

Sensory marketing strategies. Case study: Oltenia

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Abstract. *From the perspective of the tourist, sensory marketing strategies may result in an experience improvement which leads, in time, to acquiring a positive destination image, and, from the perspective of the destination, to furthering its harmonious development. Even though it appears that sensory marketing strategies can be considered as alternatives for marketing strategies, they actually are complementary, and their objective (increasing product quality by "turning to the beginning", where perception and consumer knowledge start), aims to handle the senses of the consumer by starting from the identification of his/her needs.*

Keywords: sensory marketing strategies, sensory signatures, sensory dimensions, sensory brand of the destination.

JEL Classification: M31.

REL Classification: 14G.

1. Introduction

For marketing to offer a single solution to the consumer – a premise for any destination’s brand experience, sensory marketing must take into account deep segmentation, to the level of approaching the senses of any individual. Segmentation is important and is followed by choosing the segment, positioning and then by establishing marketing objectives, and the marketing strategy respectively, in the context of marketing strategic planning (Morrison, 2013, p. 87).

Out of the desire of providing consumers with products that would represent memorable experiences for themselves, organisations have also started to implement sensory marketing strategies. Practically, these strategies are strategic approaches that aim to achieve competitive advantages, which can mean sensory, emotional and rational benefits for the consumers, so that the implementing organisation can establish, maintain and improve relations with the other organizations with which it interacts or with its own consumers, by stimulating their senses by obtaining a congruence between the brand’s value and its image (Rodrigues et al., 2011). For this reason, sensory marketing strategies are considered complementary to those within the framework of the marketing plan and are concerned with leading the consumer to achieve a “supreme sensory experience” in relation to the brand (Hultén et al., 2009, p. 14).

Sensory marketing strategies are founded on differentiations by which they can, according to Giboreau and Body (2007, pp. 25-27), be classified into:

- sensory-hedonistic differentiation, where the strategy is focused on the consumer’s sensations, so that the symbolic and/or functional attributes can be developed starting from the desired sensations for the purpose of achieving a connection between the consumer and the product, and arriving at customer attachment to the brand;
- sensory-functional differentiation, where the strategy follows the perception of better functionality, by identifying some new uses, additional services and innovative functions, so that the sensory attributes developed afterwards will sustain functional benefits before, during and after product use, assuring product-brand coherence;
- sensory-symbolic differentiation, where the strategy has as its objective brand positioning, and the sensory attributes are chosen so that they are coherent and support that positioning, by creating associations in the consumers’ minds, starting from a central element, which then has been “declined in all relevant symbolic directions” (Giboreau, Body, 2007, p. 26).

This study establishes a series of sensory identity elements for the destination brand Oltenia which can become, on the long-term, sensory signatures if the marketer, maintaining the guiding line provided by these elements and improving

tourist experience in the identified contact points, creates unique associations, strong in the mind of the consumer, to position the brand. In this context, sensory signatures can be considered sensory marketing strategies. Taking into account the experience nature of the destination, whose use should transform into a memorable experience for the tourist, sensory marketing strategies are an optimal way of positioning the destination brand in the heart and mind of the tourist.

Micro-destination Oltenia⁽¹⁾ is bounded by the Southern Carpathians in the North and North-West, by the Olt River in the East, by the Danube in the South and South-West and includes the counties of Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea. Together with the other micro-destinations (Dobrogea, Muntenia, Banat-Crișana, Transilvania, Maramureș, Moldova and Bucovina), Oltenia forms macro-destination Romania, the discovery of the sensory signatures that define it was done after analysing the sensory identity elements, and research.

