



Perspectives and Difficulties in the Development of Rural Tourism. National and Zonal Aspects

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Rural tourism is defined by the countryside in which tourism businesses or activities are found. In its broadest sense the villages, landscape, wildlife, community and cultural life, built and natural heritage are all-important assets, which serve to attract visitors - and visitors' revenue - to the countryside. In contemporary times, the countryside continues to form an important tourist destination. Rural tourism is one of many challenged services among the visitors; who enjoys the silence, the charm and the diversity of natural and agricultural landscapes, the cultural heritage of rural communities. Tourism has many potential benefits for rural areas. The most important positive effects of developing rural tourism are the following:

- this activity generates local incomes, employment and growth of welfare;
- rural tourism is a valuable contributor to rural economy;
- tourism can serve as an important source of tax revenues for local jurisdictions;
- developing the auxiliary and alternative activities for rural population (V. Efras, P. Bacal, 2004);
- assists viability of existing tourism and non-tourism business;
- promotes the usage and sale of local food products;
- contributes to local resident amenities and services;
- develops business skills and can give local crafters;
- increasing competition;
- creates sense of pride;
- prevents viable traditional occupations from being displaced;
- contributes to the costs of providing economic and social infrastructure;
- encourages the development of other industrial sectors, helping to stabilize the economic base;
- offers to rural residents business opportunities in activities that cater to the tourist trade;
- attracts inward investments;
- creates new employment opportunities;
- encourages employment opportunities, which keep people in the countryside;
- creates jobs for rural communities, especially for those that are economically underdeveloped;
- incorporating new technologies;
- leads to opportunities for social and cultural exchange;
- promotes information about the experience culture and lifestyles of rural communities;
- takes part in rural activities such as conservation work;
- explores historic identities, interests in heritage;
- ensures that tourism development protects rather than destroys cultural diversity and local community;
- develops tourism that is indigenous to area – avoiding “copy cat” approach;
- promotes unique cultural/heritage features;
- preserves tradition and heritage;

- transmits the cultural and the natural values to the new generations;
- enriches heritage with modern activities;
- tourism can also support local culture in rural areas by encouraging restoration of local and regional historic sites (V. Miron, 2002);
- revitalizes local cultural traditions, events and crafts;
- enhances the role of women;
- promotes information about wildlife and landscapes, interests in the environment;
- fosters awareness of conservation as worthwhile activity;
- contributes to the conservation of environmental and cultural resources;
- provides income for the conservation of buildings and natural environment;
- leads to environmental improvements within the settlements;
- respects the natural diversity of the destination;
- protects the sustainability and the quality of the environment;
- takes steps to monitor carrying capacity as rural tourism develops;
- facilitates a “recharge with energy” of the visitors;
- represents a change from everyday urban life;
- enhances local quality of life.

The countryside is enjoyed through a wide range of activities from traditional country life pursuits such as fishing and shooting, to more passive enjoyment, such as walking or horse riding. Many people value the ability to get away from their daily routine, to relax and revive themselves with the quietness and sense of space, and beauty of natural surroundings. These can only be enjoyed in the countryside and its great popularity brings considerable levels of spending into rural areas, to rural businesses and services. Places where the countryside can be informally enjoyed such as country parks, quiet roads and bridle paths where walking, cycling and horse riding can take place. These are part and parcel of rural tourism by virtue of their location, with each drawing upon the character of their surrounding countryside: its beauty, culture, history, tradition, wildlife and so on. As tourism has evolved, a wide variety of other attractions and activities in the countryside have become the focus of visitor interest:

- peace and quiet, relaxing environment;
- health and fitness concerns, fresh air;
- outdoor recreation such as golf or horse-riding;
- themed leisure attractions such as rare breed centres, wildlife and farm attractions, arboreta, museums, steam railways;
- local food, drink and craft sold at the farm gate, farmers markets, village shop or tourism outlet;
- take part in rural activities such as conservation work;
- activities based on local heritage, such as church trails or visits to nature reservations and forest parks;
- traditional countryside pursuits such as hunting, shooting and fishing have gained a wider level of participation to the extent that they can be considered as tourism;
- local village feasts and country festivals.

Tourism can offer rural residents business opportunities in activities that cater to the tourist trade. Such locally-operated businesses, which may be seasonal, can provide local residents with valuable opportunities to develop business skills and can give local crafters, farmers, and food processors, among others, outlets to sell their products to local retail establishments. Farmers growing fresh products can take advantage of tourism to establish direct marketing channels for ready-to-eat products, which may also serve as outlets for processed foods such as jams, jellies, breads, and preserves.

