

## TOURISM AND PROTECTED AREAS: POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF THE RURAL TOURISM IN ROMANIAN DANUBE DELTA

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### Abstract

*In this paper I discuss how tourism takes various shapes in a rural protected area from Romania (one of the typical, most vulnerable of the post-socialist period). Though tourism is advocated by Romanian officials and economists as a powerful tool, which provides economic and community development in rural, deindustrialized and protected areas, ethnographic examples presented in this paper show that 'real tourism', still regarded as a panacea, is far from fulfilling the locals' needs and expectancies (in terms of economic and social development in the Danube Delta). By using a political ecology perspective I will emphasize various local practices regarding tourism, demonstrating that there are several political layers of legality that do affect the perception and the tourism practice.*

**Key words:** development, protected areas, Romanian Danube Delta, rural tourism, Romania.

**JEL Classification:** D63, Q01, Q26, Z13, Z19.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Romanian side of the Danube Delta is a vast, reserve area, comprising approximately 2,239 sq. miles (5800 square kilometers), including one town – Sulina, and 25 human settlements (villages). The reserve is sparingly populated, the human density is low, and the general trend is one of a rapid reconfiguration throughout migration as well as low birth rates. Starting with the second half of the 19th century and during the communist period (1947-1989), the Danube Delta was the best area for fishing, agriculture, aquaculture, and reeds harvesting. In the post-socialist period, the region became a protected area, a biosphere reserve (1990), and, paradoxically, acts of privatization and concession emerged afterwards. The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority (DDBRA) was established in 1991 in order to govern the reserve's resources and inhabitants (humans and non-humans alike), to assure environmental management, to take care of the local infrastructure and livelihoods, to provide technical and scientific support and to mediate between local problems and central authorities. Yet, the DDBRA is not the only ruler in the area. Tulcea County Council (TCC) still owns lands, resources and influence inside the reserve, as well as the State Domains Agency (SDA – a Romanian government agency managing the privatization of national companies), the Lower Danube River Administration (the local and regional naval and public transport company), the 'Romanian Waters' National Administration, Nature 2000 program and so forth. Due to the very fact that the DDBRA

shares the accountabilities with other organizations and cannot economically sustain itself, its autonomy is jeopardized. Thus, rulers' divergent political and economic interests have generated a state of ambiguity, competition and unintended consequences inside the reserve. One of these consequences is that social aspects inside the local population have been disregarded (see also Iancu, 2009), while natural resources are economically exploited and even overexploited.



**Map 1.** The Danube Delta Reserves. Map author: Spiridon Manoliu, title: "Man & Biosphere" reserves in the Danube Delta. Image available at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:DeltaRBDD.jpg> ©CC.

In order to emphasize the prodigy and the specificity of the area, and therefore to attract tourists in the Danube Delta, media and tourism operators are using plenty of exotic epithets and adjectives – and the word ‘paradise’ is the most used one. These romantic depictions are proposed and circulated by journalists, tourism operators and NGOs. The wished-for image of the Danube Delta (see also van Assche et al., 2012, pp. 170 and 173) targets two purposes: (i.) the popularization of the uniqueness of this area for a large public by focusing on tourists and tourism and, (ii.) to promote the NGOs’ perceptions to various publics and policy makers.

The puzzling aspect resides in the fact that many of these overall descriptions of the area are false by generalization and this mainly because they are inadequate if compared to local realities. Thus, tourist’s expectancies, built up on such an advertised image, are bound to face great disappointments. Moreover, the DDBRA proposes tourist paths while they do not have a dedicated department for tourism and do not involve in infrastructure developing and maintenance (cf. DDBRA, 2008).

## II. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

One of the tourism defining perspectives states that tourism is defined in respect with those who are involved in this activity: ‘[a] tourist is a temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change’ (Smith, 1989, p. 2). There are circumstances where tourism is neither determined by the tourists’ intention and practice, nor by the host’s only, but by many other elements (see also Nash, 1981, p. 465). On the one hand, many scholars embraced the idea that tourism leads to local or regional socio-economic development especially in the rural areas ‘affected by the decline of traditional agrarian activities’ (Iorio and Corsale, 2010, p. 153).

