

## OPINIONS REGARDING THE TOURISTIC POTENTIAL OF THE DANUBIAN HARBOURS

**Elena MATEI**

*University of Bucharest, Romania  
e\_matei58@yahoo.com*

**Ion PÂRGARU**

*Polytechnic University of Bucharest, Romania  
pargaruion@yahoo.com*

**Aurelia-Felicia STÂNCIOIU**

*Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania  
stancioiufelicia@hotmail.com*

**Andreea BOTOȘ**

*Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania  
andreea\_botos@yahoo.com*

### Abstract

*In the context of European integration, the creation of transnational tourism products represents the brand of an inter-state collaboration, which, based on a common strategy, implies objectives that aim at achieving the global development of a destination, making thus possible an efficient and effective allocation of resources, in order to achieve a sustainable development, both from a touristic point of view and from an economic, social, cultural, technological etc. one. The route of the Danube could represent one of the most important European destinations, appertaining to more than one country; therefore, in order to develop and sustain its touristic potential, a common strategy is necessary, with an integrated marketing image, associated to a consistent tourism product, inspiring common values, regardless of the territory of the country it is located in. In this direction, a quantitative, exploratory marketing research, conducted on 992 respondents, aged 18-24, in order to determine the opinions concerning the touristic potential of the Danubian harbours - as a fundamental element, precursory to the market analysis.*

**Key words:** *Danubian harbours; Danube strategy; Touristic identity; Tourism potential.*

**JEL Codes:** *M31; L83*

### INTRODUCTION

Over time, the Danube has crystallized around it communities whose identities have been strongly influenced and even shaped by its specificity, mainly represented by natural resources, which have consisted in a binder for the "coexistence" of different cultures of ethnic groups that lived along the river. From their synergy, taking into account all aspects of the living, the identity of the Danube area itself has emerged.

Thus demonstrated the increased importance of conserving the Danube resources (*natural, human, socio-cultura etc.*), in order to maintain its identity, unitary in essence, but also marked by diversity (through the specificity of each country/region crossed by the Danube), it is required to substantiate a unique and tailored strategy for each of them, which would indicate the main areas of interest/action, (Stănciulescu et al., 2004), subsequently materialised in action plans finalised by the European Commission.

The Danube Macro-Regional Strategy, adopted by the European Commission in 2010 and supported by the European Council in 2011, along with countries

and stakeholders from the Danube area – regardless of their affiliation to the European Union (e.g., Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia), aims at "creating synergies and coordinating the existing policies with the ongoing initiatives in the Danube Region" in order to preserve a clean environment, with a high standard of living and with implemented measures of security (<http://www.danube-region.eu/>).

As it is necessary that the common objectives of the strategy are subordinated to the development objectives of each participating country, according to the principles of marketing planning, (Datculescu, 2006; Cătoiu, 2009), a close collaboration, and therefore, a strong relationship is required, involving all the levels of collaboration, vertically – by the involved regions, countries and the European Commission, as well as horizontally – concerning the main areas, whose conservation, on the one hand, and improvement/perfection on the other hand, due to synchronization and integrated efforts coordination, ensures shaping and continuing the competitive advantages of the marketing product – the Danube area. After a close analysis of the environment, following the determination of the events that led to

the deterioration of the component elements of Danube's identity, the four priority axes of the strategy consist in (<http://www.mae.ro/strategia-dunarii>): connectivity (with the sub-areas: inter-modal transport, culture and tourism and energy networks), environmental protection (with the sub-areas: water resources management, biodiversity protection and risk management), increasing the prosperity of Danube Region (with the sub-areas: education, research, competitiveness) and governance improvement (with the sub-areas: institutional capacity and internal security).