Because jobs in the tourist industry often do not require advanced training, local residents with few skills can readily work as food servers, retail clerks, and hospitality workers. Moreover, in many places people may already have part-time or seasonal jobs and tourism can help supplement these workers' salaries. For example, many farm labourers and some farmer's only work during part of the year can use another job at a different time of the year to make more money. Part-time tourism jobs may also provide needed income to a parent who needs time off to care for family members. High school-age children may also prefer such jobs since their schedules would not accommodate full-time positions. Hence, part-time and seasonal jobs may make the most sense for important segments of the rural.

Heritage tourism refers to leisure travel that has as its primary purpose the experiencing of places and activities that represent the past. A principal concern of heritage tourism is historical authenticity and long-term sustainability of the element visited. Active local involvement is also a typical key component of successful heritage tourism endeavours.

Ecotourism represents the process of visiting natural areas for the purpose of enjoying interests in the environment, including plant and animal wildlife. Nature-based tourism may be either passive, in which observers tend to be strictly observers of nature, or active (increasingly popular in recent years), where participants take part in outdoor recreation or adventure travel activities. The relationship between tourism and the environment is particularly close in rural areas, which needs sensitive planning and management of both the resource base and the tourism activity. So, tourism can result in positive and negative impacts on the rural economy, environment and society. Rural areas can be sensitive to change through tourism. The most important direction of the development of ecotourism must be the protection of the natural resource and the biodiversity. Natural resources must be used in a sustainable way to create employment and income (I. Panov, 1998). Lastly, ecotourism represents a viable economic development strategy for rural areas with natural resources; even successful ventures require patience for local communities.

Agro-tourism, a well-defined segment of rural tourism, which refers to tourism on the farm, and which enables farmers to diversify their activities while enhancing the value of their product, represents globally a small part of rural tourism (around two percent of the turnover of rural tourism) and of agriculture (0.3 percent of agricultural turnover). However, in some European countries like Austria, France, Italy, and Switzerland the percentage of the farms offering some kind of tourism accommodation are quite remarkable.

Rural tourism ideally should be included in the integrated rural development strategy. A sustainable approach to rural tourism should be based on a multi-faceted view of sustainability to achieve balanced development. Taking into consideration the needs of the community, the viability of the economy and the conservation of the environment should receive the appropriate approach. The benefits of tourism will be most effectively translated at the local level if there are opportunities for local participation and equity. Local people will be encouraged to take ownership and control of tourism and its management.

Negative effects and difficulties:

- encourages dependence on industry prone to uncontrollable change;
- creates part-time, seasonal or low-grade employment;
- incurs development costs and public service costs;
- leads to local land and house price inflation;
- creates a feeling of invasion by tourists;
- generates overcrowding and traffic;
- increases crime;
- reduction in local services, e.g. food shops replaced by gift shops;
- import of new cultural ideas – challenges the existing way of life;
- increases “usage” and destruction of landscape features;
- creates need for new developments which may not in conformity with the local area;
- increases pollution (noise, visual, air, water, litter);
- affects local biodiversity.

Benefits deriving from tourism development must be balanced against potential negative effects. Jobs in the travel and tourism industry are frequently low-paid and seasonal and often offer limited benefits. In some cases, particularly where tourism strategies are ineffectual, local residents may have to pay for tourism marketing and infrastructure through higher taxes. Tourism can also increase demand for land in rural areas, which may inflate real estate prices, potentially putting the cost of housing beyond the reach of the average local resident. This is the case for some amenity-rich tourism destinations (particularly in the West) experiencing growth in recent years stemming from recreation-based activities (Brown, Fazzone, 1998).

Tourism may directly lead to unsightly sprawl in rural areas by creating a demand for development. Other negative side effects include potentially higher rates of crime and greater demand for local services, such as police and fire protection and sanitation services, which can be expensive to provide. Also, tourism can risk changing the rural "sense of place" for some communities. Increased crowding and traffic congestion may also result in an influx of tourists

into an area. Greater demand for local arts and crafts can also potentially lead to a lowering of the quality of these products. Finally, tourism risks degrading the natural resources in rural areas unless environmental sustainability efforts are undertaken. Many of these risks, however, can be mitigated if proper planning is employed at the outset of tourism development.

Tourism can be an important force for developing disadvantaged rural areas. In particular, rural communities with few other options for development may perceive that tourism represents a panacea for growth. While tourism can certainly be an important component of a sound development plan, this is not always the case. For example, Bontron and Lasnier (1997) note that the local tourism impact varies greatly among rural regions and depends on a host of factors including work force characteristics and seasonality issues. Local support, however, is usually a necessary component for a successful tourism strategy. That is why tourism strategies must be consistent with local goals and be sensitive to sustaining a community's character and traditions.

