

Oltenia's identity – A systemic approach of a tourism destination's universe

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Abstract. *The multitude of tourism products, “constructed” with a basis containing the resources of a tourism destination, on the one hand, and from the anticipation of the tourists’ needs and desires, on the other hand, is “hosted” in a complex space, which transcends the spatial and temporal coordinates. Therefore, it is necessary that the marketing specialists know and subsequently use the components of the “destination’s universe” in the laborious process of constructing tourism products with specific, authentic elements, constituting points of contact between the targeted consumer segments and the nature and culture of the destination itself. The purpose of this paper is to identify, within a quantitative research, those specific elements of the region which can “collaborate” on developing every structured tourism product, comprising both tangible and intangible elements, functional and symbolic, which can be offered to as many market segments as possible, through planned activities of destination marketing, yet entirely complying with its identity.*

Keywords: destination; touristic identity; authenticity; Oltenia.

JEL Classification: M3; L83.

REL Classification: 14F; 14G.

Introduction

With a wide range of resources, Oltenia, in terms of authenticity and identity, can be successfully represented by its balneotherapy, natural or cultural profile alike. Its balneotherapy resources materialize the most numerous mineral springs in Romania, with the possibility of treating a large number of illnesses, the natural ones allow practicing relaxation tourism, as well as sports tourism etc., and the cultural ones compose an exceptional genuine background, by the existence of the oldest monasteries in the country, with unique architectural elements, customs and traditions, unique as well; therefore, Oltenia region is segregated, yet also integrated, from a touristic point of view, in the macrodestination Romania. Thus, the main challenge for the tourism development in Oltenia destination is not represented by identifying the constitutive elements of the tourism products (this requirement being, in the present circumstances, only a starting point for the real problem of the region's tourism development), but by the decision to combine them, in order to create complex products, according to the expectations and the increasingly sophisticated desires of potential tourists. These combinations are, naturally, based on complex criteria related to the compatibility of the resources' profile in terms of the natural environment, and to the distance between the tourist attractions, in its turn necessary as a "micro-solution" in order to meet the desires of potential tourists as well as „the compatibility perceived by them”, aspect representing, to a certain extent, the object of the present study.

Conceptual framework

The combination, organization and coordination of the products and services that are offered in the destination by different suppliers, with different interests, has as a natural result the development of a unitary image; therefore, it is necessary that the elements composing this image benefit by *a marketing capital based on the principle of communicating vessels*, case in which the fulfillment of an operating economic agent's objectives enable/facilitate/equate the image improvement of other economic agents in the destination. Thus, the aggregate efforts (which involve resources, skills and capabilities submitted to various regulations and forms of organization, yet aligned in order to achieve a common purpose) lead to the "aggregate effects", in the planned tourism development area, according to the criteria of economic efficiency, sustainability and responsibility.

The image of the destination, filtered by its identity elements, represents the basis of the brand construction process; therefore, in order to develop a strong, coherent brand, it is necessary to create a structure responsible with destination marketing

so as to “increase the long-term competitiveness of the destination” (Pike, 2005, p. 39), along with the development of strategies/tactics/actions, subsumed to the same set of general and marketing objectives within the marketing planning, which takes into account all the stakeholders of the destination, including the local community.

Methodological frame

As the space of Oltenia (like the other Romanian spaces, as well), rightly considered “a system of tourism resources”, may correspond to a single developed product, the need to strengthen its components into unitary, relevant products is subsumed to the adequacy of the combination product-destination/market. Therefore, within the present research, started in 2010 and completed in 2012, it is studied, for each county of the region, the “variation of the tourist profile”, before and after the '90s, taking into account the types of tourism considered to be specific, as well as the resources (tangible and intangible) and representative tourist attractions, on a sample of 1,247 young people, aged between 18 and 24 years⁽¹⁾ (27.1% from Muntenia, 26.7% from Bucharest, 31.2% from Oltenia, 15% from Transilvania, Banat-Crișana, Bucovina, Maramureș, Moldova and Dobrogea), with higher education studies in progress. The data were processed and systematized using IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

Research results

A first objective of this research was to identify the types of tourism considered by the respondents to be specific, within a comparative analysis, before and after the '90s, to the five counties of Oltenia: Vâlcea, Gorj, Mehedinți, Dolj and Olt.

Thus, regarding Vâlcea County, considering the most representative types of tourism, before and after the '90s (presented in a comparative manner in Table 1), on the first place is situated the leisure, recreation and rest tourism (selected by 32.2% of the respondents) – type of tourism considered to be specific to a greater extent in the current period. In spite of the multitude of balneotherapy resorts in Vâlcea County (e.g., Călimănești-Căciulata, Băile Olănești, Băile Govora) and of the indisputable uniqueness of the cure factors treating specific illnesses (e.g. Băile Govora – respiratory conditions, Băile Olănești – kidney conditions), the balneotherapy tourism is considered a specific type of tourism to a lesser extent (27.1% of the respondents); the respondents do not consider balneotherapy tourism as the most representative type of tourism neither before the '90s

(acceptable, given their age, but especially the lack/insufficiency of information/communication regarding the existence of the cure factors or their effects on health, regardless of the respondents' attitude towards health), when the balneotherapy resorts from Vâlcea County attracted a significant flow of tourists, both from Romania and abroad.