On the other hand, other scholars consider that tourism causes socio-cultural changes and no local economic development. The romantic depiction of tourism unequivocally generating local development is considered a false causality; or, at most, there is correlation between tourism and local development, and not a direct causality (see Cohen, 1984, pp. 387 and 465, and Stronza, 2001, p. 268). Anyhow, even assuming that tourism can lead the way to local economic development, it is not necessarily reflected in local welfare (see Iorga, 2012 for a relevant case study). Additionally, economic development originating in tourism is more likely to bring with it significant changes and even conflicts (i.e. the loss of hosts’ local identity, commodification, reification, the deterioration of the community structure, acculturation, locals vs. non-locals competition, etc. cf. Cohen, 1984, Stronza,

2001, p. 273, Nunez, 1989, and see also Stonich, 1998).

In this paper I understand tourism as a system (Burns, 1999, and Burns and Holden, 1995), and I consider its multiple facets (processes, impacts, subsystems, products, etc.) in terms of *force fields* (Nuijten, 2005). Nuijten concept of *force field* ‘refers to more structural forms of power relations, which are shaped around the access to and use of specific resources’ (2005, p. 2). As she clearly points out, this concept ‘helps us to analyze the weighting of different kinds of socio-political networks, the influence of law and procedures, the role of formal organizational’, while ‘the existence of multiple force fields explains that power relations are diversified’ (Nuijten, 2005, pp. 2-3). Adopting the concept of *force fields* alongside a political ecology perspective seems more appropriate and profitable on discussing about tourism in the Danube Delta, essentially because such a viewpoint integrates much more systemic elements and analytically encompass discourses from dissimilar layers (local - non-local, local – center, politics – economic, top – bottom, bottom – top, development – conservation, etc.), as well as various ideologies. On these layers and under specific ideologies various social actors interact. The ways in which environmental and political forces intermingle influencing and affecting social actors’ actions and environmental changes is what political ecology attempts to understand (Bryant, 1992, and Stonich, 1998). To put it simply, political ecology focuses on social relations, access to and the use of natural resources, and on the unequal actors’ power to control and/ or influence institutions, in order to better understand the complex relations between man and environment (see Forsyth, 2008, Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987).

More specific, the way tourism is managed inside the Reserve is a problem of political ecology for the reason that the economic and social perspectives only cannot properly give contour to the complex relationships between protected area and tourism. Henceforth, tourism could be an economic engine but it will not ensure the social and economic justice of communities and/ or of a region, and/ or for the environment. Tourism in not uniformly developed and, due to regional and local constraints, it has to be regarded in its particular contexts (*force fields*) by avoiding, as much as possible, generalizations. One of the main goals in this paper is to discuss the ways in which tourism works inside the Reserve in order to shed light on the relations between economic growth and [sustainable] development of tourism.

Tourism in Romania is not a new phenomenon, yet most of the literature about it embraced an economic perspective only. The few, more recent, sociologic and anthropologic studies on tourism focused mainly on descriptions of how tourism is experienced by hosts and local communities. By and large, anthropologic literature on tourism in the Danube

Delta is scanty (see also Ivan, 2012, Iancu, 2009, Damian and Dumitrescu, 2009, and Damian 2011).

My paper is based on data collected through fieldwork research carried out since 2005 in different phases, villages, and localities of the Romanian area of the Danube Delta. Data from previous research campaigns were reconsidered for an ethnographic approach in 2011 (i.e. 6 months of ethnographic fieldwork) and continued in late 2012 and 2013. My research had a comparative dimension in terms of case studies and geographical determinism, and was carried out in four localities comprising more than 12 villages and the town of Sulina. I engaged with both locals and authority representatives, using a variety of methods including formal and informal interviews and participant observation. For quoted narratives used in this paper, the reference includes acronyms – in order to keep the anonymity of the interviewed, the locality names in which interviews were conducted, and year. Some field observations will be specified in text.