Due to the rising interest of tourists, rural tourism becomes a profitable business (about 190 thousands of accommodation units in rural environment from Europe). This statement is valid for the Republic of Moldova, too. The retrospective analysis of this sector shows that, although in the ex-USSR existed a centralized system of accommodations, they were sold into private sector, mainly those villages located on the beach, in the Premont zones or surrounding big cities. In this way, rural population had large incomes from providing services to tourists (accommodations, cooking, flats rent etc.)

The majority of accommodations places in the Republic of Moldova were situated in rural space, too (in camps situated in forests from the village territory were functioning about 500 units, with about 130 thousands accommodation places), where over 100 small hotels were functioning, the majority of buildings now being private and out of the tourist cycle (V. Miron, V. Guțuțui, 2005). Annually, based on syndicate branch, the republic was visited by over 2 millions of tourist, a big part of which has destinations setting places from rural environment (the most visited: Ivancea, Hirjauca, Holercani, Cocieri, Chitcani, Cubolta).

The actual premises and advantages of rural tourism development in the Republic of Moldova

1. The concentration of tourist resources in the rural environment. The absolute majority of tourist objectives or nearly 80% are concentrated in rural areas, being bad explored. The historic-cultural objects prevail inside the village localities, but there the natural, especially natural monuments and landscape reservations are concentrated near the localities. Furthermore, the way of life, the economic activity, the spirituality of the local population bears a direct expression of presence and influences this patrimony, getting thus a special touristy value, especially due to foreign tourists, who can discover here a rich oasis, poorly known and developed.

2. The large diversity of tourist's services, assured by the possibility of visiting numerous natural and cultural tourist objectives existing or potential in the rural space in our republic (V. Efros, P. Bacal, 2004);

3. The low prices of tourists' and auxiliary services, conditioned, especially by low tourists expenditures for accommodation, alimentation with local traditional foods and drinks, especially the local wine;

4. At present, rural tourism can become the most important alternative and auxiliary job for rural population;

5. The forests and the aquatic objects are concentrated within the villages;

6. Rural tourism offers the efficient possibility to use the aquatic and forest objectives, it generates an increase in local incomes, it facilitates the creation of job opportunities and multiplies the alternatives and auxiliary occupations of traditional agricultural activities;

7. The implementation of the infrastructure in the rural areas needs few expenses, including mostly refitting works. The investments placed in the constructions of small hotels, in the rural areas, are 30-40% smaller than in Chișinău, due to the low price of land, of building materials and of remunerations for labour force. Moreover, if a given rural building was

transformed and reconstructed into tourist guesthouse, the costs would be twice minimized (V. Miron and V. Guțuțui, 2005). Outstanding achievements in the rural tourism sphere were made in the following villages: Trebujeni, Lozova, Cobani, Gălești, same Bulgarian (Stoianovca) and also the Gagauz villages;

8. The local population is well-known for its hospitality, its highly educated spirits and it also has the necessary communication skills for the foreign visitors (V. Miron, 2002);

9. The natural traditional wine and dishes, historical objects and cheap cultural traditions constitute a very attractive element for their visitors;

10. The pretty capable human resources manage the tourist business successfully, including the managers that have graduated institutions with departments specialized in tourism and hotel services;

11. The existence of reserve land that covers above 16 per cent of rural space that can be successfully used for construction, extinction and refitting of the accommodation places, for applying various forms of tourism (Land Survey of the Republic of Moldova, 2006);

12. The trip offer to tourist agencies is generally oriented to attractive rural places and is being promoted mainly by the foreign tourists;

13. The key position of accommodation takes places in rural places. Last year, after the development of hotel business in Chișinău, the investments are oriented to rural area: some pensions in Orhei Vechi, transforming summer camp into tourist pension in village Albota, rural hotel construction in village Lalova, entertainment in village Hârtop and so on;

14. It is essential to pinpoint that rural tourism development is intensively promoted; the entrepreneurs appreciate this form of tourism as one of the opportunities to develop and diversify the business. All opportunities that the Republic of Moldova has at its disposal are far to be efficiently explored.

15. Civil society's departments all opportunities that Republic of Moldova has at its disposal exist (National Federation of Farmers, ANTREC Moldova, ACSA, Agroinform and so on) that promote rural householders interests exists and they have their own personnel, who is remunerated, offices and technical information data base, cooperating with similar foreign societies. A net is developed at national level that facilitates communication between potential entrepreneurs in rural tourism business and at tourism market (V. Miron and V. Guțuțui, 2005). Each entrepreneur can benefit, just with paying a membership fee, from assistance services, training courses and exchanging experience, promotion and can use also the brand and the image of national organization from which it is;

16. The existing regulation standards framework is sufficient to permit: clear standards for arrangement of tourist pensions, the possibility to launch into business through an entrepreneur patent (25 lei for a patent that permits accommodation up to 7 persons) or through an extension of the activity of farms already registered, clear regulations of functioning of protection zones for protected areas in which there are specified possible models of entrepreneurship;

17. Favourable conjuncture: fashion of tourism in silent places near the wild nature, closeness to European tourism markets.

