

CAPITALIZING ON THE TOURIST AND CULTURAL-HISTORICAL POTENTIAL THROUGH TOURIST PRODUCTS. CASE STUDY: TOURIST CIRCUIT IN DOBROGEA, ROMANIA

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Abstract

Romania possesses both elements of significance for tourism and a multitude of means that can facilitate activities specific to this field. The distribution of these elements across the territory varies, with some areas having clusters of attractions that have led to concentrations of methods and resources for their development, while other areas are more dispersed. Furthermore, within the first category, local and regional development varies, with certain types of tourism activities becoming prominent, some of which are recognized nationally and internationally, while others, although equally significant, are less known and have fewer means for development. This paper aims to highlight the tourist potential of Dobrogea through tourism products. This endeavor is based on the study and highlighting of the material base necessary for the conduct of tourism activities, as well as the types of tourism products that can be utilized. To this end, we will present a case study focusing on a tourist circuit undertaken by students from Mihail Kogălniceanu Theoretical High School, Snagov, in Dobrogea.

Key words: Dobrogea, tourism, history and culture, producers

INTRODUCTION

Caught between water and sky, the land of Dobrogea undulates in broad and gentle slopes, planted with rectangular fields from which the slender, straight silhouettes of wind turbines rise (Photo 1). Well-paved, straight roads also cut through the landscape, already lined vertically and horizontally by fields and wind turbines. Few other places in Romania are as abundant in straight lines. We associate Dobrogea with the Seaside or the Danube Delta, but beyond these summer tourist highlights, Romania's eastern most historical province holds an entire treasure trove of interesting destinations.

Dobrogea is linked to the earliest historical writings about cities on what is now Romanian territory. Greek colonists arrived here at the dawn of history, in search of wealth or at least a better life. They built walls facing the land inhabited by barbarians, while remaining open to the sea, *thalassa*, which connected them to their warm homelands beyond the Bosphorus. After hundreds of

years, the Romans took their place, organizing the land between the Danube and the Pontus, filling it with settlements both inland and along the Danube. Now, an impressive array of ancient ruins traces the outline of Dobrogea along its natural borders: Troesmis, Carsium, Dinogetia, Noviodunum, Aegyssus, Capidava, Argamum. But without a doubt, the most well-known are the urban trio of Histria, Tomis, and Callatis, taught from the earliest history lessons [8].



Photo 1. The Babadag Plateau (Podișul Babadagului)
Source: personal archive.

Dobrogea is a historical and geographical habitat situated between the Danube and the Black Sea, which is part of the territories of Romania, Bulgaria, and Ukraine. In antiquity, the region was known as *Scythia Minor*, though it did not designate a province, as the area was part of the province of *Moesia Inferior* and later, in the Middle Ages, of the Byzantine *theme of Paristrion*. Today, administratively, it includes the counties of Tulcea and Constanța in Romania and the regions of Dobrich and Silistra in Bulgaria [7] (Map 1).



Map 1. Map of Dobrogea: the Romanian part in orange, the Bulgarian part (the Cadrilater) in yellow
Source: ro.wikipedia.org [24].

The main cities in the north are: Constanța, Tulcea, Medgidia, and Mangalia, along with the balneary and vacation resorts on the Romanian coast: Mamaia, Eforie, Costinești, and the resorts in the Comorova area of Mangalia. In the northeastern part, Dobrogea includes the Danube Delta, a habitat listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the south, in Bulgaria, the main cities are Dobrich, Silistra, Tutrakan, and Kavarna, while tourist sites include the resorts of Albena, Balchik, Shabla, and the medieval fortress on Cape Kaliakra [3]. According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, as of January 1, 2023, the two counties in the Romanian part of Dobrogea had a population of 848,058 inhabitants

(Constanța 657,060 inhabitants, Tulcea 190,998 inhabitants).

Dobrogea is the only Romanian province, and among the few in the world, whose name comes from a real historical figure. Historical sources provide the first information about Dobrotici in the context of the Byzantine civil war, as an opponent between 1342-1347, of Emperor John V Palaiologos [3], [16].

