

INNOVATION AND IDENTITY IN THE DANUBE BEND TOURISM

Sabina Gheorgheci, Mirela Mazilu

***Abstract:** Ethno-genesis element and, at the same time, an area with important cultural, ethnic and economic interferences, the Danube Valley, populated at least from the Neolithic, represents nowadays a potential of high tourist attractiveness, all the more so as the Danube can achieve the junction between Western, Central and South-Eastern Europe.*

Insufficiently valued up to the present, the tourist potential of this tourist macro-destination, itself divided into complex tourist micro-regions, has as starting point, on the one hand the 53 important harbours with their historical, but also economical value, as well as the 17 relatively compact ethnicities (Germans, Serbians, Slovaks, Slovenians, Hungarians, Czechs, Russians, Jews, Turks, Croatians, Armenians, Gipsies, Bosnians, Poles, Romanians, Bulgarians and Ukrainians) well represented through settlements - with architectural patterns, rural landscapes and cultural traditions.

These elements, which can be grouped under the marketing umbrella - the cultural tourism marketing, must be classified within a strategy for the entire Danube Valley, starting from the cultural symbolic representations at the level of the researched mental, at the individual level and, subsequently, at the collective level.

***Keywords:** Innovation, identity, tourist product, bend sustainable strategy*

The Danube Bend tourism micro-destination is a unique tourist area, recently integrated into the Romanian and the European tourism, where tourists stop in the commercial harbours or cross it on the cyclotourist track, in order to take part in traditional products fairs and the local cultural festivals, as well as in other events organised by the communities; in order to explore the natural space of the Iron Gates Natural Park on the fitted tracks, and, last but not least, in order to visit the tourist attractiveness elements with a high historical symbolism, spread over the Danube.

It is not arbitrary that almost each citizen of the Bend has an occupation or a concern for tourism or works in the field of the specific or adjacent tourism services.

The Danube Bend micro-region is organised as a LEADER (THE DANUBE BEND GAL) territory, it has the economic profile, the infrastructure, the utilities and the services specifically developed for and focused on tourism.

The new systemic approach of the development concept includes interdependent economic and social components, but also spatial, geographical, psycho-social, legal and administrative components, etc. “*The connections between the main indicators of the economic and social development, and also the population increase, the raw material resources, the economic growth, the population consumption, the social protection and the natural environment*”¹ are correlated with the nature of the property right on the land, the social influences and the stratification of the society, the organisation and the motivation of the governmental bureaucracy, the public administration system, the nature of the general attitude towards work, free time and self-perfection, including the attitudes of the economic and political elites,²

Any economic development strategy proposes three major objectives³:

- ☞ the increase of the possibilities to achieve and distribute on a wide scale of the necessary goods for a decent subsistence;
- ☞ the increase of the standard of living, including additional high incomes, more work places, better education, higher attention to the cultural and human values, respectively the generation of a higher national and individual self-respect;
- ☞ the increase of economic and social opportunities, available at a micro/macro-social level.

An innovative, competently-designed tourist product can focus on that perspective element which would ensure a sustainable development: cultural attractions, local people's hospitality, the desire

1 Alecsandru C. Sobaru, Gabriel Năstase, Chiriac Avădanei - coordonatori, *Artera navigabilă Dunăre – Main – Rhin*. Strategii europene orizont 2020, București, EdituraEconomică, 1998, pag. 259

2 M. Căndea, Florina Bran, *Spațiul geografic românesc*, București, Editura Economică,2001, pag. 260

3 Idem, pag. 270

for the better, gastronomy elements specific for the Danube Bend, which, thank God, are abundant!