Surely, business in tourism is an unfavourable zone from an economic point of view, as it is stated, implying some risks and obstacles like: people' distrust in this type of business and orientation trough traditional agriculture, absence of a picture of a village as a place for holidays, shabby infrastructure, unkept esthetical aspect of a lot of zones, with tourist resources, native predisposition to finance the consumption expenditures that don't generate incomes (big houses, cars, apartments in the capital) or the commercial business for which there is already an increased competitive environment.

In the present study, there were selected the more representative and more attractive tourism objects of rural space from the tourist regions of the Republic of Moldova and from the categories of protected areas of the Republic of Moldova. At the base of regionalization there were found the geographical position face to geographical coordinates, the natural objectives with maximum tourist attractiveness and the principal centres generating tourists, the configuration of Republic of Moldova territory, the predomination of some natural objects that are distinctive for that particular region, the degree of tourism value, the attendance of the realizations and the most common difficulties.

Among the most attractive natural tourist objectives are:

- 5 *scientific reservations*, including “Codru”, “Plaiul Fagului”, “Pădurea Domnească”, “Iagorlâc” and “Prutul de Jos”, with a total surface above 19 378 ha, that represent 0.6 per cent from the territory of the republic;

- about 500 *natural monuments*, including 86 paleontological and geological objectives and complex, hydrological, zoological, botanic and mixed objectives, with a total surface of 3 000 ha;

- 41 *landscape reservations*, with a total surface above 37 000 ha, which represents nearly 0.7 per cent from territory of the republic;

- 63 *natural reservations*, including 51 forests, 9 reservations of medicinal plants and 3 mixed reservations with a total surface above 8 000 ha (Ecologic legislation of the Republic of Moldova, 1999);

- the forests and the aquatic objectives within the rural space.

The scientific reservations include not only a rich biological diversity, but also high skilled specialists, who can be efficiently used for providing varied tourist services. The employees of these reservations have not only deep knowledge about vegetal and animal components of these protected areas, but also adequate communication skills, including foreign languages, which is an important factor for attracting foreign visitors. Moreover, access routes to the majority of the scientific reservations sectors are favourable for visitors.

The major part of the natural complex and the objectives of the natural protected areas mentioned and concentrated in the rural site have a great ecological and tourist value, especially the natural monuments and the landscape reservations. Unfortunately, compared with the scientific reservations, the landscape reservations are worse exploited and managed. The major part of them with certain exceptions – the forest objectives, is managed by the local public authorities that quite often are lacking qualified personnel and adequate technological and financial resources. Despite all the substantial efforts recently made by the Department of „Protected Areas and Biodiversity”, the Minister of Ecological and Natural Resources, the Investigations and Forest Planning Institute - with external financial support, the World Bank and REC Moldova with some national, zonal and local projects regarding the evaluation and monitoring of biodiversity and protected areas an acute lack of information concerning the eco-tourist value of the natural monuments and landscape reservations is estimated. Besides, among other tourist capitalization difficulties of these protected areas we can notice the unsatisfying condition or even the lack of access roads and route indicators, the insufficiency of accommodation destination for tourist catering, the reject or negligence of the tourist activities opportunities manifested by the local population, the fragile safety of these tourist routes etc.

Among the scientific reservations, a distinct ecological and tourist value, but poorly explored is “Pădurea Domnească”, which is situated in the Middle Prut Valley, between Pruteni (Făleşti) și Braniște (Râșcani) villages. “Pădurea Domnească” scientific reservation has a rich biological and ecological diversity with a very large number of birds and wild boars. Here an imposing number of fascinating natural objectives are present, as “La Fontal” relict lake, “Țara Bătlanilor” bird’s colony and a large number of secular trees and “Suta de Movile” a beautiful landscape reservation about which a national philosopher and writer D. Cantemir wrote. Just nearby of this scientific reservation unique tourist objectives are, as the Prut toltres (Sarmatian reefs) high monumentally appearance at the surface near Cobani and Butești villages. A proof of old coral reef can also be found near Corjeuți and Caracușenii Vechi (Briceni), Trinca, Fetești, Gordinești, Buzdugeni and Brânzeni (Edineț), Duruitoarea, Vărațic, Horodiște și Proscurenii (Râșcani). The tourism exploration of these unique objectives is slowed down by the insufficient development of the eco-tourism infrastructure, by the lack of favourable conditions of access roads, by the deficitary endowments of the accommodation units, by the feeble promotion of these tourist offers, by the relatively big distance to the major tourist generating areas – Chișinău and Bălți, that substantially increase the costs and movement time of tourists.