### III. TOURISM IN THE DANUBE DELTA RESERVE

Similar to most tourist areas in Romania, in the Danube Delta region tourism began to develop significantly since the 70s of the last century due to the state's initiative and unrelenting actions in order to attract tourists to seashores, Danube riverbanks and Danube Delta area. In the following period, organized tourism in the Danube Delta envisioned few localities, among which Sfântu Gheorghe, Chilia Veche, Crişan and Mila 23 and the town of Sulina. Apart from tourism practiced in villages and in Sulina, the socialist state build up resorts in tranquil and secluded parts of the Danube Delta, the so called *school camps* and *holiday villages*. For instance, the ones from Murighiol, Sulina and Roşu Lake were of high popularity. Anyhow, most of them were abandoned after 1989, or privatized and then abandoned. Field observations revealed that, excepting the school camp from Sulina, all camps and holiday villages are abandoned or are having unclear statuses, thus being closed for undefined time.

In the post-communist period, tourism development in the area relates to a process of rediscovery and of economic interests. First, the [re-]discovery of the touristic Danube Delta was a direct consequence of the re-imagining and promoting the 'multicultural' Dobroudja. Secondly, the investments made by non-local entrepreneurs in the Danube Delta's touristic infrastructure upturned the local tourism. Nowadays, in more than a decade (2000-2014) several villages were 'transfigured' by tourism investors coming from all over the country. Villages of Sfântu Gheorghe, Dunavăţul de Jos, Uzlina, Murighiol, Gorgova and Crişan are good examples of this ongoing process.

The type of tourism practiced in the Danube Delta is largely recreational (leisure-time), but does not exclude game tourism (fishing and hunting when

appropriate), amateur and professional bird watching. Coastal areas tourism (mainly Sulina and Sfântu Gheorghe) and nostalgic tourism (as for a natural state or wildlife, for example), gastronomic and scientific tourism (geologists, hydrologists, geographers, botanists, ichthyologists, sociologists, anthropologists and so on) are also practiced (see Bell et al., 2001, and the more recent book edited by Stroe and Iancu in 2012). The Danube Delta is often considered to be an alternative for the popular and crowded shoreline destinations: 'people had enough sea, they prefer to come here' (P.C., Crişan, 2011). This idea is widespread among both locals and tourists and field observations in Sulina, Letea, Sfântu Gheorghe, Crişan and Caraorman do confirm this statement.

Although the Romanian state proposed tourism as an alternative solution to traditional activities and/or as a complementary source for locals' livelihoods (see the Danube Delta Master Plan in INCDD, 2005), the non-local investors benefit from the state support (i.e. low taxation) instead of locals (see Stonich, 1998 for further general discussions about similar circumstances elsewhere.). Despite the small signs of a local economic development, mainly as a result of investments made in the area, associated problems regarding locals and non-locals soon became apparent. The problems range from simpler building designs to a complex process of competing for a 'primitive accumulation of capital' - especially land; from unfair, politically decided, discriminatory proprietorship over land towards incapacitating infrastructure development (see Amihulesei media papers from 2008, 2010 and 2011 on this topic). Discriminatory proprietorship refers to the fact that there are many villages inside the reserve in which locals do not own the land their houses are built on and they cannot obtain land titles. The Romanian Law no. 679 from 2002 explicitly mentions that people who are using a piece of land more than 30 years are entitled to ownership. Even so, the law applied discriminatory and some villages did not benefit from it while others did (see also Rughiniş, 2005, p. 166). Even more, poor or absent information, jointly with locals' limited financial resources and excessive bureaucracy have made from tourism an almost impossible option for the locals. By limited financial resources, I understand three important aspects that characterize the status quo of most of the inhabitants and households in the Danube Delta, namely: a) lack of cash funds (see also Pop, 2005 and Gătin, 2009); b) lack of financial planning for short, medium and long terms, and c) ineligibility to loan credits.