Dobrotici (or Dobrotiță) (Photo 2) was a ruler of the "Land of Karvuna" („Țării Cărvunei”) between 1347 and 1386 (with the title of despot after 1367). He was the one who moved the capital of this feudal state from Karvuna (in Byzantine or Genoese sources, which can be, according to historical assumptions, either Balchik or Kavarna) to Kaliakra (where the ruins of a fortress can still be admired today) [17], [22].



Photo 2. Dobrotici
Source: www.istorie-pe-scurt.ro [9].

In this context, the purpose of this paper is to highlight the tourist potential of Dobrogea through tourism products.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To establish a foundation for a comprehensive program of organization and tourism development for the country and any territory, it is necessary to start with a correct inventory of everything that exists and differentiate units that can be included in a hierarchical system. Components of different orders will have a

certain structure and functionality, but also connections that ensure interdependence and thereby the unity of the system. For tourism, it is important to establish precise taxonomic units that, on one hand, each reflect a certain level of potential resources, and on the other hand, a minimum of possible facilities at any given time for their utilization. Tourism in Romania focuses on its natural landscapes and rich history, also making a significant contribution to the country's economy [13], [14].

As a part of the tourism offer, the potential, due to the value, originality, and diversity of its components, constitutes the essential condition for the development of tourism in a given area. The tourism potential of a territory is defined as the set of elements (natural, tourist, and those suitable for development) for visiting and receiving tourists. These natural or anthropic elements are viewed as "tourist attractions" or "tourist resources," terms whose content differs. Therefore, the tourism potential represents the potential tourism offer of a given territory (Fig. 1).

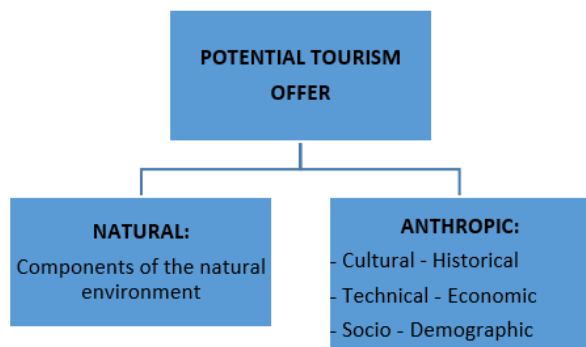


Fig. 1. Existing tourism potential or tourism offer
 Source: Glăvan, V., 1996, Geography of tourism in Romania, Publishing House of the Institute of Management - Tourism EDEN, Bucharest [7].

The natural touristic potential of Romania is structured into the following components (Fig. 2):

Relief – it is the most varied and important element of tourist potential, both through its scenic value and the wide possibilities it offers for practicing tourism. The main attractions of the relief are generated by: the steps and forms of relief, rocks with bizarre shapes, and geological phenomena. The relief constitutes an independent tourist attraction, stimulating

hiking, mountaineering, rest and recreation, speleotourism, and serves as a support for other potential elements (hydrography, flora, fauna, etc.) [4], [20].



Fig. 2. The Structure of Natural Touristic Potential
 Source: Glăvan, V., 1996, Geography of tourism in Romania, Publishing House of the Institute of Management - Tourism EDEN, Bucharest [7].

Climate – contributes to creating a favorable travel ambiance through: the precipitation regime; air temperature and humidity; atmospheric cloudiness; mountain and marine breezes. The climate is a fundamental condition for practicing certain forms of tourism: winter sports, heliomarine therapy, climatotherapy [20].

Hidrography– contributes to enhancing the attractiveness of a touristic area through the presence of the following elements of touristic potential: rivers, streams; natural lakes (including therapeutic ones) and artificial lakes; seas, deltas, and estuaries; mineral and thermomineral waters, and it favors the practice of weekend tourism, fishing, heliomarine therapy, water sports, and spa treatments [5].

Vegetation–represented by forests, meadows, and groves, it constitutes a tourist attraction in itself (examples: natural parks – as vacation destinations, dendrological parks, scientific reserves), as well as an element that enhances the attractiveness of other components of touristic potential. It is of particular interest for leisure, recreation, and amusement tourism [5].