One of the most valuable and representative eco-tourist objects from the Middle Prut Valley is “Emil Racoviță” cavern, which begins North-West of the Criva (Briceni) village, in the neighbourhood of state borders with Ukraine and it continues in the surroundings of Hotin, with its famous medieval fortress, which gives this tourist region a world-wide importance. “Emil Racoviță” cavern is one of the biggest gypsum caverns in the world and it covers 90 km in length, being made up of 3-4 levels. Cave’s passages form different chambers with different dimensions, the biggest and the most famous of them being “The Dinosaur’s Chamber ”,

“Waiting Chamber”, with the length exceeding 100 m, width of 40 m, height of 11 m and the total surface exceeding 4000 m², “The Chamber of 100 meters”, “The Dog’s Chamber”, “The Penguin’s Chamber”, “The Cathedral”, “The Dinosaur’s Tomb”. The marvel of this cavern is completed by dozen of underground lakes, including “The Lakes of Youth”, “Green Lake” “Transparent Lake”, “The Quinn Lake”, “Blue Lake” and so on (A. Reniță, 2004). The ceilings and the walls of the cavern have stalactites and stalagmites. The balneal and treatment feature and the mineralized water of the underground area multiply the value of this natural monument. Actually, the tourist exploration of this nature miracle is reduced. The main entrance to the cavern is blocked and the underground passages for visiting are almost absent. Furthermore, an extraction quarry of gypsum is situated in the cavern area, a fact that harms the existence of this unique natural monument having a geological, ecological and tourist value superior to the social benefits of the industrial exploration of this quarry.

The tourist importance of this unique objective is multiplied by the presence in its proximity of some valuable natural monuments, as the Prut meanders from Pererâta, the geopaleontological complex from the river valley of Lopatnic between Corjeuți and Caracușenii Vechi (Briceni) settlements, the spectacular gorges of Draghiște river near Trinca, Fetești and Burlănești villages, gorges Buzdugeni from Brânzeni (Edineț) Racovăț river. Not less fascinating are the landscape reservations from this zone, especially the forests reservation from Tețcani and “La Castel” (At the Castle) - is situated lower from Gordinești village and also Fetești landscape reservation. This study considers “La Castel” landscape reservation, with the surface only of 746 ha, one of the most miraculous and, at the same time, not so well-known natural areas from the Republic of Moldova, that could be compared only with the Orheiul Vechi complex, which, on the contrary, is well-known. “La Castel” landscape reservation is indeed a fairy-tale place, a splendid natural fortress, which combines harmoniously the petrophytes ecosystems with those of forest and of meadow, the profound silence with the murmur of rivers and springs, with the unforgettable songs of birds, moments who former an eternal love towards to these divine places.

This reservation still hides unique habitats and numerous rare and vulnerable species of plants and animals. Moreover, the name of this reservation is connected with a beautiful and dramatically love story that will increase substantially the attractiveness and the complex value of this natural area, especially for the foreign visitors who are in the search of a silent and original oasis in the European space. Unfortunately, the tourist and road information and the necessary infrastructure which to include these natural objects in the traditional tourist routes are absent.

At the same time, other very attractive natural monuments are:

- geological and paleontological objectives and complexes such as Butuceni promontory from “Orheiul Vechi” natural and cultural complex, “Pragurile Nistrului” (Nistru Tresholds) from Cosăuți (Soroca), “Vadul lui Rașcov” (Râbnia), “Stânca Japca” (Japca Rock) and the karstic areas near Hrușca (Camenca) village, the geological complexes from Naslavcea and “La Izvoare” (At the Springs) gorge from Otaci (Ocnița), “Râpa lui Vișan (Vișan’s Gorge)” from Taraclia (Căușeni) village, Râpa (Gorge) Cișmichioi, “Vâlceua Colcot” (Colcot Narrow Valley) from Tiraspol and so on;

- the mineral springs from Hârjauca (Călărași), Onițcani (Criuleni), the springs with big flow from Cotova (Drochia), Jeloboc (Orhei), Bursuc (Camenca), Voroncău (Soroca) villages, “Stephen the Great Spring” from Vălcineț (Călărași), “Izvorul lui Suvorov” (Suvorov’s Spring) near Hagimus (Căușeni) village, “La Moară” (At the Mill) aquatic ecosystem in neighbourhoods of Recea (Râșcani) village etc.;

- the botanical complexes, as the poplar forest from Dubăsarii Vechi, the forests from Caracușenii Vechi (Briceni) and Hârjauca – Sipoteni (Călărași) and other representative forest sectors;

- secular trees, especially oak trees “Stejarii lui Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great’s Oak Trees)” from Cobâlea villages (Șoldănești) and Căpriană (Strășeni), oak trees from “Patru Frați” (Four Brothers) from Petrușeni (Râșcani), the secular oak trees from “Pădurea Domnească” scientific reservation etc. (Legislația ecologică a Republicii Moldova, 1999).