The last two points are related to the very fact that only a small percentage of the population is employed or is having a secured source of income (see Damian 2011 for a good statistical analysis on this matter). Furthermore, those practicing fishing do not have a constant income and, secondly, the nature of their work is seasonal. As Byron (2005) clearly stated, in comparison with farmers '[f]ishers cannot establish proprietorship over the resource upon which their

livelihood depends, nor can they bank resources as a hedge against future scarcity' (p. 79). Objectively, and excluding villages with limited land restitution (which restrains locals for accessing developing funds or to get approvals in order to use their houses for touristic purposes, for example.), it is impossible, for an average family inside the Danube Delta, to become host or entrepreneur.

On the other hand and as mentioned before, the way the Reserve is governed and tourism managed inside of it is a complex of relations between protected area, economic growth, divergent interests and tourism practices. This also means that there are multiple *force fields* and that the power relations are diversified (Nuijten, 2005). To observe how power took different configurations inside various *force fields*, I will give one example. The two most important maritime sandbanks (although some authors consider that the Danube Delta is formed of two major isles, most of the recent scholars consider them sandbanks – *grinduri*, rom.) from the Danube Delta, Letea and Caraorman, holds homonymous forests of high ecological value, which are strictly protected by law. They are subtropical-like forests containing numerous unique varieties of species of flora and fauna, one of which – Letea, was declared Reserve and thus protected since 1930s. Both forests were included in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve zoning program under the label of 'entirely protected areas', in which no one is allowed to enter. However, the forests represent touristic attractions and, surprisingly, they are promoted as such, being incorporated in the advertising flyers and guides, including the regulated tourist routes proposed, approved and recommended by the DDBRA. These forests are not used only as image brands and advertise issues; they are physically included in touristic paths, while the access to them is strictly forbidden. Alongside with the obvious contradiction, the strange fact is that the DDBRA does not have a dedicated department or team in order to provide touristic services and to monitor touristic activities in these areas. Although the touristic routes established by the DDBRA require locals' logistics and support, the DDBRA did not succeed in launching local partnerships. Thus, this situation has generated a regime of free access to the forests for those having the necessary skills and technology. At the same time, DDBRA is trying to mitigate the effects by building up a fence around the Letea forest.

#### IV. MUDDY WATERS AND SANDY ROADS OR TOURISM AS MYSTIC PANACEA

As already mentioned, the tourism in the Danube Delta began to develop during the 70s and the officials scheduled several villages and localities for this purpose, including: Sulina town, Sfântu Gheorghe and Chilia Veche communes, and Mila 23, Maliuc and Crișan villages. Likewise other destinations considered to be of touristic interest, in Sfântu Gheorghe the

practice of old tourism was commonplace. In order to highlight the interplays between locals (hosts) and visitors (tourists) I will define two ways of experiencing tourism, namely the 'old way' and the 'new way'.

By 'old way' I understand the type of tourism in which the tourist lives and eats together with the hosts and, occasionally, gets involved in household's everyday jobs. The tourist's participatory role helps him/her to be better integrated in the local household. His/her status is one of a visiting friend (*musafir*, rom.), rather than of a person requiring services from the hosts. By and large, the custom was not to pay for meals and housing/hosting but to make presents (mainly alcoholic drinks and domestic tools). As a run through, the hosts and the 'visitors' have developed close and enduring relations and even get to switch roles. For instance, hosts from the Danube Delta are going into the city in order to carry out problems or just to spend some free time and, when doing that, they usually are hosted by the tourists who had visited them, thus becoming their guests' guests. Anyhow, the practice of gifts exchange was the very logic of the old way of tourism. This form of tourism was specific to the communist period and was practiced for some time after 1989, until the year 2000, when the new way of doing tourism took shape.