Of these areas, corresponding to the components of the marketing mix of "Danube Region" product, Romania has been allocated the mobility area, the environmental risks area and perhaps the most complex of them, the culture and tourism area. Starting from the idea that the marketing provides an understanding of the cultural background of a destination (Reisinger, Turner, (2003), the development of it requires the creation of responsible, specific tourism products, illustrated by the characteristics of the Danube area at the level of the country or at level of the entire course of the river in Europe, being taken into account common elements for the segmented markets in terms of geographic, psychographic and behavioural criteria, marketing specialists' task being, thus, all the more important, as the Danube represents a complex product, which may incorporate multiple types of tourism (Matei et al., 2011) and tourist attractions marked by values, customs and skills representing different cultures.

In order to establish the objectives regarding tourism development in the Danube area, obtaining market information is necessary (examples, opinions regarding the touristic potential and the occupied position of the studied destination in the consumers' minds), by means of developing marketing research regarding the way in which the targeted market segments (young people) consider the danubian harbours an essential element of referring to the Danube area.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAME

Considering the nonrenewable nature of most resources at the basis of a product, but also the multitude of resources composing a product which "hosts" the possibility to practice several types of tourism and to visit several destinations, representing "an identity circuit", a thematic one, by the cultural specificity of the place which determines the unique features of the tourism products, it is necessary that each strategy has an important component aiming at the sustainable development of the region, within a responsible tourism; the sustainable development takes into account, mainly, the heritage resources, both material and immaterial. Because the heritage value is much more complex/important than that of most goods and services and because its management

involves a very high stake, it is considered that "the exploitation of heritage tourism in view of achieving tourism consumption, if not conducted in a fair and cautious manner, can commercialize, trivialize and standardize the intangible meanings of a destination" (Ho, McKercher, 2004, p.255).

Thus, considering, on the one hand, the need of creating targeted tourism products, for multiple markets, sometimes fragmented, with numerous segmentation criteria, and, on the other hand, the ensuring of the continuity of all economic, cultural and social activities from the destination – fundamental framework of tourism actions, a thorough planning is required, in which the strategy referring to the tourism development "aligns" to the environmental, regional development strategies etc. This necessity is even more evident, as these strategies take different forms, sometimes with conflicting objectives for each country involved in transnational and cross-cultural collaborative projects. Kaplan and Norton (1992, 1993) propose an approach of the business, applied in this case to the tourism destination, including the perspectives from which it should be considered, namely, the consumer perspective, eminently touristic, heterogeneous, the internal perspective, involving the local communities, affected by changes occurring at any level (in political, social, technological, legal and especially cultural and natural environments), the innovation and learning perspective – being the one that "supports" an integrated strategy, which, by means of a certain coordination of actions regarding the resources exploitation, creates new ways and visions for the sustainable development of the destination and the financial perspective, conditioning the economic relevance of all operations developed in a particular destination (Drummond et al., 2008, p.144).

Given the significant potential benefit rendered by the resources of the destination/destinations and by the synergies between them, but also the numerous modalities through which they can be sustainably exploited (by trade, tourism etc.), an orientation to the future of the destination is required, taking into account the development of new cultural tourism products (Boniface, 1995) (as well as economic products, in general), considering, in this case, the main factors ensuring the success of such process, identified by Verbeke and Lievois (1999), namely, the objectives and values of the stakeholders (satisfied by the current Danube Strategy, in which the European Commission's efforts are correlated to those of the countries that have adhered to this strategy), the morphological characteristics of cultural heritage assets (e.g., identifying the development potential concerning the identity, biodiversity, education etc.), accessibility and functionality (much attention being paid to all the elements "in the shadow" that influence the economic activities in the area, e.g., the water and transport quality, the effectiveness of the security measures) and the integration with other tourism

activities and supporting elements, the areas of interest within the strategy being coordinated so as to record performance together (Ho, McKercher, 2004, p.258).

#### **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

In order to explore the Danubian harbours' identity, as an expression and tangibilization element of the identity of Danube's area, an exploratory marketing research has been conducted, on a sample of 992 respondents – young people aged 18-24\*, completed in 2011, which aimed at determining the association of the harbours with certain types of tourism (to the extent of their cognition), at testing the opinions of potential tourists regarding the constitutive elements of the tourism product, at the past and expected behaviour concerning this type of destination, taking into account various elements of planning/implementing a holiday, such as the length of the sojourn or the appropriate possibilities of promotion, from the respondents' perspective.