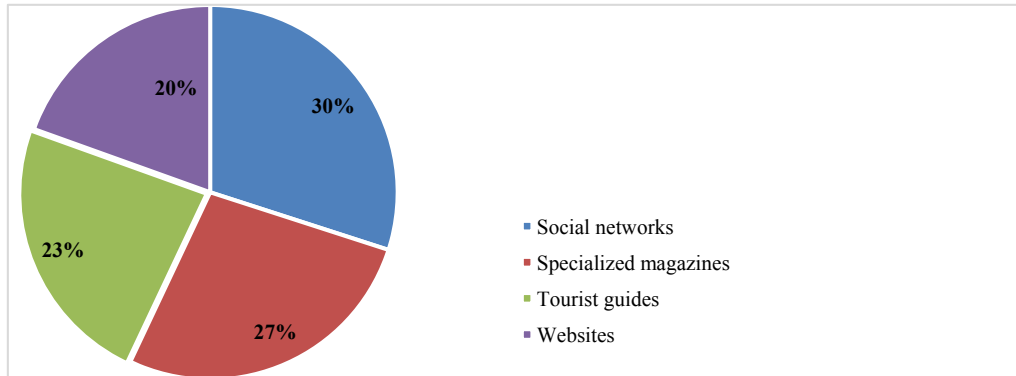
2. Methodological framework

The research, conducted between March 2012 and July 2012 on a sample of 416 respondents coming from all of Romania's regions, aged 20-24 years, with higher education or ongoing higher educations, with 27.2% men and 72.8% women, had as its objective identifying sensory signatures for micro-destination Oltenia. This research is building on an earlier one regarding representative attraction elements for micro-destination Oltenia, conducted between October 2010 – December 2010 – January 2011 on a sample of 1887 respondents (Stăncioiu et al., 2011), with a similar profile with the current research.

Among the respondents, 83.9% have visited Oltenia, 77.4% wishing to return to this destination, which shows they were satisfied with the experience. The respondents that didn't visit Oltenia (16.1%) explained their choice by: insufficient time (29.8%), lack of material resources (23.7%), lack of interest (18.6%), lack of information concerning accommodation facilities (9.3%), unfavourable information on the region (3.3%), other reason (4.7%) and do not know (10.6%).

The information sources that the tourists have used to document themselves concerning micro-destination Oltenia are presented in Figure 1. What is surprising is the strong showing that social networks have on informing tourists about micro-destination Oltenia. One explanation could be that most of the potential tourist's acquaintances are on these social networks, the tourist trusting their recommendations, and also in the ease of sharing information among social networks, especially of photographs, important elements in presenting a destination and creating a first impression.

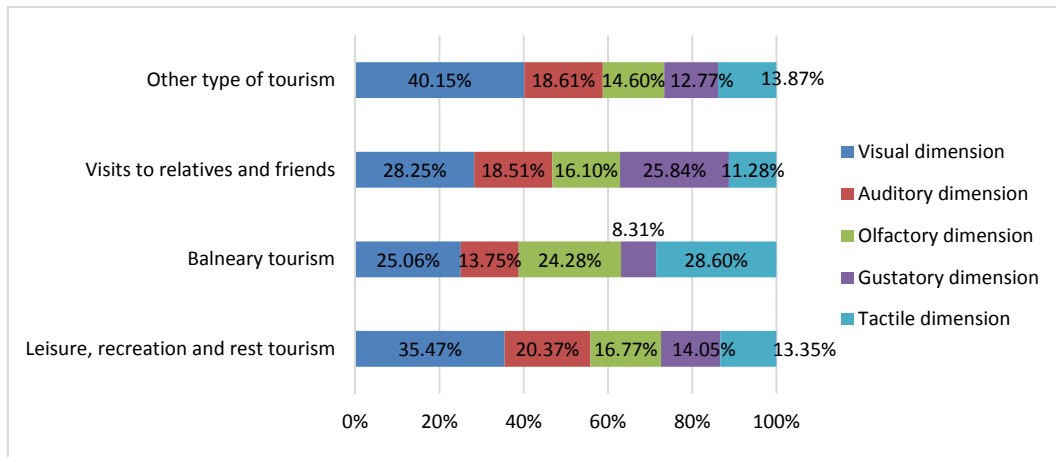
Figure 1. Information sources used by tourists in order to document themselves regarding micro-destination Oltenia



From here we can infer that the marketer should be assured that the tourist’s experience is a memorable one, at least in the identified tourist – destination interaction points, so that the photographs he made (which will later be published on social networks) will lead in forming a correct destination image.