- the sites of rare and endangered species of plants and animals.

Among the most valued landscape and natural reservations for tourist activities we can mention:

- *on Chişinău – Orhei – Rezina route*: Trebujeni landscape reservations in Orheiul Vechi complex; Pohrebeni (Orhei), a site with cave monasteries at Țâpova, Saharna, the antique fortress, the springs used for treatment, the petrophyte ecosystems and very spectacular gorges;

- *on Râbnîța – Camenca – Japca – Floreşti route*: the Erjova natural forest reservation; “Vadul” and “Colohur”, Bugornea landscape reservation in the neighbourhoods of Raşcov village, where we can find “Vadul lui Raşcov” natural monument; “Valea Adâncă” (The Deep Valley) landscape reservation, “Râpa Namălvii” springs and gorge from Bursuc village, on the way to Floreşti we can visit “Stânca Japca” (Japca Rock) natural monument on the right-side of Nistru river; “Izvorul Cărauşului” landscape reservation and hydrological monument from Climăuţii de Jos; Dobruşa landscape reservation and monastery; geological monument from Răspopeni, a large village, with a specific cultural heritage; “Stejarul lui Ştefan cel Mare” (Stephen the Great’s Oak Trees) from Cobâlea (Şoldăneşti) village;

- *on Floreşti – Soroca – Ocnîța route*: Cosăuţi landscape reservations, Holoşnița from the district Soroca; “Rudi-Arioneşti” from Donduşeni district; Calarăşeuca and “33 de Vaduri” from Ocnîța district, natural reservation of medicine plants from Cernoleuca, Donduşeni district, the natural forest reservation of birch trees from Ocnîța. One of the most beautiful monasteries of Moldova is situated on the territory of the Cosăuţi’s landscapes reservation and nearby one can find “Pragurile Nistrului” (Nistru’s Thresholds) geological monument (A. David, 1990), Cosăuţi outcrop of granite and grit stone, a unique granite quarry from the Republic of Moldova, there are a lot of quarries of grit stone and clay also non authorized ones. Besides, the craft works made from granite and grit stone was preserved and is sill developing here, the activity bringing income sources for the native population. Moreover, Soroca town is situated at the distance of only 8 kilometres and there one can find one of the most valuable national medieval historical objectives that remained on the territory Republic of Moldova - Soroca Fortress. Due to this, the value and the tourist attraction of this region tend to increase, a fact that is proved by the offers of tourist agencies. Ocnîța district is also very rich in natural tourist objectives. Besides the landscape reservations mentioned, here one can find numerous geo-paleontological and hydrological open-air monuments, especially in the neighbourhood of Naslavcea village, “Râpa Adâncă” (Deep Steep Ravine) near Verejeni village and “La Izvoare” (At the Springs) steep ravine south of Otaci and also the springs from Voroncău. In general, taking into consideration all these natural tourist monuments, this zone can be compared only with the Middle Prut Valley, but according to the tourist wave this zone outruns the latter one;

- *in the central region, on the Chişinău – Ungheni route*: Roşcani natural forest reservation, Căpriana- Scoreni, with a surface of 1762 ha, Țigăneşti, where one can also see the famous monasteries and Căbăieşti – Pârjolteni (Călăraşi), Sadova, Boguşi and Leordoia natural forest reservations, “Plaiul Fagului” (The Beech’s Country) scientific reservation, „Valea Mare” landscape reservation which is located south of Ungheni town; on Chişinău – Leuşeni route, on Poltava highway: the natural forest reservation and standard wig trees sector near Condița village, “Codri” scientific reservation not far from which a monastic complex – “Hâncu Monastery” is situated, endowed with sufficient and modern units of housing; “Vila Nisporeni” landscape reservation, with a surface of 3499 ha, where one can also find the Monastery of Vărzăreşti – one of the oldest and visited monastery in our republic; on Chişinău route – Hânceşti – Leuşeni: “Pădurea Hânceşti” (Hânceşti Forest) landscape reservation, with an area of 4500 ha between the Mereşeni and Lăpuşna villages, the natural reservation of medicinal plants in Logăneşti; on Chişinău – Cimişlia route: Cărbuna natural forest reservation, which is situated at about 50 km near the capital, where one can find one of the most visited centre of religious pilgrimage – Zloţi Monastery, on Chişinău – Tighina route, at the same distance of 50 km from Chişinău, and at less than 10 km from Tighina town “Pădurea Hârbovăţ” (Hârbovăţ Forest) landscape reservation is situated, with a monastic complex which it is frequently visited;