The conversion process from the 'old way' to the 'new way' of tourism was highly influenced by a growing demand of services from an increasing number of tourists and by the hosts' profit-oriented behavior. Tourists started to demand improved and more intimate conditions regarding hosting and hygiene; and they wanted to pay for them. At the same time, the rise of non-local investors alongside tourist dedicated spaces and services, brought competition between locals and non-locals. Hitherto, if for the non-local hosts (entrepreneurs) tourism means business, for locals' it means livelihoods. The distinction is important because it highlights the mechanisms of different meanings of touristic activities and, nevertheless, because it pinpoints the expected ends of such activities.

The Sfântu Gheorghe village represents an excellent example of this conversion process. Unlike other villages caught in the transition from the old way to the new way of practicing tourism - where the new way generally meant the annihilation of the old way, in Sfântu Gheorghe the locals succeeded in keeping the cohabitation between the two forms. How did they succeed in doing so? First, they kept on hosting tourists by using their existing networks. This is what I call local tradition regarding tourism in Sfântu Gheorghe. Secondly, due to a close relation and a personal history between hosts and guests, it was easier for the hosts to adjust their houses and services gradually in order to meet the tourists' needs and demands. A third account refers to the fact that the locals, by keeping the old way functional, maintained a touristic niche in the context

of the increasingly expansion of the new form. The fourth important issue is that the villagers of Sfântu Gheorghe had already the needed infrastructure (i.e.: houses, ownership over land, relational capital and so on and so forth), so they could make some changes and improvements little by little. Simply put, it was easier for them to adapt to new circumstances (see also Ivan, 2012 and Stroe and Iancu, 2012 for specific examples).

In contrast, in other villages from the Danube Delta, the circumstances are poles apart. Even though tourism has been practiced in these villages, it had no continuity or, in a sporadic manner, lasted until year 2000 at most. Nowadays, in most villages where tourism is to some extent significant, it begun in its new form, and was based mainly on non-local initiatives and capital. The very fact that there were no local initiatives results into a growing number of villages where non-local investors exclusively practice tourism.

The new form of tourism brought with it a different ‘know how’ in practicing and experiencing tourism. Large buildings intended to ensure privacy and comfort aroused, new construction materials were used, and big boats fitted with powerful engines for tourists’ transportation appeared. Locals understood the discrepancies between them and non-locals, and the competition that came with the new way of doing tourism. If they want to host tourists, they need to build adequate buildings and take care of them and of tourists, generally by giving up other ordinary activities such as fishing or hunting (for further discussions see Ivan’s ethnographic study from 2012).

Most of the locals I spoke with, regardless of their village, are embracing the idea according to which it would not be efficient to adjust the house they have at moment for touristic needs, complaining that ‘there are no conditions’ and ‘no money’ to make an investment in order to enhance the comfort required by ‘tourism’. However, even if these conditions are to be fulfilled and money invested, ‘there is no one to stand by tourists’ – meaning that they would not have time to ‘deal with tourists’. Even so, there is no guarantee that tourists will come and profit achieved. Locals are excluding themselves by embracing this radical dichotomy, hence pointing toward a lack of imagination and, again, a low tolerance to risk. Thus, the miss-conception (or miss-information) of what tourism is and what tourists wants led locals to an altered image of what tourism actually means and how can it be enacted.

## V. CLOSING THE CIRCLE AND OPENING THE MUSEUMS

Because many locals still regard tourism as the ‘last save’ (I.M., Murighiol, 2005) and as representing ‘the future’ (P.C., local guesthouse owner, Caraorman, 2011), all too often is a double-edged issue with almost religious or, at times, mystic valences. On the one hand, it is about locals adopting, internalizing and using the ideological discourse developed by authorities or by non-governmental organizations, or by both, and the media. The ideological discourse do stress on tourism, eco-tourism, and agro-tourism as alternative solutions for improving the locals’ livelihoods, especially in a context of limited access to natural resources and the lack of jobs. Yet, it is rooted on the a priori idea that tourism can be practiced in every single village in the Danube Delta and, therefore, it can provide individual and local-community development and welfare. Simply put, from this point of view, tourism looks like a panacea. This ideology underlines that the only missing thing is ‘locals’ will’ to accomplish and to get involved into tourism. It is the typical discourse, and envisions that social and economic outputs of tourism would be the most beneficial for locals and would eliminate social insecurities in communities across the Delta (see INCDD, 2005 and DDBRA, 2008). Nonetheless, it is a hegemonic tool, mainly because it does not considers the very fact that in this *force field* locals does not have much room for maneuver.