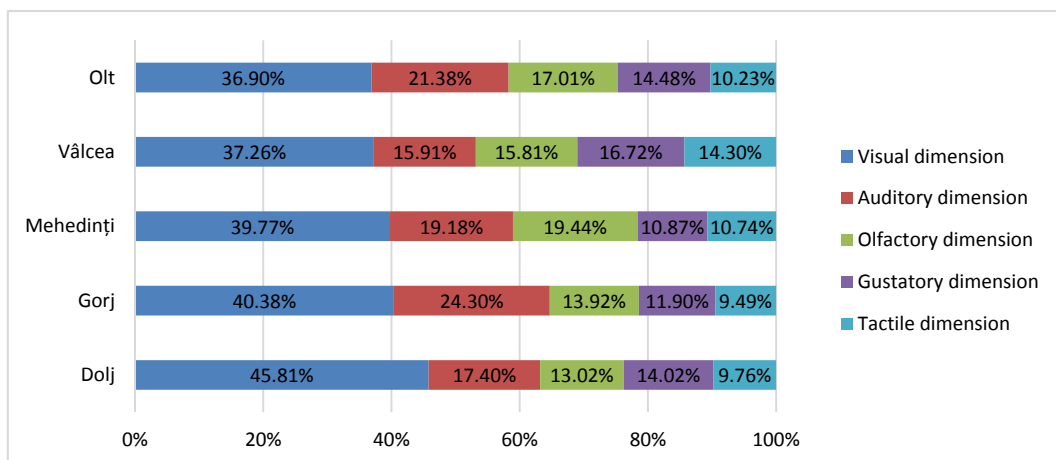
Another aspect the marketer should take into account is that of the optimal use of destination resources, so that they represent a real competitive advantage, “imposing”, at the same time, the characteristic type of tourism. Therefore, the tourism type – the main motivation for which the tourist travels to a destination – needs a sensory analysis (Figure 2), with the purpose of improving tourist experience by dealing with his senses and improving destination quality. At the same time, by prioritising the specific type of tourism of Oltenia, followed by selecting contact points that support that type of tourism (considered a priority) and transforming those points into coherent “scenes” on which the tourist lives unique experiences, but also by improving services (transport, accommodation, food, leisure and other complementary ones), the whole micro-destination can develop harmoniously. As an example, if balneary tourism becomes a priority for the Oltenia micro-destination (as Figure 2 shows, food services are poorly developed), in this case, in order to offer to the tourist a positive holistic experience the rapid improvement of service quality is imposed.

Figure 2. *The sensory dimensions perceived by tourists for the main types of tourism in micro-destination Oltenia*