- *on the Valley of the Lower Nistru, from Dubăsari to Tighina*; “Iagorlâc” scientific reservation, located on the left side of Nistru, near Dubăsari dam, Telița landscape reservation, the poplar forest from Dubăsarii Vechi, Voinova natural forest reservation near Şerpeni village; a lot of lakes and river meadows sites;

- *on the Valley of the Lower Nistru, from Tighina to Palanca* one can visit “Grădina Turcească” (Turkish Garden) landscape reservation, one of the first natural areas from the our republic, situated on the old river bed of Nistru, called “Nistru Chior” (The Blind Nistru) by the

natives, having a length of 34 km; geo-paleontologic monuments, such as “Râpa lui Albu” (Albu’s Steep Ravine) from Cioburciu, “Râpa de Piatră” (Stone Steep Ravine) from Tudora, the gorge from Purcari; “Izvorul lui Suvorov” (Suvorov’s Spring) hydrological reservation near Tighina town; “Mlaștina Togai” (Togai Marsh) mixed natural reservation placed in the neighbourhood of Crocmaz village, Copanca and Leuntea natural forest reservations. “Grădinile Nighicei” (The Nighice’s Gardens) dendrological park with species of fruit-trees from the XIX century; over 40 forests, especially “Jidranul” and “Unghiul Boului” (The Oxen Angle) from Talmaza, “Recea” placed between Cioburciu and Răscăieți, “Împărăteasa” (The Queen) from Olănești, numerous lakes and beaches, a nursery of pheasants (V. Grosu, 2004).

The wide range of natural protected areas, as well as of forests, aquatic and food plain ecosystems represent a decisive and irrevocable argument for the establishing of a National Park “Nistru Inferior” (Lower Nistru) in the next future. In this region there is also placed the famous center of religions pilgrimage – the monastery “Noul Neamț” from Chițcani. An increasing attraction of this region is generated by the proximity to the urban centers, such as Tighina, Tiraspol, Slobozia, Căușeni, Ștefan-Vodă and Razdelne (Ukraine), by the median position from Chișinău and Odesa, the favorable position and the developed transport infrastructure. Before the falling of Soviet Union, this zone was more requested than Orheiul Vechi, Saharna, and the religious objects from the center of republic; moreover, most of them were closed. The military conflict on the Nistru (1991-1992), which unleashed here with much violence, influenced the tourist capitalization of this region, especially due to the closeness to Tiraspol and Tighina – that two main locations of the trans-nistrian problem. In the vicinity of the bulwarks of trans-nistrian separatists and Russian occupancy army.

Actually, the decisive barrier for the tourist development and the development of this region is caused by the postponement of the area where we can find some valuable natural tourist objects, such as natural forest reservations “Misilindra” beside Hagimus, Olănești and some natural geo-paleontological monuments, such as the fossil fauna from Calfa, Anenii Noi district, “Aflorimentul Fârlădeni” (Fârlădeni’s Fossil Outcrop), “Cariera din Zaim” (The Quarry from Zaim), “Râpa din Sălcuța” (Gorge from Sălcuța), “Râpa lui Vișan” (Vișan’s Gorge) from the Taraclia village (Căușeni), which is the oldest geo-paleontological monument registered officially in the Russian Empire (A. David, 1990).

Also, in the center of the Căușeni town we can find cultural-historical objects with an international importance – like “Adormirea Maicii Domnului” (Dormition of the Mother of God) church, where there the unique medieval frescos from Republic of Moldova are preserved. Sălcuța village, where one of the authors of this study was born, is crossed by “Valul lui Traian de Sus” (The Traian’s Wave). Much more, the districts Ștefan Vodă and the Căușeni are well-known, both at an international level through selected wines, especially that from Purcari, Sălcuța, Carahasani, Talmaza, Popeasca, Tudora, Olănești, Crocmaz, Volintiri and so on. The promotion of the tourist routes like those wine-making ones, also the rehabilitation of some objects and the introduction of cultural events represent some optimistic premises for the future development of this region.