Fauna – from a touristic point of view, it has importance in terms of cinegetics (hunting) and fishing – due to the richness and variety of

species; aesthetics – thus contributing to the increased attractiveness of visited areas; scientific – due to the existence of rare or endangered species, protected in reserves and zoological parks, and it serves as a motivation for practicing hunting and sport fishing, scientific tourism, and educational tourism [7]. **Natural reservations** –are regarded for their aesthetic value as well as their cognitive scientific significance, being a basis for professional and educational tourism. Due to more than two millennia of history, this region has a rich and valuable anthropological potential;



Fig. 3. The Structure of Anthropogenic Tourism Potential
 Source: Glăvan, V., 1996, Geography of tourism in Romania, Publishing House of the Institute of Management - Tourism EDEN, Bucharest [7].

The components of the anthropogenic tourism potential, which stand out for their attractiveness and value, are categorized as follows (Fig. 3):

a. Cultural-Historical Potential

1. There are a large number of archaeological relics in Romania that are of great significance to our people’s history, culture, and civilization as well as to world history. The Dacian, Dacian-Roman and Greek fortifications, and the medieval and peasant fortresses, area few examples of such historical edifices.
2. The numerous historical and art monuments showcase the development of the local culture and civilization, as well as the influences of other cultures that it has interacted with. The most notable ones are the monasteries and churches, castles, and plastic art creations.
3. The distinctive appeal of our nation lies in its ethnic and folklore features, which are distinguished by their uniqueness, richness, and variety. These consist of particular popular architecture and building methods, artistic creations, handicrafts and craftsmanship, customs, popular traditions, and traditional clothing.

4. The cultural institutions, museums, and memorial houses with a variety of profiles, as well as cultural events like music, film and theater festivals, exhibitions, fairs, and celebrations all serve as reflections of the intensity of spiritual life, tradition, and modernism in the region’s culture.

b. The Technical-Economic Potential includes, for example: storage dams, bridges, and other technical-economic elements that can serve as attractions.

c. The Socio-Demographic Potential includes cities that are attractive due to their specific architecture, the art values they house, or the events they host, as well as rural localities which, in addition to these values, offer exceptionally attractive natural conditions for leisure activities (peace, clean air, unique landscapes) [4], [20], [23].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The value of Romania's touristic potential, characterized by the variety and harmony of its relief forms, the diversity of natural and anthropictourist attractions, as well as the existence of unique resources, places Romania among the most favored countries, with the possibility of practicing a "total tourism." Realizing this potential involves designing original and attractive touristic programs, with itineraries as varied as possible, specific to the different regions of the country. The circuits include visiting the most interesting tourist attractions (both natural and anthropic), with varied profiles. They can have different durations, ranging from 3 to 12 days, and can include, as appropriate, other activities such as Romanian-themed evenings, fishing, wine tastings, camp fires, to enhance their attractiveness [2], [12].

The diversity and depth of Dobrogea's tourism potential set it apart and led to the creation of numerous initiatives of such kind. From the 2nd to the 4th of August 2023, we took part in a tour in this area, organized by Mihail Kogălniceanu Theoretical High School, with the goal of learning as much as we could about the geographical, touristic, and cultural-historical legacy of Dobrogea. Among the proposed objectives were: Cheile Dobrogei, Histria

Fortress, Argamum – Orgame Fortress and Capul Doloşman, Enisala Fortress, Babadag Plateau, the city of Tulcea, Celic – Dere, Cocos, and Saon Monasteries, and the Danube Delta Museum.

The first objective visited was the Dobrogea Gorges. These are among the most exquisite and well-known sights in the area. Geologists value them for the ancient age and significance of the Jurassic reefs from the Paleozoic era, while tourists visit them for the breathtaking scenery they provide. The age of the Dobrogea Gorges is over 2 million years (Photo 3). They provide an incredible karst landscape, with several gorges that are far more worn than they were in the past. Initially, those rocks were over 1,000 meters high, but external forces like water, wind, and rushing rivers kept eroding them until they reached their current height of slightly over a 100 meters [17], [10].



Photo 3. Dobrogea Gorges
Source: personal archive.