Moreover, it means the improvement of the infrastructure, given the landslides from the north of the Bend, but also the ones from September 2014 from the area of Orșova locality, on E70 route, which paralysed the tourist traffic to and from the Bend, ending in human victims as well... The innovative tourist product, contributor to the economic growth and the standard of living of the inhabitants of the Bend localities, shall take into account the assurance and the protection of the human factor interests, the technical fittings and the heritage preservation, grouped in **three action directions** as follows:

- the mitigation of the high percentage of the migration of the population from disadvantaged environments (for instance rural environment) and the stimulation of the return, at least partially, of the population to these areas;
- the economic stimulation, the creation of new work places, the stability of the active population in these environments;

The identity or **The destination identity**, filtered through the identity elements, represents the basis of the brand construction process; hence, the creation of a responsible marketing structure of (Pike, 2005, pg. 39), with the elaboration of strategies/tactics/actions, focused on the same set of general and marketing objectives, within a marketing plan considering all the destination stakeholders, including the local community, is needed for the development of a powerful, coherent brand.

The destination identity, for the “competitiveness increase on a long term of a destination”, needs the knowledge and, subsequently, the usage of the components of “the destination universe” of the marketing experts within the thorough process of building tourist products with specific, authentic elements, which should constitute contact points between the segments of target consumers and the actual destination nature and culture. The purpose of this article is to identify, within a quantitative research, those elements specific to the region that can “collaborate” for the development of all the structural tourist products, comprising the tangible and intangible elements, functional and symbolic elements, and that may be offered to more market segments,

through planned destination marketing activities, but also with the entire preservation of its identity.⁴

The cultural **identity elements** for this tourist micro-region - the Danube Bend, analysed as common elements (with common histories, considering the three clusters), as well as single elements that form the brand through:

- **culinary identity** (the local gastronomy, with common products - examples, honey, coffee, etc., so different for the ethnicities of the area);
- **traditional habitat identity**, determined by the origin, the evolution and the architecture of the ethnic settlements and specificities of the dwellings located along the Danube Valley (for instance, the presence of the porch - for the original Romanian house, for the Bulgarian or the Slav - Ukrainian one);
- **cultural ethnicities identity**.

Each city, village or place on the Danube has its personality and specific, determined mainly by the ethnicities populating it.

At the moment, the Danube Bend Area faces an unprecedented economic decline; the reduction of the mine activity and of the shipbuilding yard from Orșova make the regional tourism, especially the cruise tourism, one of the few improvement solutions of the situation.

Considering the national economic crisis, the state budget represents wishful thinking for the situation solution, needing the involvement of the civil society for the attraction of investments in the area. As any investor aims for advantages, these can come only with legislative and administrative facilities meant to finally bring the re-launching of the area.

The Danube Bend (in Serbian Banatska Klisura, Банатска Клисура) is located along the Northern bank of the Danube, in the South of Banat region. The region is delimited by the Nera river in the West and the Danube Gorges in the East. The largest settlements from the Danube Bend are Orșova Municipality and Moldova Nouă Town. The Danube Bend also comprises Socol, Pojejena, Coronini, Garnic, Șichevița, Berzasca communes from Caraș-Severin county, as well as Șvinița, Dubova, Eșelnița, Ilovița and Breznița-Ocol from Mehedinți county.

4 Aurelia-Felicia Stăncioiu, Nicolae Teodorescu, Ion Pârgaru, Andreea Botoș, Anamaria-Cătălina Radu, Identitatea Olteniei – o abordare sistemică a universului unei destinații turistice, *Economie teoretică și aplicată, Volumul XX (2013), No. 7(584), pp. 4-22*