The cultural tourism, through the monasteries in Vâlcea County: Govora, Dintr-un Lemn etc.), is, according to the respondents, more “appropriate” in the current period compared to the tourism before the '90s (11.7%, compared to 8.2% of the respondents). This fact can be explained by the increased efforts from nowadays, both for creating tourism products and for “packing” them, by developing tourism packages with thematic circuits (e.g., religious circuit for the monasteries in Vâlcea County). Visiting relatives and friends is considered by a large proportion of respondents as the specific type of tourism of the county (22.4%, respectively 15.9%, before and after the '90s); the position of this type of tourism, namely the second place among the most representative types of tourism from Vâlcea County, could mean that, given the acknowledged hospitality of Romanians, in general, the motive of visiting relatives and friends is fundamental in selecting the destination, a logically justified situation, again, by the age and especially by the lack of interest in their health.

Table 1. Comparative analysis for the specific type of tourism in Vâlcea County, by the reference period

	Total sample	– % of total column –		
		Before the '90s	Total sample	After the '90s
<i>Basis</i>	1,247	1,247	1,47	1,247
Leisure, recreation and rest tourism	401	32.2	446	35.8
Visiting relatives and friends	279	22.4	198	15.9
Balneotherapy tourism	364	29.2	338	27.1
Cultural tourism	102	8.2	146	11.7
Business and professional motives tourism	54	4.3	80	6.4
Other	47	3.7	39	3.1

Source : statistical survey conducted by the authors.

Regarding Gorj County (Table 2), the most representative type of tourism concerns visiting relatives and friends, this option “diluting” the extraordinary cultural potential of the area, mainly represented by the “Constantin Brâncuși” ensemble, along with other cultural elements of Târgu Jiu, the cultural tourism being ranked only on the second place among the specific types of tourism of Gorj County, recording an increase of “its representation” (27.8%, respectively 31.2% of the respondents, before and after the '90s). The leisure, recreation and rest

tourism is ranked, in the case of Gorj County, on the third place for the tourism before the '90s, outperforming in the current period the visits to relatives and friends, while being nowadays considered more representative with an increase of 5% in comparison with the situation before the '90s. Balneotherapy tourism, represented by Băile Săcelu, is considered specific to Gorj County by 9.7% of the respondents, a significant percentage considering the fact that in this county there is a single balneotherapy resort, not included among the ones of national importance.

Table 2. Comparative analysis for the specific type of tourism in Gorj County, by the reference period

	Total sample	Before the '90s	Total sample	After the '90s
<i>Basis</i>	1,247	1,247	1,247	1,247
Leisure, recreation and rest tourism	261	20.9	314	25.2
Visiting relatives and friends	383	30.7	290	23.3
Balneotherapy tourism	127	10.2	121	9.7
Cultural tourism	347	27.8	389	31.2
Business and professional motives tourism	48	3.8	69	5.5
Other	81	6.6	64	5.1

– % of total column –

Source: statistical survey conducted by the authors.

Considering Mehedinți County (Table 3), the first place is occupied by the leisure, recreation and rest tourism (with the same percentage before the '90s and nowadays – 30.6% of the respondents), indicating the fact that, according to the respondents, the accommodation, food and leisure services are sufficiently developed so as to ensure a certain experience (perhaps justified by the nature of “limitrophe county”). After the tourism of “visits to relatives and friends” (selected by 2.1%, respectively 18.4% of the respondents, before and after the '90s), the cultural tourism (mainly represented by Drobeta-Turnu Severin city), although considered to a great extent specific to Mehedinți County, occupies only the second place, with 21.1% of the total respondents, and balneotherapy tourism (represented, as touristic potential, by Bala resort), occupying the third place, is considered less representative in the current period than in the past (15.7%, in comparison with 16.1%).

Table 3. Comparative analysis for the specific type of tourism in Mehedinți County, by the reference period

– % of total column –

	Total sample	Before the '90s	Total sample	After the '90s
<i>Basis</i>	1,247	1,247	1,247	1,247
Leisure, recreation and rest tourism	381	30.6	381	30.6
Visiting relatives and friends	275	22.1	229	18.4
Balneotherapy tourism	201	16.1	196	15.7
Cultural tourism	240	19.2	263	21.1
Business and professional motives tourism	65	5.2	87	7.0
Other	85	6.8	91	7.2

Source: statistical survey conducted by the authors.

Regarding Dolj County (Table 4), the type of tourism considered specific by most of the respondents (26.9%) is represented by the visits to relatives and friends; although its importance is undeniable, the dimension of this type of tourism and the variation of the flow of tourists are influenced to a lesser extent by the natural and anthropogenic potential of the destination and by the destination marketing efforts, their role only pursuing to enrich/supplement the tourism experience, to influence the degree of sophistication of the tourism product, and, to some extent, the rate of return (with significant effects on tourists' satisfaction). However, since the main motivation associated to this type of tourism is not necessarily dependent on the comparative and competitive advantages of the area, the fact that the respondents (22.1%) consider it the type of tourism specific to Dolj County, it can be concluded that they do not know, or do not consider important, the natural/cultural potential of the county.

On the second place, the leisure, recreation and rest tourism is considered to be specific to a greater extent nowadays, than in the past (with 22.1%, compared to 20.2% of the respondents), followed by the cultural tourism (mainly represented by the potential of Craiova city), 18.8% of the respondents considering it to be specific to Dolj County. Important to mention is that the business and professional motives tourism, although considered specific only by 16.5% of the respondents, has recorded a much higher proportion than other counties of Oltenia (which did not exceed 7% of the respondents), nowadays, more than before the '90s (also due to the "development" tendency of this type of tourism). Thus, business tourism, although on the fourth place in the respondents' opinion referring to the specific types of tourism, is a type of tourism by means of which Dolj County differs from the other counties of Oltenia, situation which could be justified by the fact that Craiova city is perceived, on a real basis, as being the largest city in Oltenia region (hence, with the largest business potential).