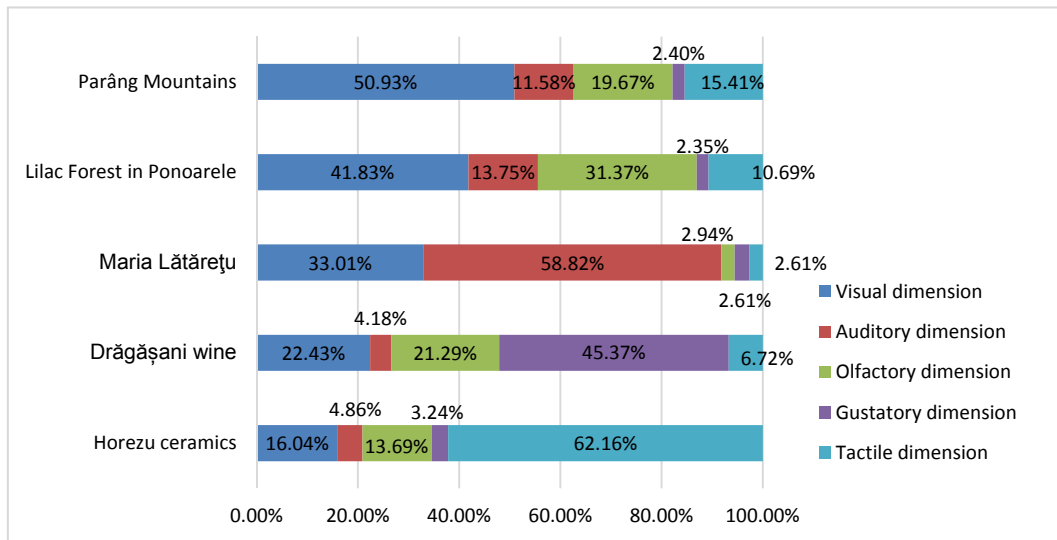
Once the type of tourism becomes a priority at the level of the “region” as micro-destination, the marketer will realize a sensory analysis of the composing counties (Figure 3), taking into account that each one can constitute a destination on its own, but that they should deliver an integrated experience. One can observe (Figure 3) that among all the counties composing the Oltenia micro-destination, Vâlcea County has the most developed tactile dimension, being known that tactile stimuli are mostly used in balneary tourism, and Vâlcea houses most of the balneary resorts and locations in Oltenia. On the other side, Mehedinți and Gorj Counties also house a balneary resort or location, for which the tactile dimension is poorly developed, so that in order to improve tourist balneary experience in micro-destination Oltenia, adequate marketer measures are necessary.

Figure 3. *Sensory dimensions perceived by tourists in the counties composing micro-destination Oltenia*



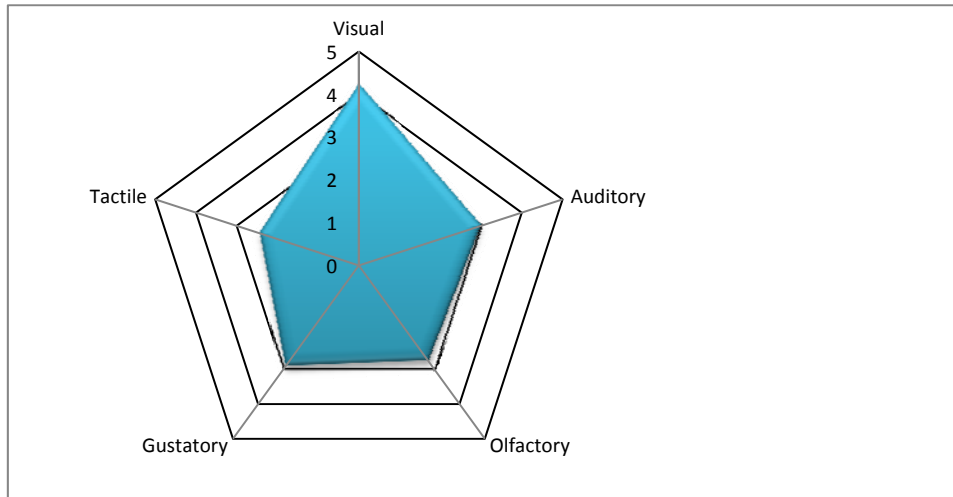
The sensory analysis can be further made at the level of specific attractions elements for micro-destination Oltenia and/or for each county (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Sensory dimensions perceived by tourists for attraction elements of micro-destination Oltenia



The researched attraction elements constitute contact points between the tourist and destination, and unique experiences can be developed around them in order to lead to the wanted positioning for Oltenia. Figure 4 contains an attraction element that peaks on a certain sensory dimension (visual dimension – Parâng Mountains, auditory dimension – Maria Lătărețu, olfactory dimension – the Lilac Forest in Ponoarele, gustatory dimension – Drăgășani wine, tactile dimension – Horezu ceramics).

Carrying out the sensory profile of micro-destination Oltenia (Figure 5), by following Lindstrom in creating sensory models (sensograms) for a brand (Lindstrom, 2009), becomes a measure of developing and monitoring the sensory brand of the destination. The figure makes it clear that the sensory profile of micro-destination Oltenia is poorly developed and only by identifying sensory identity elements, which can lead in time (by implementing sensory marketing strategies) to attaining the peak on each sensory dimensions (becoming destination brand signatures), we can come to a clear positioning in the heart and mind of the tourist.