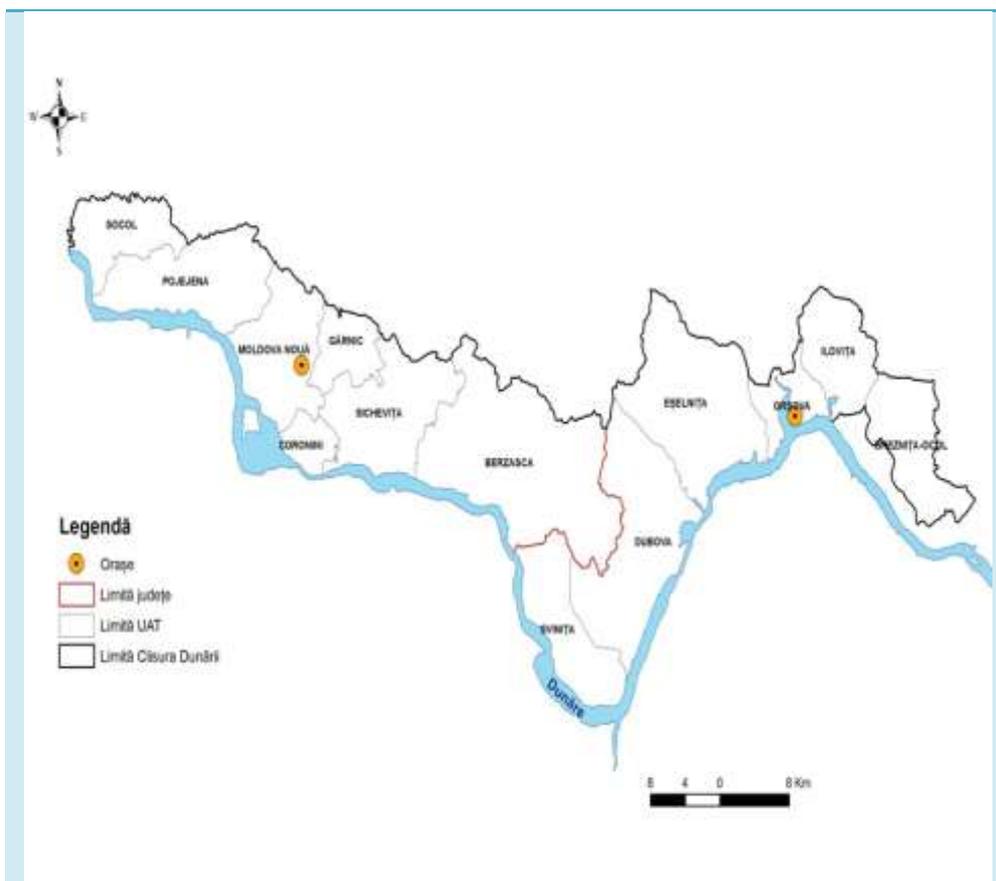


Fig. 1 The administrative map of the Danube Bend.

The Bend is regionally identified through an ethnical mosaic: Romanians, Serbians, Czechs, Germans, living together exemplary. The Danube Bend tourist route comprises diversified tourist products, such as: ruins of fortresses telling the history of hundreds of centuries, the Statue of Decebal, Tabula Traiana, Trikule Fortress, Drenecova Fortress, Saint Ladislau's Fortress, but also the Golubac Fortress on the Serbian bank. The old Danube river is the perfect frame for the practice of many nautical sports, the Danube Bend area being perfect for the mountainous routes, hiking in open air, paintball in Ogradena area, or for spending time outdoors.

The **DANUBE BEND** tourist area is the “messenger” of tourism from Banat and comprises the longest and the most beautiful canyon from Europe - the Danube Canyon (135 km), from Baziaş to the “Iron Gates” (Gura Văii) reservoir dam, built during 1964-1971.

Within a regional entity, **identity can be seen from a geographical point of view, as well as a materialization tool of a complex marketing planning process**, as a part of the strategic marketing process and, respectively, as a marketing program comprising, as any other marketing process, the situation analysis (through the main specific markers of the tourist activity), the setting of the objective/objectives, the strategy development, the action program (communication, internal marketing, etc.), the implementation or the practice, the evaluation and the control.

The success of a tourist destination is set by the manner in which it manages to guarantee and, at the same time, to ensure an experience equalling or exceeding the multiple alternative destinations to the visitors, through its entire offer.

