the accommodation units, by the weak promotion of this tourist offer, by the relatively long distance to major tourist generating areas – Chişinău and Bălţi, that substantially increase tourists’ costs and travel time [2]. Only in “Pădurea Domnească” scientific reserve there are information boards.

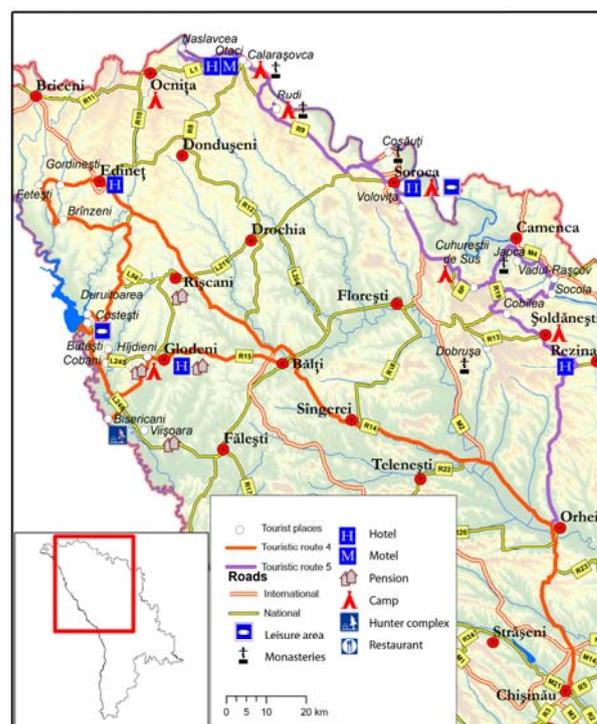


Fig. 3. The “Middle Prut” (4) and “Rezina-Naslavcea” (5) tourist routes.

In this case also, most accommodation capacity is concentrated in cities: Glodeni (1P3*, 1H3*), Râşcani (1P3*), Edineţ (3H). In the rural area there are only four hostels (Hâjdieni, Viişoara, Balatina, and Gordineşti). The resort area of Costeşti-Stânca Lake and the beach of national importance are not enough capitalised.

5). The “Rezina-Naslavcea” route ensures the visiting of numerous and unique natural and anthropogenic tourist objectives, including Sorocea fortress, a landscape reservation, springs, caves and other natural monuments, monasteries, craft centres for manufactured objects made of stone, granite,

sandstone, and wood. Most monasteries have sufficient accommodation places. At the same time, the main accommodation facilities for tourists are concentrated in the urban area of Soroca and of the monasteries. Important sights, such as “Cosăuți”, “Rudi-Arionești”, “Naslavcea”, “Socola”, and “Vadul Rașcov” landscape reserves are bypassed by roads.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1). The promotion of tourist routes and areas should not only focus on advertising objectives, but also on the development of tourist business corridors, on the development of transport infrastructure, of accommodation and entertainment units, on the efficient economic exploitation of local products, on the development of local population’ business skills.

2). It is necessary an adequate marking of roads, of routes and of important sightseeing. The following actions should take place: signalling local tourist pathways with boards, information on restrictions in the area, information plates, maps, and marking accessible routes, stops and sightseeing places.

3). Tourist agencies and responsible authorities must redirect tourist routes according to the road network and location of accommodation and recreational facilities.

4). Accommodating monasteries to pilgrimage tourism through selling religious objects and creating conditions for pilgrims’ longer stay.

5). Development of accessible tourist service facilities, especially those of 1-2* for mass tourism, including villas, hostels, motels, hostels, camping in beautiful natural landscape, traditional food units, sports and recreation, places for tourist stops, secure parking near tourist attractions;

6). Creating business partnerships with local producers of wine, organic food, craft objects, tourism and sports equipment, photo and video reproductions.

7). Creating and arrangement of national parks, especially for Orhei and for the Lower Dniester in order to train entrepreneurs and local population in an efficient exploitation of tourism potential.

8). Construction and modernization of roads to valuable tourist objectives such as to the Vărzărești, to Zloty, to Cosăuți, and to Rudi monasteries, and to “At the Castle”, to Tipova, and to Saharna Landscape Reservations, to “Pădurea Domnească” Scientific Reservation, and to attractive geological and hydrological monuments.

9). The following should develop: fuel and service stations, motels, pensions for parking, food, leisure and accommodation, points for tourist information and marketing of crafts and local food.

10). Authorities should stimulate the development of tourism business in rural areas by providing soft loans, tax exemptions for tourist activities and by simplifying requirements for the classification of tourist facilities with 1* and 2* with accommodation for groups.

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