All these elements represent "points of support" in studying and testing some important components of buying behaviour and some desires associated to the components of the marketing mix, necessary in order to outline the Danube Strategy, in the area of culture and tourism. It is necessary that the results of this research, continued in depth, but also adjacently (testing other areas of tourism marketing) are finalized with the creation of a tourism brand "umbrella" type – the identity of the Danube with several brands – the identities of each microdestination (harbour, region) from the Danube area.

#### **OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK / RESULTS**

An important objective of the research has been the one to determine the association of harbours, to the extent of their cognition among the respondents, with the appropriate type of tourism, its fulfillment being the first step in sizing the respondents' opinions regarding the "profile" of the respective destinations and, thus, in the development of the marketing strategy. Therefore, the Romanian harbours with the highest notoriety among young people are: Galați (85.88% of the respondents), Tulcea (66.63%) and Brăila (49.19%), significant being as well: Giurgiu (31.14% of the respondents), Constanța (26.31%), Drobeta - Turnu Severin (21.97%), Orșova (17.03%), Sulina (16.83%), Modova Nouă (9.7%) and Călărași (7.66%) – Table 1.

The multicultural nature of these destinations (Figure 1) may favour, in terms of their characteristics, the development of several types of tourism, with the possibility of being practiced even simultaneously, during the same holiday. In most of the aforementioned harbours, with significant frequencies recorded with regard to their cognition, the main combination of types of tourism which could be achieved, based on the results of research, consists in leisure, recreation and rest tourism, visits to relatives and friends (where possible) and business tourism – recording the highest scores.

Inexplicable is the fact that cultural tourism is considered to a small extent by the respondents as a predominant type of tourism. With one exception, the destination Drobeta - Turnu Severin (in which 19.26% of respondents place the cultural tourism as a predominant type of tourism), for most destinations with high notoriety, the extent to which cultural tourism was considered as the main type of tourism that can be practiced encloses between 6% and 7%, indicating an insufficient degree of cognition of the numerous cultural resources of these destinations, both tangible and intangible. In this sense it is a contradiction with the fact that cultural attractions play an important role in tourism at all level (Richards, 2001).

Regarding the degree of knowledge of the international Danubian harbours (Table 2), the highest notoriety has been recorded by the following: Budapest (63.60% of the respondents), Vienna (48.48%), Bratislava (27.11%), Belgrade (21.67%), being also considered: Galați (7.05% of the respondents), Constanța (5.44%), Giurgiu (5.24%), Ruse (4.23%) and Tulcea (3.83%). If the case of the most renowned international Danubian harbours, according to the research, important European capitals as well, cultural tourism is considered much more suitable in comparison with the ones in Romania, recording rates between 31.62% and 43.86% of the respondents who have associated each Danubian harbour, in part, with cultural tourism, fact which indicates a stronger representation of cultural tourism resources. Thus, the suitable combination, in most cases, consists in the leisure, recreation and rest tourism, cultural tourism and business tourism.

---

\* The questionnaires were completed by students of Marketing, Commerce, Agricultural and Environmental Economics (from the bachelor and master), class of 2010/2011 from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies and the Department of Entrepreneurship, Management and Engineering Affairs of the University "Politehnica" of Bucharest, whom we thank on this occasion.