As a consequence, through all that the tourist destination offers, from the potential tourist's first contact with it, - under the form of information, images, impressions, up to the moment of the lived experience - it must raise the interest, associate to an achievement. A high competitiveness of the tourist destination may be ensured only by such an approach. (Fig. 2)

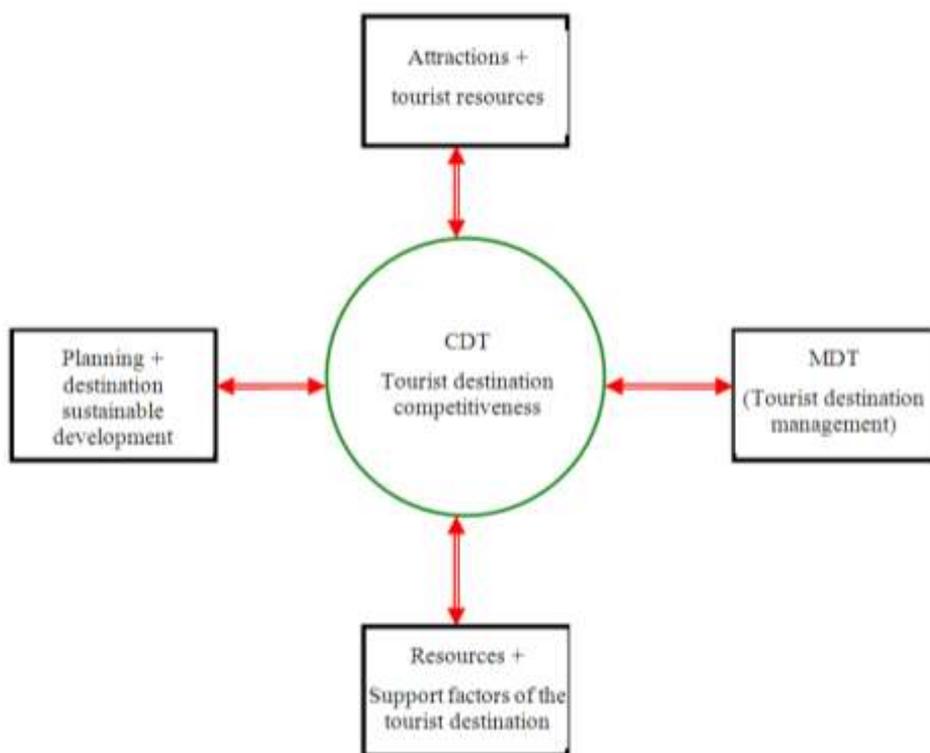


Fig. 2 Competitiveness of the Danube Bend tourist destination

A micro-region, to express the reliability as a tourist destination, must emphasise its defining elements, but also the activities from the recreational, curative or cultural sphere in which it is specialised (adapted from Cocean et al., 2002, pp. 297-298) This means several stages, organically linked between them within a planned frame, setting several objectives and specific strategies, at a micro-, medium and macro-levels, starting from the “studying of the motivational request, of resources, in terms of their functionality for tourism and the operational profitability” (Erdeli, Gheorghilaş, 2006, pg. 288-289).

Therefore, I propose in the Ph.D thesis, starting from these considerations, the disclosure of the regional brand elements, identifying those functions or tourism forms (recreational, curative and/or cultural) specific for a tourist micro-destination, such as the “yet unseen and unknown” Danube Bend.

The following image (Fig. 3) shows the elements favouring the innovation; these represent **four variables**, the most important ones being the strategic advantages (the market opportunities) and the employee competences (connected to the new technology, the

professional training, control and relationship). The decisional processes and the organisation abilities together with other company resources have a less significant influence on innovation.