Table 4. Comparative analysis for the specific type of tourism in Dolj County, by the reference period

– % of total column –

	Total sample	Before the '90s	Total sample	After the '90s
<i>Basis</i>	1,247	1,247	1,247	1,247
Leisure, recreation and rest tourism	252	20.2	275	22.1
Visiting relatives and friends	410	32.9	336	26.9
Balneotherapy tourism	112	9.0	103	8.3
Cultural tourism	190	15.2	234	18.8
Business and professional motives tourism	169	13.6	206	16.5
Other	114	9.1	93	7.4

Source: statistical survey conducted by the authors.

Regarding Olt County (Table 5), the leisure, recreation and rest tourism is selected by the majority of the respondents (28.6%), followed by the visits to relatives and friends (24.9%, less representative than in the past – 27.4%). Although in Olt County there are no balneotherapy resorts, representative or of national interest, the balneotherapy tourism is considered by 5% of the respondents as the specific type of tourism; this fact indicates the low level of information on the county's resources or the formation/existence of an image which does not correspond to the place identity, maybe also by the superposition of the word "Olt" over the word "Oltenia".

Table 5. Comparative analysis for the specific type of tourism in Olt County, by the reference period

– % of total column –

	Total sample	Before the '90s	Total sample	After the '90s
<i>Basis</i>	1,247	1,247	1,247	1,247
Leisure, recreation and rest tourism	370	29.7	356	28.6
Visiting relatives and friends	342	27.4	310	24.9
Balneotherapy tourism	179	14.4	187	15.0
Cultural tourism	151	12.1	171	13.7
Business and professional motives tourism	99	7.9	124	9.9
Other	106	8.5	99	7.9

Source: statistical survey conducted by the authors.

In the context of a relatively constant background of resources, the possible changes comprised in the comparative analysis, before and after the '90s, occur only due to the opinions (more or less founded) of the potential tourists, being necessary to find appropriate solutions, by linking/confrontation them with the consumers' needs and preferences. Similarly, in order to "validate" the possibility

of practicing these types of tourism, considered specific in the current period, they should be compared to the existing resources (or even to the destination image).

Another objective of the research has been to determine the sources of information on the considered types of tourism from each county of Oltenia, to which the respondents appeal. The most important sources of information for the tourism before the '90s, for all counties of Oltenia (Table 6), are the family, the friends, the Internet and the television (with percentages between 17.6% and 32.9%). It should be noted that, for the situation before the '90s, the Internet is considered a more important source of information than the influence of friends, in the case of Mehedinți, Dolj and Olt counties (23.9%, 22.1%, respectively 23.7%). Inexplicable is, however, the respondents' opinion according to which, for the same period, books, newspapers and even the radio (impersonal sources) have not represented important sources of information, although their degree of spreading was much more significant than the one of the Internet.

Table 6. Sources of information for the tourism from each county of Oltenia, before the '90s

– % of total column, multiple answers –

	Vâlcea	Gorj	Mehedinți	Dolj	Olt
Family	32.9	26.7	25.8	24.1	26.4
Friends	24.2	20.8	18.7	20.3	20.8
Internet	21.1	20.9	23.9	22.1	23.7
Television	19.4	18.2	18.4	17.6	18.9
Books	12.8	11.3	12.0	8.1	10.3
Newspapers	11.1	11.1	10.1	9.0	9.5
Magazines	10.7	10.0	7.8	7.8	7.6
Radio	6.0	5.4	5.8	5.7	4.1
Brochures	5.6	5.8	6.1	4.5	4.8
Films	2.7	2.3	2.9	1.8	3.4
Blogs, social media	2.4	2.6	2.3	3.2	3.3
Other	4.5	6.0	6.6	6.3	5.9
Total	1,247	1,247	1,247	1,247	1,247

Source: statistical survey conducted by the authors.

As far as the tourism after the '90s is concerned (Table 7), there are considered, as important sources of information, the family, the friends, the Internet and the television (with percentages between 18.8% and 25.6%). While, in the past, the main source of information (for all counties of Oltenia) was represented by family, nowadays the Internet occupies the first place (with percentages between 33.4% and 36.6%), followed by friends, for Dolj and Olt counties. However, given the Internet's expansion and influence on young people, the fact that blogs and social media do not represent nowadays important sources of information for

the counties of Oltenia indicates a possible lack of use of these means of promotion/communication by the supporters in the region.

Table 7. Sources of information for the tourism from each county of Oltenia, after the '90s

– % of total column, multiple answers –

	Vâlcea	Gorj	Mehedinți	Dolj	Olt
Family	25.6	21.8	20.8	19.5	21.7
Friends	26.5	21.7	20.5	22.0	23.4
Internet	36.6	33.4	35.3	34.9	35.4
Television	22.0	20.4	20.0	18.8	19.4
Books	8.9	7.9	7.7	5.8	7.3
Newspapers	9.6	8.3	7.1	6.5	6.5
Magazines	11.1	9.9	8.3	7.1	7.1
Radio	5.2	6.2	5.8	5.5	5.3
Brochures	6.4	7.1	7.1	4.7	5.8
Films	1.9	2.7	1.8	1.6	2.0
Blogs, social media	6.4	5.1	5.5	4.8	5.3
Other	3.6	3.9	4.2	4.8	4.7
Total	1,247	1,247	1,247	1,247	1,247

Source: statistical survey conducted by the authors.