- *Valley of the Inferior Prut from the Sărata-Răzești*, region of the Leova till the Giurgiulești; “Lebăda Albă” (The White Swan) meadow reservations, north-west of Leova town and flood meadow of the Prut river up from Cantemir town, the scientific reservation “Prutul de Jos” (Lower Prut) from the neighbourhood of Văleni and the Slobozia Mare villages, which are known through local customs and especially through local dances;

- *South region, on the routes of the Sărata Galbenă – Iargara – Cahul*: natural forest reservation and medical herbs and lakes from the Sărata Galbenă, “Vila Caracui”; “Codrii Tigheci” landscape reservation, which is the most important reservation of this type in the South part of the republic covering an area of 2.519 ha, while considering its ecological value and its history, it must be passed to the category of scientific reservations; Chioselia and “Liceul Bolgrad” natural forest reservations; the gorges from Cociulia (Cantemir) and Tartaul (Cahul), the fossil locations near the Pelinei and Moscovei villages (the Cahul);

- *on the route of the Hâncești – Cimișlia – Comrat – Taraclia – Vulcănești*: “Râpele de la Cimișlia” landscape reservation; Ciobalaccia (Cantemir), “Hârtopul Moisei” (Cimișlia) natural forest reservations; geopaleontological monuments – “Râpa Coțofana” (Cimișlia), “Râpele de la Ceadâr Lunga”, outcrops from the Taraclia and the Baurci, clays from the Etulia and “Râpa Cișmichioi” (UTA Găgăuzia).

The most important historical and cultural objects with tourist value are the following:

1. *The prehistoric* preponderant Palaeolithic's stations, which were found at Trinca, Buzdugeni and Brânzeni (Edineț), Duruitoarea, Vărativ, Horodiște (Râșcani), Cosăuți and Rașcov villages.

2. *The ancient monuments* represented especially by fortifications of land and less citadel in stone. In the first category there are fortifications of promontories, which are placed on the steep share and isolated with a wave of protection from the rest of the plain, which prevailed on ringer shores of river Nistru and Răut from Rudi, Saharna, Țâpova and Butuceni villages; the ring-shaped fortress made by the inhabitants from the plains, especially of water sheets from villages of Mateuți (Rezina), Glinjeni, Pojăreni (Ialoveni), Stolniceni (Râșcani), and rectangles citadels at Hansca village. The linear fortifications is represented by two Traian's waves, placed between Nistru and Prut rivers, the upper Traian's Wave is built by the Romans and the Lower Wave by the local habitants.

3. *Monastic complexes*, churches and other religious objects, including:

- monasteries situated on high cliffs, which are, also the oldest, they are localized on the shore Nistru from Saharna, Țâpova, Orheiul Vechi, Japca;
- churches in wood, 12 of which are considered monuments of religious architecture;
- medieval churches and monasteries built in stone situated in Târnova, Hârbova, Rotunda, Sudarca, Braicău, Călărășăuca, Măcărești, Palanca, Larga villages;
- churches and monasteries built in the XVIII - XX centuries and recently rebuilt in the villages which are concentrated in the central part of Republic of Moldova, such as Căpriana, Curchi, Condrița, Suruceni, Țigănești, Răciula, Hârjauca, Vărzărești, Hâncu and so on (Mănăstiri basarabene, 1995).

4. *Medieval fortresses* include the fortifications of land and stone. The land fortifications dated from the IX – XI centuries and which are usually found in the places of ancient fortifications, which were rebuilt. The majority of the medieval citadels, still kept up now, are situated outside of Republic of Moldova: Hotin and Cetatea Albă (White Fortress) in Ukraine, in Suceava in Romaine. In the Republic of Moldova the fortress of Soroca was kept in a normal state, which was built by Ștefan the Great and represents a medieval unique fortress and the citadel Tighina where the 14 army Units of Russian Federation are dislocated at present; other citadels nearly completely destroyed: Orheiul Vechi, Râbnița, Tiraspol and Palanca.

5. *Monuments with local architecture*. The religious houses built in caverns or grottoes in rock that are situated on the rivers shore and represent monastic cells – in Saharna, Țâpova villages, as shelters for poor people from Țâra and Socol village;

The traditional rustic houses, among which we highlight the traditional Moldavian houses with the famous "Big House" designated for guests with a rich sculpturing decor in stone in Nistru villages from Orhei and Rezina districts, especially Ivancea and Trebujeni; with beautiful columns in wood as in Codri area, the traditional houses of the Bulgarian colonists with original interior and also functional domestic farms, kitchens and local customs (V. Miron, 2002);

Aristocratic houses – built in the last century for local aristocrats in conformity with European architectural styles; some of them were transferred to museums;

Museums with reference to village history other major events as at Second World War (or World War II), bungers and Stalinists deports.

The structure of rustic houses respects, especially the ancient building traditions, perfectly updated to local conditions. The houses from different zones of the republic attract the attention of the foreign visitors with their particular characteristics: position, style, the building materials used, and their general décor.

6. Among *the engineering constructions and monuments there* we can enumerate the famous ground wine from Mileștii Mici and Cricova villages. Many monuments are designated for visitors, especially for political, diplomatic and scientific personalities and other categories of VIP persons.

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