Figure 5. Sensory profile of the micro-destination Oltenia

After creating the sensory profile, once the interaction points between the tourist and the destination are identified, by analysing the experience the tourist feels in Oltenia, the marketer will select the sensory identity elements that he/she wishes to transform into sensory signatures. In Table 1 the contact points (attraction elements) that characterize the tourist's visual experience in micro-destination Oltenia are presented.

Table 1. Visual elements "composing" the experience for the micro-destination Oltenia

	Visual elements	Total	-% of total column- of which	
			Male	Female
	<i>Base</i>	416	113	303
1	Endless Column – Coloana Infinitului	12.0	9.7	12.9
2	landscape	7.7	7.1	7.9
3	Olt	5.3	8.0	4.3
4	fields	4.6	5.3	4.3
5	The Gate of the Kiss – Poarta Sărutului	4.3	5.3	4.0
6	beautiful	3.1	1.8	3.6
7	mountain	2.9	2.7	3.0
8	River Olt	2.6	4.4	2.0
9	monasteries	2.4	2.7	2.3
10	Olt River Valley	2.4	1.8	2.6
11	Cozia Monastery	2.2	0.9	2.6
12	Craiova	1.9	3.5	1.3
13	Muierii Cave	1.9	3.5	1.3
14	Târgu Jiu	1.9	2.7	1.7
15	green	1.9	1.8	2.0
16	Brâncuși masterpieces	0.0	1.8	1.7
17	Others	39.4	32.7	41.9
18	Does not exist/I don't know	1.7	4.4	0.7

The Endless Column is the visual identity element that can, in time, become the visual signature of the brand Oltenia. Also from Table 1 we can observe that the visual experience concerning the micro-destination Oltenia is dominated by Brâncuși's masterpieces, so that, together with the Endless Column, the other art pieces from the great artist complete the visual identity of the micro-destination Oltenia brand.

Concerning the auditory experience that the tourist can have when he visits Oltenia, it can be observed that there is no single element that can be associated with the destination, with the exception of the local accent (Table 2). Because of this, for the marketer to succeed in creating a auditory signature for the micro-destination Oltenia (Table 2), he/she must identify a specific traditional song (for example *sârba oltenească*, *rustemul*, *călușarii* etc.) which would become the auditory signature, or he/she can create an event during which traditional-folk music from Oltenia would play, or even represent the central element, in this hypothesis, the event becoming the auditory signature for the Oltenia brand.

Table 2. Auditory elements "composing" the experience for the micro-destination Oltenia

		-% of total column-		
Auditory elements		Total	of which	
			Male	female
	<i>Base</i>	416	113	303
1	quietness	13.0	12.4	13.2
2	traditional music	7.7	9.7	6.9
3	music	4.1	1.8	5.0
4	accent	3.6	4.4	3.3
5	noise	3.4	6.2	2.3
6	local accent (Oltenia)	2.9	5.3	2.0
7	commotion	2.9	3.5	2.6
8	birds	2.9	3.5	2.6
9	folklore	2.4	1.8	2.6
10	stream	2.2	2.7	2.0
11	manele	1.9	3.5	1.3
12	local music	1.9	2.7	1.7
13	Sârba (dance)	1.9	1.8	2.0
14	streams	1.7	1.8	1.7
15	Others	44.7	31.9	49.5
16	Does not exist/I don't know	2.9	7.1	1.3

The tourist olfactory experience in micro-destination Oltenia is dominated by the clean air (Table 3), which can't represent an element of olfactory identity.