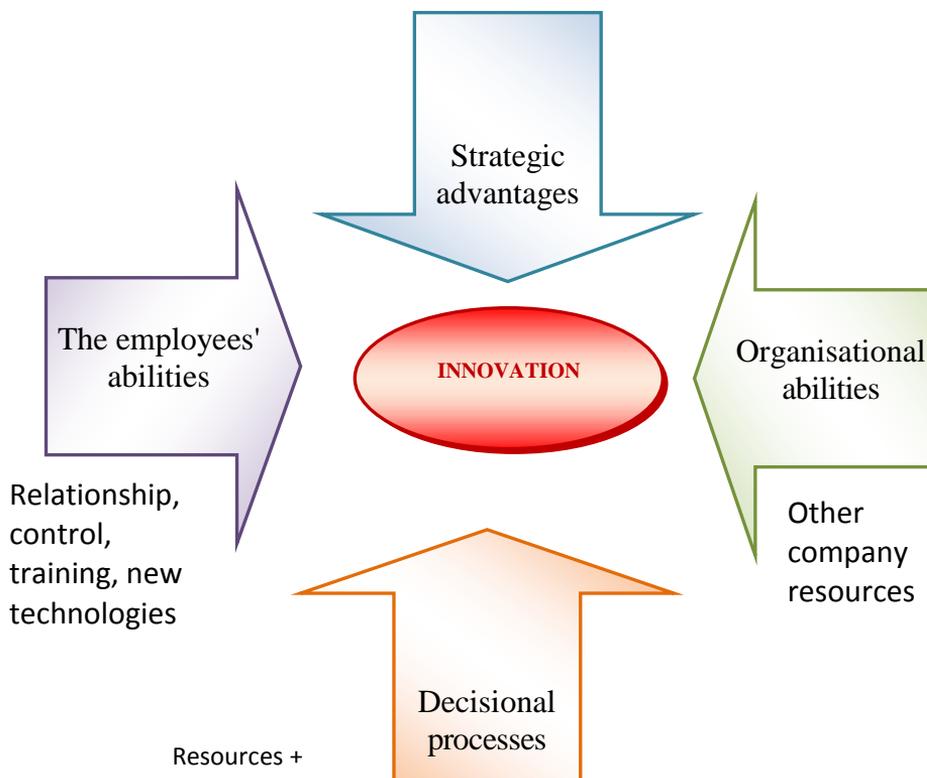


Figure no. 3. The main variables influencing innovation
(Source: adapted from Julien P.A., Innovation et PME, 2003)

Basically, innovation in the Danube Bend tourism must be directed towards:

- 1. The imperative creation of innovative tourist products and packages**
- 2. The diversification of tourist services and of the complementary innovative services in the region**

Thus, elements from the cultural potential and ethnic mosaic from the Danube Bend may become unique innovative tourist products: local festivals, specific Gastronomy and Crafts fairs, local centres of traditions, the creation of innovative services for tourists, which are missing from the area: a first aid point, lifeguard services in the

mountains, the caves and the river, children playgrounds and services, pet services, beauty services, SPA, common transportation services, social services (social assistance, clubs for the elderly, elderly centres).

The rural areas in difficulty need the support through multinational programs in order to maintain and develop **reliable rural communities**. The development programs for the disadvantaged areas must comprise the following fields:

- diversifying the activities from the primary sector;
- developing the non-agricultural sector;
- developing the agro-tourism;
- protecting and rebuilding the natural environment;
- developing the human resources by occupying and stabilising the rural work force;
- -technical assistance

The rehabilitation of the civil heritage is achieved, while there is a tourist flow, mainly in two ways:

☞ **The preservation or the restoration of the historical or cultural interest objectives** may be obtained through practicing several access fees;

☞ **The creation of an accommodation potential** means the restoration and re-inclusion in the circuit of the deserted buildings, following the depopulation phenomenon, increasing the degree of comfort at the level of the buildings that have rooms available for rent, building motels, tourist villas, campings, the recreational infrastructure.

The attraction of new investments remains “the key for success” and the maintenance of any activity.