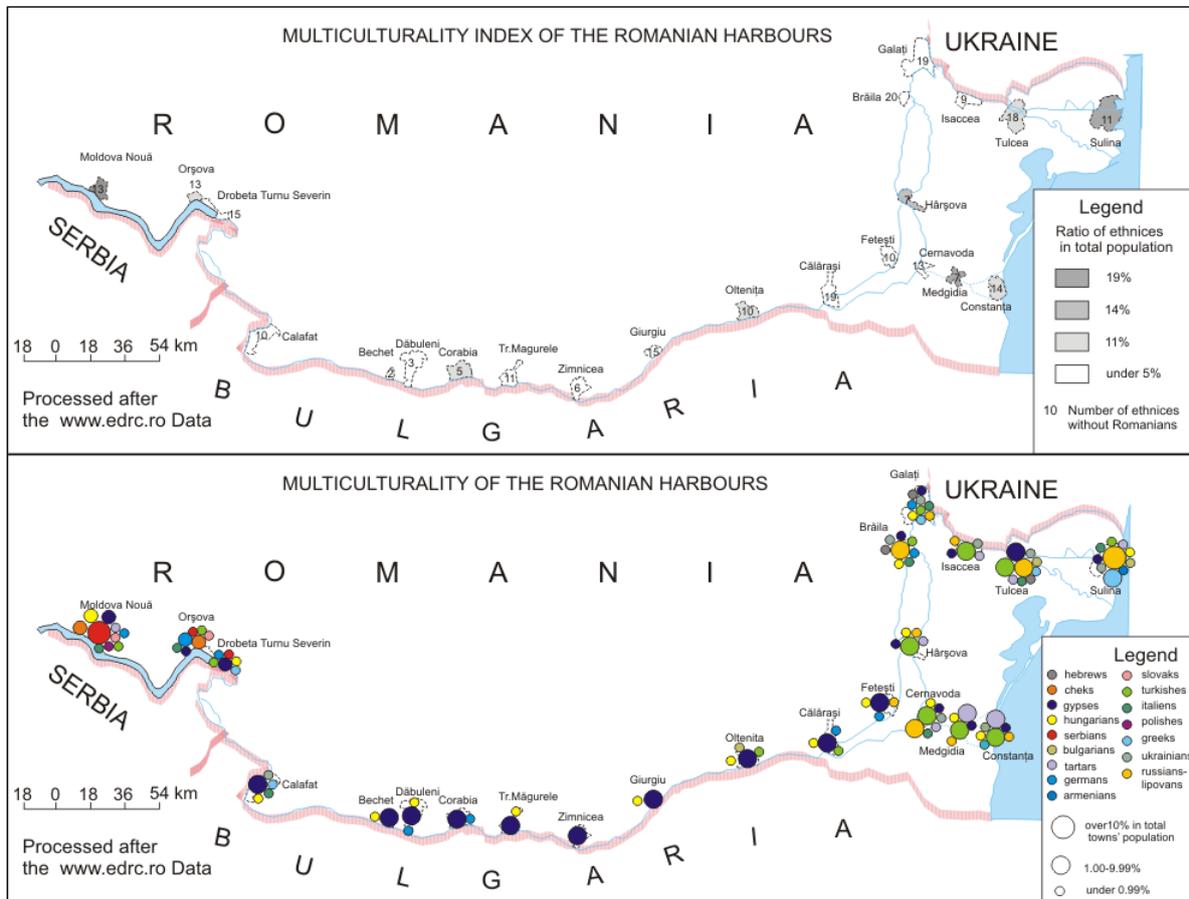


Figure 1 - The cultural potential of the Danubian harbours in the context of multi-ethnicity

Table 1 - The association of Romanian Danubian harbours with different types of tourism, to the extent of their cognition

Romanian Danubian harbour	No. respondents knowing the harbour	Leisure, recreation and rest tourism	Visits to relatives and friends	Balneo-therapy tourism	Cultural tourism	Business tourism	Other types of tourism
Brăila	488	161	162	28	33	92	12
Calafat	49	9	21	2	3	12	2
Călărași	76	16	42	1	3	12	2
Cernavodă	41	10	13	1	4	12	1
Constanța	261	165	16	21	10	45	4
Drobeta-Turnu Severin	218	92	32	10	42	27	15
Galați	852	246	271	17	57	236	25
Giurgiu	309	90	88	4	13	91	23
Oltenița	31	11	8	0	3	7	2
Orșova	169	87	34	17	13	9	9
Moldova Nouă	97	43	6	12	19	14	3
Sf. Gheorghe	45	30	7	2	2	4	0
Sulina	167	107	13	16	11	17	3
Tulcea	661	366	95	40	51	80	29