On the other hand, despite the general statement that ‘[t]he Delta is everywhere alike’ (A. C., Caraorman, 2011), the locals’ compared perspective on disparities among villages inside the reserve makes them ultimately admit that the discrepancy in terms of geographic location, the degree of isolation and inaccessibility (e.g. lack of material infrastructure) are objective limitations for the emergence and development of tourism in specific cases. In their paper from 2009, Damian and Dumitrescu are clearly showing the unequal dynamic of tourists’ distribution by considering comparative data for localities of each of the tree arms of the Danube River (Damian and Dumitrescu, 2009). At local level, these differences are acknowledged.

Q.: And, don’t you think your village will develop [for tourism]?

A.: No, I think not, the village is too isolated. The majority is passing by, they go to the forest, they visit what is to be visited and then leave; they don’t come to stay.

Q.: Why do you think they aren’t staying?

A.: Maybe conditions here, maybe... it was no media coverage, if they would advertise it and if... [Pause] and the people would be more interested in attracting tourists; I say they will be attracted.

Q.: So, you think that the people are not interested in promoting tourism here?

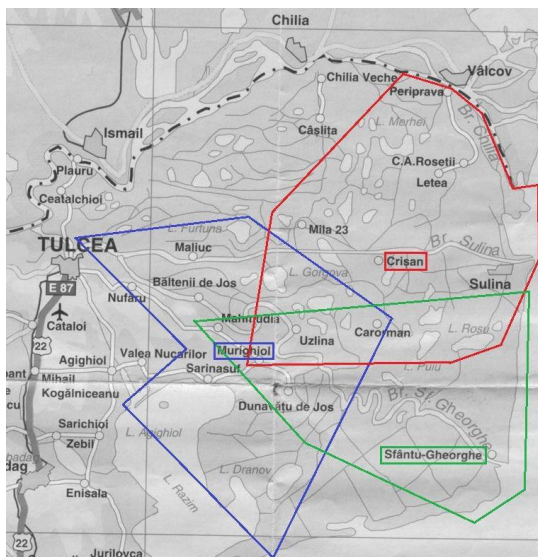
R.: I’m not referring to people from the village, but to others maybe...



Q.: What others?

R.: The ones from X [another village], who prefer to attract them [the tourists] there and they say to them “don’t go to Y [village]”. It was always a struggle between villages...’ (P. C., Caraorman, 2011).

The above mentioned struggle refers to the competition between villages in attracting tourists. It gives a hint on the manner in which tourism is performed and, last but not least, suggests the fundamental idea that some villages are more successful than others. How successful they are one can only guess, because statistic data regarding tourism at the level of villages does not exist and data which are at the commune level cannot be used mainly due to high differentiation between constituent villages. In these particular conditions, field observations and interviews became very profitable tools in finding out the successful cases. Participant and non-participant observations revealed that there are ‘specialized’ tourism villages. Subsequently, this ‘specialization’ divides villages in two categories, namely: host-villages and transit-villages (for visiting only). First category comprises villages where tourists are hosted, are taking meals and practice leisure. Even if these host-villages do not necessarily have the potential to offer specific sightseeing, they have a very good positioning in terms of access.



**Map 2.** Areas covered and controlled by touristic operators from guest-villages. Circumscriptions are approximate and are based on the most frequented local networks. These areas can be looked at as of a variety of force fields. With red: Crișan. With blue: Murighiol. With green: Sfântu-Gheorghe.