In order to “materialize” the tourism products based on the types of tourism identified as being specific to each county of Oltenia, the respondents were asked to mention the main three attractions for each county, in part. Analyzing the first ten attractions for each county, depending on the frequency of occurrence, there are considered the most representative, in Vâlcea County, Băile Olănești (mentioned by 149 respondents), followed by Cozia Monastery (136 respondents), Călimănești (125 respondents), Băile Govora (108 respondents), Căciulata (81 respondents), Horezu (53 respondents), the monasteries in Vâlcea County (53 respondents), Râmnicu Vâlcea (45 respondents), Ocnele Mari (42 respondents) and Horezu Monastery (40 respondents) – Table 8. All the attractions listed by the respondents revolve around the major balneotherapy resorts (Băile Olănești, Băile Govora, Călimănești-Căciulata, Ocnele Mari), indicating the practice of balneotherapy tourism (despite being ranked the fourth, in terms of the specific type of tourism in Vâlcea County), this being easily replaced/combined (taking into account the preferences/distance between attractions/time allocated to the journey) by/to cultural tourism (especially with its religious side) – located on the third place (with cultural cities and monasteries). In addition, in terms of degree of attractiveness, Călimănești-Căciulata, Băile Olănești and Băile Govora were considered the most attractive, achieving average scores (on a scale of 1 to 5) of 4, 4.07, respectively 4.17, granted by the respondents who have visited Oltenia.

Fulfilling, according to the respondents, the criterion of representativeness, simultaneously with that of attractiveness, these three resorts, both independently and globally (in terms of their similar profile and small distance between them), constitute “the center of touristic interest”, according to the identity of Vâlcea County.

For Gorj County (Table 8), the most representative tourist attractions are, in the order of their importance, the “Poarta Sărutului” and Rânca mountain-based resort (selected by 219 respondents), the “Coloana Infinitului” (211 respondents), the “Masa Tăcerii” (197 respondents), “Constantin Brâncuși” ensemble (97 respondents), Tismana Monastery (77 respondents), Târgu Jiu (64 respondents), Muierii Cave (57 respondents), Polovragi Cave (24 respondents) and Lainici Monastery (21 respondents) – each of them recording scores of attractiveness higher than 4 (on a scale of 1 to 5). In accordance with the specific type of tourism of Gorj County, the main attractions target the cultural tourism (with Brâncuși’s sculptures in Târgu Jiu and monasteries), but also the leisure, recreation and rest tourism (with Rânca mountain-based resort).

Disconsidering Băile Herculane (wrongly considered by 62 respondents as belonging to Mehedinți County instead of Caraș-Severin), the most representative tourist attraction is represented by the Iron Gates (178 respondents), followed by the Danube Boilers (40 respondents), the Danube (37 respondents), “The Bridge of God” (35 respondents), Mehedinți Plateau (31 respondents), Decebal’s half-length portrait (28 respondents), Drobeta-Turnu Severin (27 respondents), Danube Defile, Iron Gates Museum and Traian’s Bridge (20 respondents) – Table 8. In this way, the historical elements are defined as identity elements of the county, together with those related to the Danube, all of them recording scores of attractiveness greater than 3.5 (on a scale of 1 to 5).

Craiova polarizes the first representative attractions of Dolj County by the city itself – tourism destination (99 respondents), Romanescu Park (74 respondents), the Botanical Garden and the Museum of Art (22 respondents), the Zoological Garden (16 respondents), Oltenia Museum (11 respondents), Băniei House and other museums (8 respondents) and the monasteries in the area (10 respondents), the following city, much less representative for Dolj county, from the respondents’ perspective, being Calafat (10 respondents) – Table 8. Thus, according to the respondents, the image of Dolj County is largely confined to Craiova destination, with its cultural and recreation-oriented attractions (with scores of attractiveness higher than 3, on a scale of 1 to 5) – necessary resources for the practice of leisure, recreation and rest tourism, as well as cultural tourism,

considered specific to Dolj County (on the second and third places, after the tourism of “visits to relatives and friends”).

Olt County's representative attractions, outlining its identity, are represented by Olt Valley (92 respondents) and Olt River (78 respondents) – also having the highest scores of attractiveness, the respondents also mentioning the main city, Slatina (47 respondents), Sucidava Citadel (28 respondents), Brâncoveni and Clocociov monasteries (24, respectively 11 respondents), also other monasteries (23 respondents) as representing Olt County, Ceaușescu's house (21 respondents), Olt Defile and Corabia Harbour (14 respondents) – Table 8.