Several limestone rock towers with coralline origins that date back to the Mesozoic era define the region. Here, experts have identified more than 600 endemic and rare plant species. In terms of fauna, various species of reptiles, birds of prey, and bats can be identified from a paleontological perspective, the limestones in the Dobrogea Gorges area host the richest fossil site with Mesozoic fauna in the Casimcea Plateau [17], [19].

The Cheia Geological Massif was declared a protected natural reserve in 1970 and is located in the northern part of Constanța County, in the Casimcea Plateau, near the village of Cheia. There are more than ten caves located within the Gura Dobrogei perimeter, two of them being of a larger size and more well-known due

to speleologists' research that has been done. These are the intriguingly named Gura Dobrogei Cave, also called the Bats' Cave, and the La Adam Cave. [1], [10].



Photo 4. Histria Fortress
Source: personal archive.

Another point of interest we visited during our tour was the Histria Fortress (Photo 4, Photo 5 and Photo 6). Currently, the ruins of the city are located within the administrative territory of the Istria commune, in Constanța County. Histria was founded by Greek colonists from Miletus around 657 BC. The city of Histria experienced uninterrupted development for almost 1300 years, starting from the Greek period and ending in the Byzantine period. During the Greek period, the city consisted of two distinct parts, the acropolis and the civilian settlement, following a model found in ancient Greek cities. This structure was maintained until the city was abandoned in the 7th century. One of the reasons for the city's abandonment was the silting of the ancient bay of the Black Sea, where the port was located, which is now known as the Razim-Sinoe lagoon complex [11], [16].



Photo 5. Histria Fortress
Source: personal archive.

Danube was known to the Greeks as the Istros River, which is where the name of the Histria Fortress (Istria in Greek) originates. The settlement had stone-paved streets, a strong defensive wall surrounding it (only the western part of the fortress wall had 10 towers and two gates), was supplied with water through pipes spanning more than 20 kilometers, which also supplied the baths built during the Roman era and it had both physical education institutions (gymnasion) and cultural-artistic institutions (museion).



Photo 6. Histria Fortress
Source: personal archive.

The "Histria" Archaeological Museum has numerous bas-reliefs, an impressive collection of amphorae, and altars dating back more than two millennia, including a part of the marble facade of the temple dedicated to the "Great God." Visitors can also see the fortress's defensive wall, equipped with towers and bastions, the well-preserved ruins of Greek temples, a few paved streets, residential houses, several Christian basilicas dating from the 6th century AD, the temples of Aphrodite and Zeus, the forum, the marketplace, the street network, and even some sewer pipes [19].

On our journey, the next objective was the Argamum – Orgame Fortress. It is an archaeological site that is situated within the Jurilovca commune in the eastern portion of Tulcea County, in the place called Capul Doloşman. This site marks the intersection of the Razim Lake (Photo 7) and the Babadag Plateau, which was formerly an open gulf of the Black Sea (the Gulf of Argamon). According to Hecateus of Miletus, an ancient source from the early 6th century BC, Argamon is the earliest settlement on Romanian land,

being established by the Greek immigrants from Asia Minor around the middle of the 7th century BC [16].



Photo 7. Lake Razim
Source: personal archive.

Sources related to the Argamum-Orgame Fortress are very few (Photo 8). Archaeological research is also not very advanced; the site, which covers almost 100 hectares, has been excavated to a small extent, about 15%, so more historical evidence can emerge at any time.

In the vicinity of the ancient Greek necropolis lies the "heroon tumulus," the oldest Greek tomb in the entire Black Sea region. This gives archaeologists much more evidence to support their theory that Orgame was among the first Greek settlements in the Black Sea. It is notable to mention that here lies also one of the first Greek cremation tombs, more specifically a small mound, being unique for the Balkan peninsula and the Black Sea basin. It was so important to the inhabitants of the city that a hero cult was developed around it, which lasted for about 400 years.



Photo 8. The Argamum - Orgame Fortress site
Source: personal archive.

All archaeological sources collected from the site indicate that the tumulus dates from the second half of the 7th century BC, around 640-630 BC, a period close to when the colony was founded. It was likely an important figure, as archaeologists have concluded that the person cremated there was probably the leader of the colony. For almost 400 years afterwards, the inhabitants of the fortress brought offerings to this figure and considered him a hero [16]. The multiculturalism, archaeological remains, wild places, local gastronomy, and stunning landscapes make this little-known area one of the most enchanting tourist destinations on the Romanian coast.