There have been selected the harbours which have recorded a total absolute frequency (on all the considered types of tourism) >2% of the total sample

Source: statistical survey conducted by the authors

**Table 2 - The association of the international Danubian harbours with different types of tourism, to the extent of their cognition**

International Danubian harbour	No. respondents knowing the harbour	Leisure, recreation and rest tourism	Visits to relatives and friends	Balneo-therapy tourism	Cultural tourism	Business tourism	Other types of tourism
Belgrad	215	76	9	7	68	48	7
Bratislava	269	143	6	6	69	42	3
Budapesta	631	260	22	9	240	90	10
Constanța	54	34	0	6	4	10	0
Drobeta-Turnu Severin	28	14	2	1	2	7	2
Galați	70	19	17	1	5	28	0
Giurgiu	52	16	10	0	2	22	2
Ruse	42	12	7	2	2	15	4
Tulcea	38	20	5	2	4	7	0
Viena	481	198	11	8	211	48	5

*There have been selected the harbours which have recorded a total absolute frequency (on all the considered types of tourism) >2% of the total sample*

*Source: statistical survey conducted by the authors*

In order to determine the optimal modality in which the destination resources are managed so as to meet the needs and desires of potential tourists, an important objective of the research consisted in identifying those types of tourism that the respondents would practice in a Danube harbour. Thus, it can be noticed that most of the respondents (77.8%) orient themselves to leisure, recreation and rest tourism, water being generally associated with relaxation activities, including the Danube Delta, recognised as the most important protected wet, habitat of Europe (Hall, 1993), 12% prefer the visits to relatives and friends, 3.4% consider the business tourism, 4.4% prefer balneotherapy tourism, while 0.7% consider the religious tourism (Table 3).

**Table 3 - Types of tourism the respondents would practice in the Danubian harbours**

Type of tourism	Absolute frequencies	Relative frequencies
Leisure, recreation and rest tourism	772	77,8
Visits to family and friends	119	12,0
Business tourism	34	3,4
Balneotherapy tourism	44	4,4
Religious tourism	7	,7
Other types of tourism	16	1,6

*Source: statistical survey conducted by the authors*

In terms of the agreement/disagreement of the respondents regarding certain statements, tested on a semantic differential scale with ten gradations, the following results have emerged:

- The Danubian harbours are a symbol of diversity. They unite different ethnic groups, different religions, different traditions and customs (an average of 7.65);
- The Danubian harbours are full of history (an average of 7.19);

- The national Danubian harbours have a high touristic potential (an average of 7.01);
- The European Danubian harbours have a high touristic potential (an average of 8.01).

It is noted that most of the respondents agree with the statement according to which the European Danubian harbours have high touristic potential. A part of them consider the area (of both national and international harbours) of great importance through its culture and traditions, stating that these are a symbol of diversity, managing to simultaneously unite religions, traditions and customs. Ranked on the third place, with a score of 7.01, the respondents have placed the statement concerning the significant historical side of the harbours, since ancient times being a symbol of the cities in which they were located. On the last place is situated the statement referring to the national harbours' notoriety, with a significant difference of opinion compared to the touristic potential of the European harbours, fact which indicates the increased interest for the latter, not only because of the place's profile (i.e. that of harbour), but because of its framing in European cities (e.g. from previous research (Stăncioiu, Mazilu et. al., 2011) referring to the notoriety of international Danubian harbours: Budapest – 35,2% of the respondents, a city which tries to found a brand for the international visitors (Smith, 2003), Vienna – 27.4%, Bratislava – 16.1% și Belgrade – 9.7% as opposed to the Romanian ones, the most renowned being: Galați – 2.6% and Tulcea – 1.9%). The results indicate the possibility of creating, in the case of the Romanian tourism as well, cultural tourism products, even more, with a historical theme, both "sojourn of 1-2 days" type, and circuit, with visits to the main tourist attractions.