Table 8. *The most representative tourist attractions, in the respondents' opinion, for the counties of Oltenia*

– % of total column, multiple answers –

	Vâlcea		Gorj		Mehedinți		Dolj		Olt	
Rank I	Băile Olănești	11.9	"Poarta Sărutului"	17.5	Iron Gates	14.2	Craiova	7.9	Olt Valley	7.3
Rank II	Cozia Monastery	10.9	"Coloana Infinitului"	16.9	Danube Boilers	3.2	Romanescu Park	5.9	Olt River	6.2
Rank III	Călimănești	10.0	"Masa Tăcerii"	15.7	The Danube	2.9	Botanical Garden	1.7	Slatina	3.7
Rank IV	Băile Govora	8.6	Brâncuși ensemble	7.7	"The Bridge of God"	2.8	Museum of Art	1.7	Sucidava Citadel	2.2
Rank V	Căciulata	6.4	Rânca	6.6	Mehedinți Plateau	2.4	Zoological Garden	1.2	Brâncoveni Monastery	1.9
Rank VI	Horezu	4.2	Tismana Monastery	6.1	Decebal's half-length portrait	2.2	Oltenia's Museum	0.8	Other monasteries	1.8
Rank VII	Monasteries	4.2	Târgu-Jiu	5.1	Drobeta-Turnu Severin	2.1	Calafat	0.8	Ceaușescu's house	1.6
Rank VIII	Râmnicu Vâlcea	3.6	Muierii Cave	4.5	Danube's Defile	1.9	Monasteries	0.8	Olt Defile	1.1
Rank IX	Ocnele Mari	3.3	Polovragi Cave	1.9	Iron Gates Museum	1.6	Băniei House	0.6	Corabia Harbour	1.1
Rank X	Horezu Monastery	3.2	Lainici Monastery	1.6	Traian's Bridge	1.6	Museums	0.6	Clocociov Monastery	0.8
Total	1,247		1,247		1,247		1,247		1,247	

Source: statistical survey conducted by the authors.

Identifying the respondents who have visited Oltenia region so far is important, as it can provide clues regarding their opinion on the type of tourism specific for each of Oltenia's counties; in an affirmative case, it implies “complementing” the sources of information with past experiences. Thus, from the 1247 respondents, 40.9% of them have mentioned that they have visited Oltenia (254 of respondents from Oltenia, 118 from Bucharest, 89 from Muntenia, 19 from Moldova and 14 from Dobrogea), while 43% of them have not visited yet this region; in addition,

another 15% of the respondents stated that they have not visited Oltenia yet, but plan to undertake journeys in the future – thus representing a potential market (73 respondents from Bucharest, 59 from Muntenia, 28 from Moldova, 14 from Oltenia and 9 from Dobrogea), and 1.1% of them have never visited, neither they want to visit this region in the future (absolute non-consumers of tourism products in the region of Oltenia).

In terms of tourism products, it is necessary that the needs and desires of potential tourists become “inputs” for their construction. The time they are willing to spend in the region of Oltenia provides the “space”, necessary to be known by tourism marketing specialists, which shall be further “populated” with activities/services in accordance with the type/types of tourism chosen by the potential tourists.

The journeys appertaining to business tourism usually last a settled period of time, those concerning balneotherapy tourism being bound to fit certain “rules”, more or less subjective, depending on the purpose of the journey (e.g., recuperation, prophylaxis, relaxation), while the visits to relatives and friends may also have a duration of time according to which certain tourism activities could be determined (and not the desired activities determine the journey duration); “the unknown data”, however, from the equation of the considered types of tourism remains the journey duration in Oltenia, for a cultural purpose.

The diversity of tourism resources of Oltenia are reflected in the perception/opinion of the potential tourist, by the number of days allocated to the destination visit. Thus, the required period of time in order to visit Oltenia from a cultural point of view (Figure 1) is, for most of the respondents, a week (30.8%), while 27.9% have mentioned that they would allocate to such journey a few days, 22.9% have opted for a period longer than a week, whereas 15.1% consider that a weekend is sufficient so as to visit the cultural attractions of the region and only 3.3% wish to confine their journeys to a single day. Therefore, it can be noticed that there are three major segments (with close weights in the total of the respondents) for which tourism marketing specialists could and should create, as well as “pack”, products involving cultural journeys, sojourns or circuits, of a few days, a week or even more.

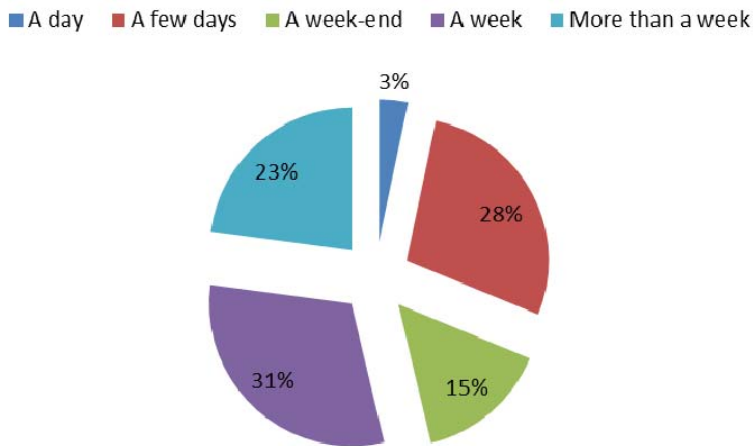


Figure 1. *The period of time, considered necessary by the respondents, in order to visit Oltenia from a cultural point of view*

Subsequently, it was aimed, among those who visited Oltenia, the identification of those respondents who would recommend this region to friends, as a cultural destination, according to the region's resources. Thus, it has been observed that an unexpectedly high percentage, of 77.5% of respondents who visited Oltenia, are determined to recommend this region to friends (most of them from Oltenia – 224 of the 254 respondents who visited the region), while 18.9% of them are not yet determined, and only 3.9% state that do not wish to recommend the region (Figure 2) – indicating a certain dissatisfaction regarding the consumption of the tourism product.