“Eselnița, Dubova and Mraconia could become European tourist destinations. The authorities and the business environment would like to make the Danube Bend a brand of Mehedinți county and of Romania, by promoting the cruise tourism” (<http://www.travelmix.ro/clisura-dunarii-brand-turistic-european/>), or to succeed, the same site mentions the creation of the Cluster for the Sustainable and Innovative Tourism - TURINN - meant to support not only the local people of the area to access European funds, but also the tourism entrepreneurs. The South-West Oltenia newspaper, Gazeta de Sud, mentions the opportunities of tourism development in the Danube Bend, underlined also by the Regional Economic Forum, Oltenia.⁵

⁵<http://www.gds.ro/Bani-afaceri/2012-04-9/Clisura+Dunarii+vrea+sa+devina+brand+turistic+european/>

In conclusion, the tourism from the still rural Danube Bend area is a potential manner itself, but, in addition, it shows the advantage that it acts towards opening a new investment perspective. Tourism eases the contact between people coming from the most various environments, and the ideas and the actions, directed towards the upper revaluation of the various local resources, occur immediately. Obviously, the preservation of nice memories from the rural holidays may raise the interest of business people in investing in the respective environment. As any productive activity, rural tourism may trigger synergetic growth effects, by attaching new variables in the design process and the operation strategy.

Bibliography

- Baker S., Bradley, P., Huyton, J., *The Principles of the Operations at the Hotel Reception*, ALL Beck Publishing House, Bucharest, 2002.
- Baltălungă A.A., *România. Orașele porturi dunărene. Geografie umană și economică*, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2008.
- Benea, C.B., *Dunărea. Geopolitică și negociere*, Editura Institutul European, Iași, 2009.
- Ielenicz, M., Comănescu, L., *România, Potențial turistic*, Editura Universitară, București, 2006
- Eagles, P., McCool, St., *Tourism in National Parks and Protected Areas, planning and management*, CAB International, Cambridge, 2000.
- Eagles, P.F.J., McCool, S.F., Haynes C.D., *Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas –Guidelines for Planning and Management*, World Commission on Protected Areas, IUCN, 2002.
- Fennell, D. A. and Dowling R. K., *Ecotourism policy and planning*, Editura Cabi, Wallingford-Cambridge, 2007.
- Mazilu, M., E., *The Danube, vector of regional and sustainable tourism development, published in Abstract Book of Geographical Research and Cross-Border Cooperation within the Lower Basin of the Danube*, The First Romanian-Bulgarian-Hungarian-Serbian Conference, organized by University of Craiova, West University of Timisoara, Institute of Geography, Bucharest, 23-26 Sept. 2010, ISBN: 978-973-7773-44-9, Editura Beladi, Craiova, p. 77, 2010.
- Mazilu, M., *The Romanian Tourism - A Promoter of Globalization and Sustainable Development Factor*, Published by WSEAS (World Scientific and Engineering Academy and Society) Press (Cotată ISI)
<http://www.wseas.org/multimedia/books/2012/Mazilu/Mazilu.pdf>
- Dumbrăveanu, Daniela, *Zona turistică „Porțile de Fier”: analiză geografică*, Editura Universitară, Bucuresti, 2004.
- Ianoș, I., *Sisteme teritoriale, o abordare geografică*, Editura Tehnică Bucuresti, 2000.