The most interesting fact is that the entrepreneurs in these villages succeeded in developing tourism service infrastructure, via local networks, in order to cover the surrounding areas, including other villages, which, consequently, became transit villages or sightseeing. Therefore, locals from transit villages advanced the idea of [living] museums regarding their

home places. However, those who took the initiative and had the ability to build tourist facilities in transit villages are not being visited by tourists and, as consequence, the source of income and profit lacks: ‘but look at those who own pensions, they have 2-3 groups per summer. It’s [for] nothing...’ (P.C., Caraorman, 2011). For instance, a non-local investor has built a guesthouse in one of these beautiful transit villages and, although there was no competition around, it was a total failure due to the shortage of tourists who wanted to stay at his guesthouse, he pointed out in discussions we had in 2011. Anyhow, at the beginning transit tourists stopped by in order to take lunch then, gradually, their guides canceled the stops in visiting villages by changing the schedule of visits, hence taking the tourists back in the host-village for having lunch.

## VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this paper, I emphasized the idea that tourism does not represent an affordable alternative for the Danube Delta locals’ livelihoods, and that they need support and guidance for other activities. I opted for a political ecology perspective mainly in order to emphasize on the large context in which tourism is embedded and to understand it in its relations.

Tourism works in few specific cases (whether villages or routes) only. Even if some of the non-locals investors tried to nurture business in new, less touristic places, they failed in doing so by having bad economic choices and by placing themselves into restrictive *force fields*. For non-locals – who are interested in doing business, capital and personal choices seems to constitute the crucial factors determining a successful or a failure case. On the other hand, for locals, what I described as local tradition represents the most important issue in conditioning and practicing tourism.

By and large, it is extremely difficult to draw a comprehensive conclusion in order to capture the full range of experiences and practices inside the Danube Delta, mainly because generalizations prove to be false and dangerous. The multiple legislative layers which govern the Danube Delta reserve, its population and the economic activities, are to be understood in their interrelatedness and by focusing on particular contexts and cases. Types of responds required from locals and non-locals by these heterogeneous layers generate bottlenecking situations for the social actors involved. Legislative regulations are highly unstable and involve spurt reactions, adaptability and ability, both for individuals and communities. Furthermore, locals’ feeling of marginalization and abandonment diminishes their agency capacity and drives them inside an area of a relative deprivation of opportunities.

Incomplete decentralization, contradictory regulations, and excessive bureaucracy have led to institutional bottlenecks and incapacity in planning actions at regional, community-local, and individual levels. All these elements are operating inside vicious

circles, thus showing a great capacity for self-reproduction. For example, unjustified limited restitution of land and restricted access to property over housing creates a highly discriminatory disparity among villages. Last but not least, locals have to fend by themselves against social insecurities, shortage of social services and livelihoods. Ultimately, tourism does not represent a breakthrough on these vicious circles.

In the context of the new way of practicing and experiencing tourism, it can be said that, in fact, 'locals were duped into accepting tourism rather than having consciously chosen such an option for themselves' (Stronza, 2001, p. 269). Although many locals and local authorities regard tourism as a solution for the economic development of the Danube Delta in general, only few locals consider it as a solution for their village, and even fewer see it as one for their families.

The overall image of the reserve, as depicted on the basis of field research, clearly indicates that tourism - at least in the manner in which it is experienced now, represents an option only for very few locals and only for certain areas. In other words, tourism is not a panacea. Finally, it is not a way for locals to supplement their livelihood, so that we can talk about a change in the mode of living, welfare, or of reduction of social

insecurity at individual, household, local, and/or regional level. As stated already, tourism could be an economic engine but it will not ensure the social and economic justice of local communities unless it is reinforced by the state through local state agents with local partnerships, and properly supported by clear legislative regulations. At the same time, re-enacting old and/ or temporary abandoned practices (see Pop, 2005 and Gătin, 2009 for more examples) in order to ensure locals' livelihoods represents an indicator of disenchanting tourism and searching for alternatives, for transient solutions.

Anyhow, the relation between tourism and environment sustainability inside the Danube Delta reserve remains an open and delicate topic which needs further investigations.

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