Regarding the recommendation of Oltenia as a balneotherapy destination, most of the respondents (61.6%) mentioned that they would recommend it, 27.6% do not know yet whether they will recommend it or not, while only 10.8% state that they would not recommend it (Figure 2). It can be observed that the intention to recommend Oltenia as a cultural destination manifests to a greater extent than the intention to recommend it as a balneotherapy destination, indicating satisfaction as a result of cultural holidays or of cultural components of holidays. Therefore, it is recommended that in the process of constructing tourism products in the region of Oltenia is used, as the main type of tourism – the cultural tourism, in combination with other types of tourism considered specific for each county in the region.

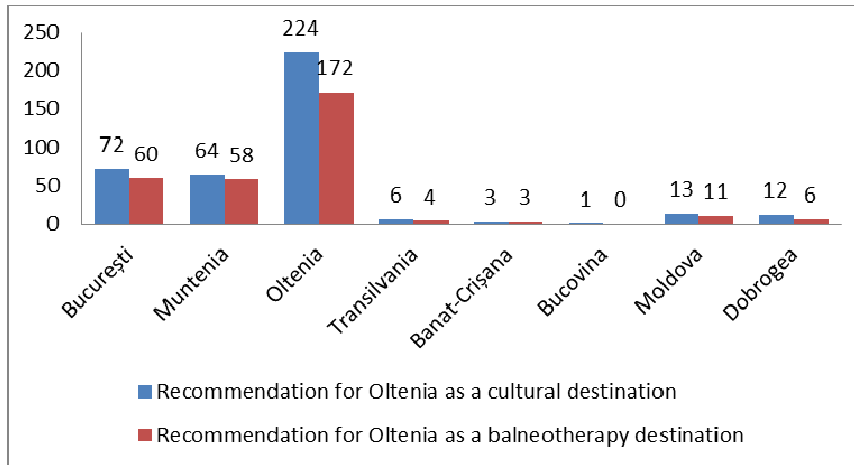


Figure 2. Intention of recommending Oltenia as a cultural and balneotherapy destination

Regarding the attractiveness of the five counties in Oltenia, analyzed in this research, it can be noticed that on the first place is Vâlcea County (with an average of 3.89, on a scale of 1 to 5), on the second place is Mehedinți County (3.76), Gorj county, ranked third (3.66), on the fourth place, Olt County (3.57), and on the last place, Dolj County (3.32). Thus, the presence of the most representative attractions from the most attractive counties (e.g., Băile Olănești, Băile Govora, Călimănești-Căciulata from Vâlcea County; the Iron Gates, the Danube Boilers from Mehedinți County) within the touristic circuits of Oltenia region is recommended.

A further objective of this research was to identify the opinion of young people towards various statements regarding Oltenia, measured on a scale of 1 to 10. Thus, the following were observed:

- The statement according to which Oltenia is the touristic region with the most beautiful manually woven carpets has recorded an average of 7.23, however, 35.2% of the respondents did not know any information about this statement;
- The statement according to which Oltenia is known as being the most rich region in thermal resorts has recorded an average of 6.79, however, 35.2% of the respondents did not know any information about this statement;
- The statement according to which Oltenia is the touristic region with the most numerous semi-fortified buildings (called “cule”) has recorded an average of 6.72, however, 62% of the respondents did not know any information about this statement;
- The statement according to which Oltenia is the touristic region mostly renowned for ceramics has recorded an average of 6.65, however, 40.7% of the respondents did not know any information about this statement;

- The statement according to which Oltenia is the region with the oldest monasteries in the country has recorded an average of 5.63, however, 28% of the respondents did not know any information about this statement;
- The statement according to which Oltenia is the poorest region has recorded an average of 4.21, however, 28.7% of the respondents did not know any information about this statement.

It may be ascertained that the mineral and thermal springs, as unique natural resources and superlatives of the region, are not known to a great extent, and neither are the semi-fortified buildings (“cule”), nor the ceramics – unique cultural resources of Oltenia. Therefore, increased communication is required, through all the relevant marketing channels, of the unique resources, of the superlatives, in terms of dimensions of some phenomena, in order to transform these elements of identity, unknown to a significant proportion of young people, into important elements of the region's image.

Regarding the elements which have the role of maintaining the spirit of Oltenia intact (Figure 3), the respondents have considered important the following: folklore/traditions/customs (67.5%), nature/landscape (64.7%), history (35%), atmosphere/ambient of the area (25.3%), people (24.2%), followed by religion (14.4%) and other (0.3%). Since the customs and traditions in Oltenia are considered in the highest proportion, by the respondents, as explanatory elements, illustrating the region's identity, they should be present at both functional and symbolic levels in the structure of tourism products in Oltenia, along with the natural background, represented by the landscapes of the region.