Regarding the modality in which the Danube harbours should be promoted, the respondents agree

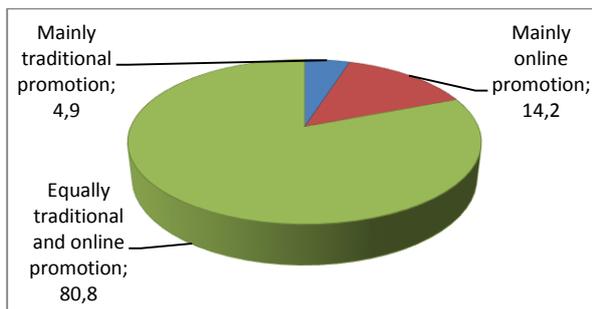
that it should be accomplished primarily through presentations within tourism fairs/conferences or websites (scores of 1.35), advertisements (a score of 1.32), and articles in professional journals (a score of 1.19) – Table 4.

**Table 4 - Instruments of promoting the Danubian harbours, considered by the respondents**

Promotional instruments	Average
Brochures, flyers and prospecti	0,91
Presentation CDs/DVDs	0,7
Advertising clips	1,32
Audio presentations (Radio)	0,82
Articles in professional journals	1,19
Social media	1,14
Websites	1,35
Blogs	0,96
Presentations within tourism fairs/conferences	1,35
Discussion forums	0,81
Other	0,05

Source: statistical survey conducted by the authors

Regarding the means of promoting the Danubian harbours, the most of the respondents (80.8%) believe that this action should be done both traditionally and online, 14.2% thinking that it should be held online, while only 4.9% prefer solely the traditional way (Figure 2).



**Figure 2 - The means of promotion considered suitable by the respondents**

As far as the online promotion is concerned, the majority of the respondents (87.7%) have mentioned that they are part of a social network and 3.3% are not currently members, but intend to become, while only 9% of the respondents do not involve in social media, nor intend to become members. The high percentage of those who prefer promoting the harbours both traditionally and online is justified, given the diverse and unitary nature of the products/harbours, on the one hand, and the large number of respondents who have chosen as the main modality of promoting the harbours – the presentations at the tourism fairs/conferences or websites (scores of 1.35) on the other hand.

Given the ratio of respondents who have visited a Danubian harbour so far (65.2%) and those who have not visited one yet (34.8%), a report foreshadowing the tourism product consumption in the Danubian harbours, it can be ascertained that the

intention of buying such a product in the future belongs to a higher percentage of respondents, belonging to the respondents wanting to make a journey in the near future in a Danubian harbour (73.5%), in comparison with the previous behaviour. Most of the respondents (67.5%) wish that the journeys generally take place with a group of friends, while 29.6% prefer traveling with the family, a result explained by the sample of young people aged 20-24. Regarding the duration of sojourn, in general, 39.9% of them want to spend a few days in a destination, a close proportion (33.7%) allocating a week-end to journeys, while only 14.5% of the respondents allocate to journeys a whole week. Regarding the way in which the respondents regularly travel, most of them travel once a year (34.9%) or once at every 3-4 years (26.3%), only 26.3% traveling once every 3-4 months and 11.9% traveling once a month. These coordinates of the tourism consumption behaviour, respectively the modality of conducting a journey, in terms of number of tourists forming a group and of the duration of the journey, provides clues for designing future products having as main tourist attractions the Danubian harbours included.

## RESEARCH LIMITS

In the context of the Danube Strategy, project initiated by the European Commission, in which Romania has an extremely important role, taking into account the applicability and continuation of the studies, the exploration in detail of the culture and tourism in the Danube area, and therefore, that of the harbours (across the country and beyond the borders), as well as some behavioural variables (e.g., the lifestyle), determinant for the potential tourist buying and consumer behaviour of every country, undoubtedly represents a necessity, for which one cannot spare marketing efforts.

Continuing a previous research, with regard to the degree of knowledge of the national and international harbours and to the types of tourism that the respondents have associated to these destinations, the present research, at the beginning and in full development, although limited to a restrained sample of young people, can shape "the red thread" of the Danube Region tourism policy, following the line of the types of tourism preferred by the respondents, and then, that of the countless tourism products, "limited only by creativity".

## RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

Although a significant proportion of respondents believe that the Danubian harbours are marked by diversity in terms of ethnic groups, religions, customs, existing traditions and history – all of these constituting favourable conditions for a "multicultural" holiday development, even for

"isolated" microdestinations (from the circuit on the Danube), it is ascertained, to a lesser extent, that the Romanian harbours have particular touristic potential. As the existence of specific natural and anthropogenic resources is undeniable, also being recognized by the respondents, the cause of a less attractive touristic potential may be due, most likely, to the material-technical base and to the general and touristic infrastructure. Moreover, knowing as many coordinates of the tourism consumer behaviour as

possible (e.g., the length and frequency of the sojourn in general, socio-demographic structure etc.) is important in order to construct the tourism product, in general and the one specific to the Danube area, in particular. Contributing to the shape of the Danube Region image with specific elements, of differentiation, the results of this research may represent real points of support for further research aiming at transforming these differentiation elements into brand elements.

## REFERENCES

1. Boniface, P. (1995) *Managing Quality in Cultural Tourism*, Routledge, London.
2. Cătoi, I. (coord.) (2009) *Cercetări de marketing: tratat*, Uranus, București.
3. Datculescu, P. (2006) *Cercetarea de marketing*, Brandbuilders, București.
4. Drummond, G., Ensor, J., Ashford, R., (2008) *Strategic Marketing. Planning and control*, Third Edition, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.
5. Hall, D. (1993) *Ecotourism in the Danube Delta*, Tourism review, vol.48, Issue 3, pp.11-13.
6. Hall, D. (1999) *Destination branding, niche marketing and national image projection in Central and Eastern Europe*, Vacation marketing, vol.5, no.3, pp.227-237.
7. Ho, P.S.Y., McKercher, B. (2004) *Managing Heritage Resources as Tourism Products*, Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research, pp.255-266.
8. Jansen-Verbeke M., Lievois, E. (1999) *Analysing heritage resources for urban tourism in European cities*, in Pearce D.G. and Butler R.W. (eds.), *Contemporary issues in tourism development: analysis and applications*, London - New York, Routledge, pp.81-107.
9. Kaplan, R.S., Norton, D.P. (1992) *The Balanced Scorecard - Measures That Drive Performance*, Harvard Business Review, 70(1), pp.71-79.
10. Kaplan, R.S., Norton, D.P. (1993) *Putting the balanced scorecard to work*, Harvard Business Review, 71(5), pp.134-142.
11. Matei, E., Stăncioiu, A.F., Pîrgaru, I., Manea, G., Vărdol, A. (2011) *The Romanian Ports on the Danube Valley - An Emergent Tourism Destination*, Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference on Tourism and Economic Development (TED '11) published by WSEAS Press, pp.113-118.
12. Reisinger, Y., Turner, L. (2003) *Cross-Cultural Behaviour in Tourism. Concepts and Analysis*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.
13. Richards, G. (2001) *Cultural Attractions and European Tourism*, CABI Publishing, London.
14. Smith, M. K. (2003) *Issues in Cultural Tourism Studies*, Routledge, London, p.27.
15. Stăncioiu, A.F., Mazilu, M., Teodorescu, N., Pârgaru, I., Vlădoi, A.D. (2011) *Considerations Regarding The Marketing Destination Danube Valley*, Contemporary Trends in Tourism and Hospitality, Novi Sad, pp.12-18.
16. Stănculescu, G., Bran, F., Lilea, E., Titan, E. (2004) *Strategii si politici regionale de dezvoltare durabilă a spațiului dunărean. Provocări pentru turism*, Editura ASE, București.
17. West, D., Ford, J., Ibrahim, E. (2010) *Strategic Marketing. Creating Competitive Advantage*, Second Edition, Oxford, New York.
18. <http://www.danube-region.eu/> accessed on May 2013.
19. <http://www.mae.ro/strategia-dunarii> accessed on April 2013.