Photo 9. Doloşman Cape
Source: personal archive.

Doloşman Cape (Photo 9 and Photo 10) is a protected national area located to the east of the village of Jurilovca, within the administrative territory of the Jurilovca commune. It represents a geological formation (a limestone cliff) that includes the ruins of the Argamum-Orgame fortress and the steep rocky slope of the cliff.



Photo 10. Doloşman Cape
Source: <https://discoverdobrogea.ro/> [6].

It is the highest rocky cliff on the Romanian coast, stretching nearly 3 kilometers and offering tourists a wonderful perspective. The Cretaceous cliff, composed of sandstones and limestones, stands 29 meters high, but it continues with a very steep hill that reaches up to 56 meters. The name Doloşman has Turkish origins and means "Bad Head" [8].

In our exploration of the history of Dobrogea, we reached the Enisala Fortress (Photo 11). The ruins of the medieval fortress Yeni-Sale (Enisala, Enişala, Eraclea, or Heracleia) are located 2 kilometers from the village of Enisala, on a limestone hill that overlooks the Razim and Babadag lakes.



Photo 11. Enisala Fortress
Source: personal archive.

The Yeni-Sale Fortress has an irregular polygonal plan that follows the sinuosities of the Jurassic limestone massif on which it is located. Following the study of portolans from the 13th to 14th centuries, the settlement that appears under the names Bambola or Pampolo has been identified with the Enisala Fortress. It was first mentioned by the name Yeni-Sale in the 15th century [21].



Photo 12. Babadag Plateau
Source: personal archive.

The primary purpose of this fortress was military: defensive and for high-altitude surveillance of land and water routes. It was abandoned by the Turks, and in the following centuries, the fortress fell into ruin.

However, a unique element that sets this fortress apart is that it survived the Russo-Turkish armed confrontations that took place in Dobrogea, according to historians. Here's how: two centuries ago, Russian army generals ordered the destruction of all medieval fortresses in northern Dobrogea that housed Ottoman Empire garrisons. Only one escaped because it was no longer active at that time. Thus, Enisala remained standing. It has been partially reconstructed, making it the only medieval fortress in Dobrogea, and it has once again become a major tourist attraction in Northern Dobrogea [19].

The city of Tulcea is located in the northern part of the Dobrogea region, serving as the gateway to the Danube Delta. Nicknamed the city of seven hills, the entire area has developed on the hillside terraces that surround it. As a result, Tulcea's streets continue to have a distinct picturesque charm. Even the road to Tulcea, which passes close to the town, stands out from the typical Dobrogea landscape. The occasionally high slopes have produced winding roads that take you to new places. The one-and-a-half-kilometre-long waterfront has undergone rehabilitation and has been renamed in honor of the renowned Romanian athlete Ivan Patzaichin. Currently, Tulcea's residents enjoy a new port infrastructure that spans more than 36,000 square meters, along with a modern promenade.



Photo 13. The Aquarium - Danube Delta Museum
Source: personal archive.

The Danube Delta Eco-Tourism Museum Center is one of Tulcea's top tourist destinations, which functions as a comprehensive cultural center, including a public aquarium and a museum. At the same time, it features a permanent exhibition that primarily displays elements characteristic of the natural heritage of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (Photos 13, 14 and 15).



Photo 14. The Letea Forest Habitat Exhibit - Danube Delta Museum
Source: personal archive.

As previously mentioned, the complex also features a public aquarium and several temporary exhibitions, all of which are housed in an environment that faithfully reproduces habitats specific to the Danube Delta, the Razim-Sinoie Lagoon Complex, and other nationally significant protected areas in the Dobrogea Plateau (Photo 12), such as the Macin Mountains National Park.



Photo 15. The Letea Forest Habitat Exhibit - Danube Delta Museum
Source: personal archive.