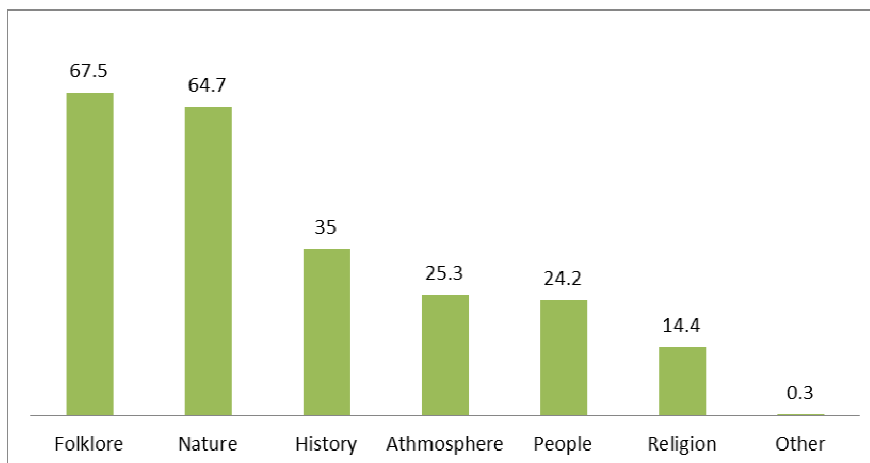


Figure 3. Elements with the role of preserving Oltenia's spirit

Within the traditions in the region of Oltenia, which maintain its spirit, and, thus, the place identity, it is important to study the degree of awareness of the elements which “complete” (and sometimes fundament) the touristic experience, offering specificity and uniqueness. These include the specific products, cuisine and wines of the region, providing consistency to the identity of Oltenia and tangibility to the elements that distinguish it from other regions of the country. The best known specific product of Oltenia is represented by leek (mentioned by 212 respondents), being important to also mention an ungrafted vine variety called “zaibăr” (mentioned by 132 respondents), Horezu ceramics (mentioned by 55 respondents), plum brandy called “țuică” (mentioned by 29 respondents) and a salty type of cheese called “brânză de burduf” (mentioned by 19 respondents) – Table 9. Since the respondents associate these products to Oltenia, retrieving them within the holidays in this region confers coherence to specific tourism products and a “permanent contact” with the spirit of Oltenia.

In accordance with the traditions of Oltenia, the forcemeat rolls in cabbage leaves (“sarmale”) and the specific sausages from Oltenia (“cârnați oltenești”), mentioned by 45, respectively 37 respondents, however, surpass, in terms of cuisine, the leek products, such as the leek main dish and the leek soup (mentioned by 14, respectively 12 respondents) – Table 9. Accompanying the cuisine and completing the gastronomical experience, the wine of Drăgășani is the most renowned wine, specific to Oltenia (mentioned by 76 respondents), followed by Oprișor (mentioned by 40 respondents) and Segarcea (mentioned by 31 respondents) – Table 9. Therefore, within the food services of the tourism product, but also as symbols, in its composition, these gastronomical products have the role of ensuring the specificity of Oltenia region.

As intangible elements, representing the culture of Oltenia, in order to shape the image of the region, the main renowned personalities of Oltenia and the most widespread legends have been determined. Undoubtedly, Constantin Brâncuși is the most famous personality of Oltenia (mentioned by 468 respondents). Correlated with the outstanding cultural resources of the region, Constantin Brâncuși can become a key element in shaping, illustrating, synthetising and representing the culture of Oltenia, improving, thus, the opinion concerning the practice of cultural tourism (currently on the third place in most counties). Michael the Brave and Tudor Vladimirescu (mentioned by 115, respectively 105 respondents) have the role of illustrating the history of the region, considered by 35% of the respondents an identity vector of Oltenia and Amza Pellea (mentioned by 79 respondents) expresses the spirit of the people of Oltenia, (considered to have a specific way of being by 24.2% of respondents) – Table 9. Among the

legends, elements of the region's image as well, the respondents have attributed the traditional Romanian holiday called "Dragobete" to the most renowned legend closely related to Oltenia (mentioned by 34 respondents), followed by Dochia's legend (mentioned by 21 respondents) – Table 9.

Table 9. *The most representative elements, in the respondents' opinion, for Oltenia's identity*
– % of total column, multiple answers –

	Specific products		Cuisine		Wines		Personalities		Legends/ Myths/ Stories	
1 st place	Leek	17.0	Meatrolls - "Sarmale"	3.6	Drăgășani wine	6.0	Constantin Brâncuși	37.5	"Dragobete"	2.7
2 nd place	Ungrafted vine variety called "zaibăr"	10.5	Specific sausages	2.9	Oprișor	3.2	Michael the Brave	9.2	Dochia's Legend	1.6
3 rd place	Horezu ceramics	4.4	Leek main dish	1.1	Segarcea	2.4	Tudor Vladimirescu	8.4	The Bridge of God's legend	1.0
4 th place	Plum brandy called "țuică"	2.3	Leek soup	0.9	Vânju Mare	1.7	Amza Pellea	6.3	Michael the Bravel's legend	0.9
5 th place	Salted chees called "brânză de burduf"	1.5	Polenta	0.9	Stârmina	1.6	Niculina Stoian	4.4	The Gate of Kiss legend	0.7
6 th place	Palinka	1.2	Aspic called "Piftie"	0.5	Știrbei	1.2	Nicolae Ceaușescu	4.3	The seven wonders of Caracal	0.6
7 th place	Manually woven carpets	1.1	Polenta with meatrolls	0.4	"Sâmburel de Olt"	0.9	Ecaterina Teodoroiu	3.8	Iancu Jianu	0.6
8 th place	Green watermelon called "lubeniță"	0.9	Specific stew	0.4	"Dealul Viilor"	0.7	Maria Tănase	3.3	The legend of Olt River formation	0.6
9 th place	Bread baked using an iron object (bell-type) called "țest"	0.9	Dumplings with plums	0.4	"Fetească Albă"	0.7	Nicolae Titulescu	3.0	The dance of mythical creatures called "iele"	0.4
10 th place	Pies of leavened dough called "scovergi"	0.4	Polenta with cheese	0.4	Corcova	0.5	Maria Lătărețu	2.8	"Paparude"	0.4
Total	1,247		1,247		1,247		1,247		1,247	

Source: statistical survey conducted by the authors.