Table 3. *Olfactory elements “composing” the experience for the micro-destination Oltenia*

		-% of total column-		
Olfactory elements		Total	Of which	
<i>Base</i>		416	Male	female
1	fresh	12.5	13.3	12.2
2	clean air	6.5	6.2	6.6
3	fresh air	3.4	1.8	4.0
4	flower	3.1	2.7	3.3
5	scallion	2.6	2.7	2.6
6	clean	2.4	4.4	1.7
7	grass	1.9	1.8	2.0
8	food	1.9	2.7	1.7
9	smell	1.9	3.5	1.3
10	nature	1.9	3.5	1.3
11	flowers	1.7	1.8	1.7
12	enjoyable	1.7	0.9	2.0
13	blossomed linden tree	1.7	1.8	1.7
14	Olt River	1.2	1.8	1.0
15	Other	41.1	29.2	45.5
16	Does not exist/I don't know	14.4	22.1	11.6

The gustatory experience for the tourist in micro-destination Oltenia, according to respondent opinion (Table 4), is represented by scallion (praz), which can be found in a lot of local recipes (scallion ciorba (soup), filled scallion, scallion with cheddar, scallion with cheese, scallion bread, etc.). Scallion can become the gustatory signature for the Oltenia brand as, among traditional Romanian recipes with a local trait, scallion ciorba (soup) is mentioned. Other gustatory identity elements that were mentioned by the respondents are: local sausages (including “trandafir” (rose) sausages), and zaibăr (Table 4).

Table 4. *Gustatory elements “composing” the experience for micro-destination Oltenia*

		-% of total column-		
Gustatory elements		Total	of which	
<i>Base</i>		416	Male	female
1	Scallion (praz)	17.8	21.2	16.5
2	food	7.5	7.1	7.6
3	traditional food	5.8	7.1	5.3
4	good	3.8	4.4	3.6
5	sarmale	3.8	2.7	4.3
6	Local (Oltenia) sausages	2.9	5.3	2.0
7	Zaibăr	2.4	4.4	1.7
8	sweet	2.2	1.8	2.3
9	good food	2.2	2.7	2.0
10	wine	1.4	1.8	1.3
11	salted	1.2	0.9	1.3
12	flavoured	1.0	0.9	1.0
13	sausages	1.0	1.8	0.7
14	ciorba	1.0	1.8	0.7
15	Others	38.9	26.5	43.6
16	Does not exist/I don't know	7.2	9.7	6.3

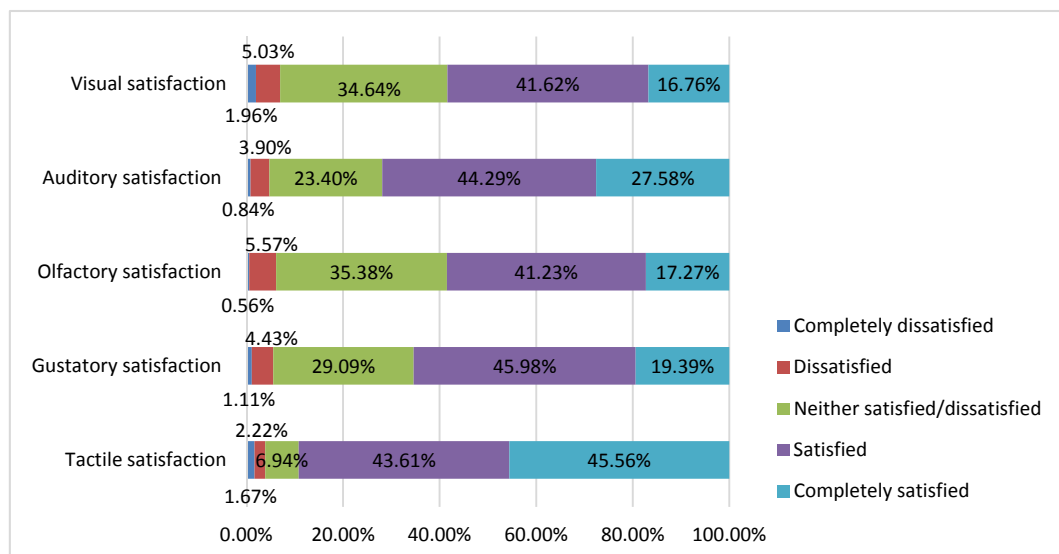
From the point of view of the tactile dimension, Oltenia offers the tourist the experience of sculpture and the art of clay modelling (Table 5). Component of the UNESCO Immaterial World Heritage, Horezu ceramics can become the tactile signature of the Oltenia brand.