The permanent exhibition features 46 plant species, 3 reptile species, 44 bird species, and 12 mammal species, all of which are shown in different ecological interactions and scenarios, allowing visitors to learn about the vast biological diversity of the geographical regions (Photo 16). Through the films that are available along the visiting route, visitors can learn about the birds that have been designated as natural monuments, rare animal species that are protected both nationally and internationally, species that have vanished from the deltaic and Dobrogean areas, recently introduced species in the delta's fauna and other aspects of their lives.

The aquarium can hold 150 tons of water and is equipped with modern installations. It includes a collection of 8 marine invertebrate species, 6 types of imported corals from Indonesia, 24 native fish species from the Danube Delta and the Black Sea, and 23 reef fish species (Photo 17). Not only are the aquariums featuring fish and invertebrates from coral reefs unique to Tulcea, but they are also distinctive among other public aquariums in Romania.



Photo 16. Turtles (*Testudines*) - Danube Delta Museum
Source: personal archive.

Visitors can experience what it's like to be in the middle of a reef for a short while, surrounded by eye-pleasing fish and corals with remarkable shapes and colors, thanks to a system of two concentric cylinder aquariums. Similar feelings can also be felt when passing down the tunnel that leads to the aquarium's largest tank, which is home to eels and sturgeons—two of the oldest species of fish currently in existence. Sturgeons are noted for their distinctive reproductive habits.



Photo 17. Lionfish (*Pterois volitans*) - Danube Delta Museum
Source: personal archive.

The Independence Monument in Tulcea (Photo 18) is the main tourist attraction of the city, due to its location, which offers a panoramic view of the city at the mouths of the Danube. The foundation stone of the first monument dedicated to the War of Independence and the reunification of Dobrogea with the Romanian state on Hora Hill was laid by „domnitorul” (ruler) Carol I during his visit to Tulcea on October 17-18, 1879. However, the official inauguration took place much later, in 1904, also in his presence and alongside Queen Elisabeta [21].



Photo 18. Independence Monument in Tulcea
Source: personal archive.

Besides these historical and cultural places, Dobrogea has also a rich heritage regarding the local traditions (architecture of the houses,

gardens, agriculture and animal raising, agro-food products, folk music and dances, vineyards and wines, and gastronomy which are of high attraction for tourists and which favored the development of rural tourism and agro-tourism [15, 18].

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the territory of Dobrogea offers a rich wealth of cultural and historical values that cater to various motivations for tourism, including ancient ruins, treasures of folk art, ethnography, and folklore, which collectively represent a hallmark of our people.

The harmonious natural setting, with its varied and picturesque landscapes and numerous tourist potentials, highlights the beauty and value of the Romanian village. The need to capitalize on the unspoiled heritage through tourism is therefore imperative.

In establishing criteria and analyzing tourism heritage, the quality of the surrounding environment is of at least the same importance as the ethnographic and folkloric value of the area. Tourism, more than any other field of activity, is dependent on the environment, which represents its "raw material," the object and domain of its activity, and the bearer of its resources. The tourism potential and its exploitation in Dobrogea should be a priority for Romania, as Dobrogea is a region where one can find a variety of geographical features, from the Danube Delta to the ancient mountains of Dobrogea, archaeological sites, monasteries, caves, and not least, a chain of resorts along the Black Seacoast. This region generally benefits from an infrastructure network that facilitates access to these tourist attractions. Starting from this, we can highlight three important directions for the development of tourism in the Dobrogea area:

-Danube Delta: Tourists can stay in hotels and guesthouses, and benefit from boat excursions on the channels, which can be organized for fishing trips or to show case the Delta's diverse flora and fauna.

-Archaeological Sites, Monasteries, Caves, and Vineyards: These attractions are significant as they offer visitors the chance to explore ancient Greek ruins along the coast, the

Cave of Saint Andrew, considered the Christianizer of these lands, and renowned vineyards where wine-tasting events are organized. Additionally, Dobrogea also features Muslim and Lipovan heritagesites, which add to the range of important tourist destinations.

Romanian Black Sea Coastline: Along the coastline, from Vama Veche to Năvodari, there is a chain of resorts where tourists can find accommodation in hotels ranging from 2 to 5 stars, with options for spa treatments and wellness services.

Tourists should consider the destination as a combination of several criteria: local traditions, natural setting, quality accommodation services, recreational activities, gastronomy, and opportunities for leisure.

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