Regarding the means of promotion – suitable for promoting Oltenia, for all the types of tourism, tourist attractions, natural and anthropogenic resources, as well as cultural resources of the destination, it is interesting that the main means of promotion, according to the respondents, is represented by the presentations within tourism fairs and conferences (with a score of 1.3 – Figure 4). Also the Internet is a suitable option, through websites and social media, altogether with advertising clips (1.13), considering articles from specialist journals as well (1.09).

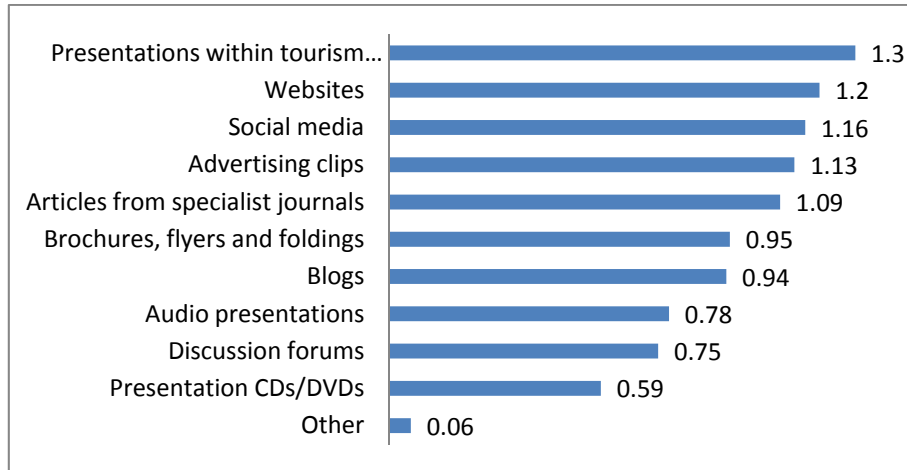


Figure 4. Means of promotion considered suitable by the respondents for promoting Oltenia

It is necessary to be noted that these five communication tools, considered appropriate, constitute a communication mix, in which communicating the elements of Oltenia's image should have a unitary nature, firstly considering elements of identity and the type of resources involved in the practice of various possible types of tourism, which can generate activities compatible only with certain communication media (e.g., the incompatibility of a detailed communication regarding the medical or therapeutical procedures regarding the balneotherapy resources in Vâlcea County in the online environment).

Limits

In order to develop tourism in a certain destination, it is necessary that such complex research is continued, and, most of all, extended, with the consideration of multiple components of the tourism products which could be constructed and provided to other market segments as well (with demographic and psychographic variables explaining certain preferences or phenomena).

In addition, a different type of organization could be proposed (e.g., by a type of tourism considered specific, such as balneotherapy, cultural tourism, visiting relatives and friends etc. which naturally "imprints" tourism activities as well), separated from the one containing the division by counties, whereas, in some cases, certain information held by respondents may not be associated with a certain county, and, therefore, could not reach to be communicated and disseminated.

Conclusions

The multitude of resources/types of resources does not implicitly facilitate the tourism development from a certain region, rather on the contrary, it requires increased marketing efforts. Therefore, tourism marketing specialists have the task of segmenting, targeting and positioning the market, i.e. to test the compatibility of the resources in order to combine them, both from the perspective of local communities and from the perspective of the potential tourists (all the more in the case of such a complex destination, like Oltenia), to track/target market segments for each tourism product, to find/position or retrieve/reposition the unique elements, all these simultaneous actions requiring coordination, organization and harmonization in a planned manner, with precise objectives, in order to efficiently and responsibly exploit the entire touristic potential of the region Oltenia.

Therefore, given that the research results show the fact that (both before and after the '90s) for neither of Oltenia's counties, none of the types of tourism is considered to be specific, at the same time, exclusive, the opinions revealing a rather fragmented distribution (either due the low level of knowledge, or due to the possibility of practicing a wide range of types of tourism); it is thus required a combination of types of tourism (e.g. leisure and cultural tourism, cultural and balneotherapy tourism), taking into account the ranking of the types of tourism that are representative for each county of Oltenia and the degree of attractiveness of each county.

Moreover, in order to foreshadow "the skeleton of the tourism product" with tourist attractions, one should take into account those which are equally considered representative (respecting the "requirements" of the destination) and attractive (respecting the "requirements" of potential tourists), the common core of the attractions representing the framework of developing various tourism activities (with distinct degrees of specificity and compatibility), leading to the creation of perceptual maps of attractions.

Permanently studying and, at the same time, carefully managing the differences between the elements of identity and the perceived elements (concerning the image) of a destination, it is assigned to the specialists the task to remove the existing dissonance, in order to avoid "supplying" the potential tourists' expectations in a wrong direction, but also to maintain an authentic background of resources of the destination, uninvaded of "extraneous" elements, which, despite having an increased capital of knowledge, can "dilute" the region's identity by associating it, without factual basis, with inadequate elements of folklore, tradition, nature and culture.

Note

- ⁽¹⁾ The questionnaires were completed by students of the faculties of Marketing, Commerce, Agricultural and Environmental Economics (from the bachelor and masters degree), promotions of 2010/2011 and 2011/2012, of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies and from the Faculty of Entrepreneurship, Engineering and Business Management of the Polytechnic University of Bucharest, whom we thank on this occasion.

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