Table 5. Tactile elements “composing” the experience for the micro-destination Oltenia

		-% of total column-		
Tactile elements		Total	Of which Male	female
	Base	416	113	303
1	hot	15.1	20.4	13.2
2	high temperature	5.0	5.3	5.0
3	temperature	3.1	2.7	3.3
4	ceramics	2.4	2.7	2.3
5	grass	2.2	1.8	2.3
6	chill	1.7	0.0	2.3
7	pleasant temperature	1.7	1.8	1.7
8	Horezu ceramics	1.4	3.5	0.7
9	enjoyable	1.2	0.9	1.3
10	water	1.0	1.8	0.7
11	good	1.0	0.9	1.0
12	Endless Column	1.0	0.0	1.3
13	Others	43.5	26.5	49.8
14	Does not exist/I don't know	19.7	31.9	15.2

At the same time, the tactile experience offers tourists the biggest satisfaction, as we can see from Figure 6. It seems that the potters’ craft and Horezu ceramics, together with sculpture (represented by the pieces of Constantin Brâncuși) create a memorable tactile experience for the tourist.

Figure 6. The satisfaction degree felt by tourists on each sensory dimension in micro-destination Oltenia



Even if the tourist is satisfied by the experience, and by the sensory experience lived in micro-destination Oltenia (Figure 6) respectively, the low number of unique attraction elements associated with this place, put against a vast existing and recognized material and immaterial heritage, is a measure of the lack of continuous marketing activity, and of sensory marketing respectively, which could build, step by step, the sensory brand of micro-destination Oltenia.

Taking into account all the sensory attraction elements referenced earlier, sensory marketing should assert itself all the more, as even in 1919, professor George Vâlsan was saying that “each person associates, more so than one could suspect, the semblance of nature to his frames of mind, especially of the happy ones, of the most intimate [...] Our conscience sometimes identifies itself with nature. [...] nature begets a soul [...] – she has a social soul. Meaning it gives common reason to each individual manifestation” (Vâlsan, 2006, pp. 27-28).

3. Conclusions

Sensory marketing strategies ensure sustainable competitive advantages to a destination in an economy of knowledge, thus leading to sensory brand creation. Taking into account the fact that tourist experience represents an indicator of destination quality, the marketer has started to attach a greater importance to this indicator, an example being the in-line ministry which, in its strategy formulation for the tourism brand Romania, has proposed “designing some unique Romanian experiences, as well as some routes and special developed areas, where they can be lived” (Ministerul Dezvoltării Regionale și Turismului, 2011, p. 20). This way, the success of sensory marketing strategies depends on providing the right sensory mix (Derval, 2010).

Even if that for a destination sensory marketing strategies start from symbolic differentiation, in the sense of brand positioning, beyond the associations created in the mind of the tourist, they will also lead, in time, to the improvement of destination quality, by developing some contact points where the tourist experience is memorable.

Research limits are represented by the errors that appear in the sensory evaluation of a complex product, like a destination, and also by the fact that, during the course of the study, only tourist opinion was analysed, presenting a consumer perspective and not taking into account the opinion of all its stakeholders, including the opinion of the marketer.

In the future, completing the study with the perspective of the organisation which handles the marketing and the destination management will be pursued, along with the study of the opinions of respondents from different age groups.

Note

- ⁽¹⁾ This article follows up on the series concerning the sensory audit of macro-destination Romania, the first two “episodes” being “Dimensions of the destination’s sensory profile. Case study: Muntenia” (Stăncioiu et al., 2014) and “The sensory brand of the destination. Case study: Transylvania” (Dițoiu et al., 2014). In those articles, using historical and geographic segmentation criteria, the perspective is that of the national level destination, macro-destination Romania, composed by region-level destinations, called micro- destinations.

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