- Iordache, C., *Defileul Dunării: (sectorul Bazias-Eselnița): Structurile habitatului rural și economia rurală*, Editura Universitaria, Craiova, 2001.
- Manea, Gabriela, *Naturalizare și antropizare în Parcul Natural Porțile de Fier*, Editura Universității din București, 2003.
- Olaru, M., *Munții Banatului. Amenajarea și dezvoltarea turistică*, Editura Hestia, Timisoara, 2000.
- Institutul Național de Cercetare-Dezvoltare în Turism, *Strategia națională de dezvoltare a ecoturismului în România*, Faza I, Faza II, București, 2009.
- ***, Administrația Parcului Natural Porțile de Fier, Planul de Management al Vizitatorilor (Strategia de vizitare), (document), 2010.
- Mazilu M., Bălă D., Dumitrescu D., Baltălungă A., *Revitalization of the Danube port-cities through tourism*, Conference Proceedings, Volume II, 14-th International Multidisciplinary Scientific Geoconference, SGEM 2014, Albena, Bulgaria, 17-26 Iunie, 2014. ISBN:978-619-7105-05-6, ISSN:1314-2704, DOI :10.5593/sgem2014,p.611-619.
- Mazilu M., *Innovation, tradition and cooperation in tourism according to the EU Strategy of the Danube Region*, Proceedings of International Conference Serbia in the Danube Region in 21-st Century, ISBN:978-86-7067-200-0, Publisher Institute of International Politics and Economics, Belgrad, 2014, p.73-94.
- Mirela M., Sava C., *The impact of travel and tourism on the romanian protected areas case study: Mehedinți County*, Proceedings XXII International Conference Ecological Truth EcoIst'14, ISBN 978-86-6305-021-1, COBISS.SR-ID 207726860 Edited by: R.V.Pantovic and Z.S.MarKovic, pp.581-591
- Mazilu M., Mitroi S., *Demographic Social, Economic and geographic features –shaping factors of the Tourist Market*, in REBE: Romanian Economics and Business Review, REBE special issue Spring 2010: Understanding economic crisis, Vol.5, number1, Bucarest, ISSN:1842-2497, pag.159-166, 2011.
- Mazilu M., *The revival of tourism in Mehedinți county - case study, the Danube bend Destination*, publicat în Revista de Turism, nr.7, 2009, ISSN:1844-2944, revistă cotate B+, Cod CNCSIS 447, p.77-84, Suceava, 2009.
- Stăncioiu F., Mazilu M., Teodorescu N., Pargaru I., Vlădoi A., *Considerations Regarding the marketing destination Danube Valley*, Collection of Papers-International Conference: Contemporary Trends in Tourism and Hospitality, 2011, Novi Sad, Serbia University of Novi Sad, Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, ISBN:978-86-7031-233-3, p.12-18.
- Snak, O., Baron, P., Neacșu, N., *The Economy of Tourism*, Expert Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001.
- Stăncioiu A. F., Mazilu M., Căescu Șt. C., Constantinescu M., *Considerations regarding the strategic thinking in the marketing of the regional*

identity, article published in „Economica” magazine, year XIV no.4 (December) (56)/2006, ASEM, Chişinău, 2006, ISSN 1810-9136

Stăncioiu A. – F., Arsene O, Teodorescu N., Mazilu M., Marinescu R, *The SWOT Analysis of the tourist destination – conceptual aspects – methodology*. Case Study: Northern Oltenia or Oltenia at the bottom of the Mountain-published in the vol. The International conference Competitiveness and stability in Knowledge – Based Economy, 30-31 May 2008, Craiova, ISBN 978-606-510-162-3, pg. 600-607, Universitaria Publishing House, Craiova.

The National Institute of Statistics - 2010-2015

Atlasul complex „Porțile de Fier”, Editura Academiei, 1972.

Așezăminte clisurenale ale spiritualității creștine (II), în „Informația de Severin”, 2008, nr.206 din 19 februarie

Geografia Văii Dunării Românești, Editura Academiei, București, 1969.

Parcul natural/Parco Naturale Porțile de Fier, Palermo, 2006.

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Sabina Gheorgheci is a young university specialist of the University of Craiova, within the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, attending the doctoral studies within the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography, and the theme of the tourism field thesis being adjacent to the theme of this article.

Assist. Ph.D Student Sabina Gheorgheci - University of Craiova, Faculty F.E.A.A. sabibi_sabra@yahoo.com

Mirela Mazilu, mirelamazilu2004@yahoo.com, is now Professor PhD at the University of Craiova, Department of Geography,. She has many national and international researches naming 14 books which were published as a single author (2 in International Database); 7 university manuals especially in tourism; over 200 articles and 56 ISI articles, which were published in the volumes of national and international congresses, symposiums, conferences and seminars and also in prestigious CNCSIS journals and over 237 participations at scientific events