

Current Development Level of Ecotourism and Eco-Touristic Products in Moldova

Doru Postica

University Fernando Pessoa
Master Student in Business Sciences
Porto - Portugal

António Cardoso

Assistant Professor at University Fernando Pessoa
Coordinator of Bachelor and Master Degree's in Business Sciences
University Fernando Pessoa
Praça 9 de Abril, 349
Porto - Portugal

Abstract

Ecotourism is a new form of recreation and will represent an influential change over time. After a proper introduction of the theoretical framework, the paper examines the current situation and development level of ecotourism in Moldova by presenting and commenting the results of some studies made on national level. The framework proposed is then used to assess the status of ecotourism of a particular site, namely "Royal Forests" and propose a basic project to improve this destination. The research paper also formulates some objectives for ecotourism in Moldova and shows that putting it on a sustainable path is a major challenge for this country.

Keywords: eco-tourism, marketing, development, Moldova, Royal Forests

1. Introduction

According the World Tourism Organization (WTO) travel and tourism are among the world's fastest growing industries and are the major source of foreign exchange earnings in developing countries.

Ecotourism can be viewed as a potential strategy to protect natural ecosystems while, at the same time, to promote sustainable local development. Ecotourism is a growing niche market within the larger travel industry, with the potential of being an important sustainable development tool.

One problem is that ecotourism is defined in many ways as the study upon tourism managers from Moldova shows. There is no common accepted definition, which causes the lack of understanding of specific conditions under which it may be best promoted, managed and evaluated. Ecotourism is more than just visiting to natural areas. In literature there is no consensus concerning the distinctiveness of ecotourism and the extent to which it differs from other forms of tourism. This allowed businesses to use the term "ecotourism" as a marketing tool, in order to gain an apparent green edge on the competition without having to really change anything (Ross, 1999). As for Moldova as a developing country, the academic environment has opposite opinions. Some consider it a profitable activity, while others say that ecotourism can only help developing countries in a small way and until national debts and resource dependence is resolved, poverty will still be an issue (Castilho, 1995).

The research problem is the development of ecotourism in Moldova as a new and innovative branch. The objectives are to assess the current level of ecotourism and existing products on the national market, study theoretical concepts about ecotourism and eco-marketing, to suggest improvements for one product in particular and to make recommendations for further evolution of this sector in Moldova. The research object is ecotourism in Moldova. Research method in investigation and elaboration process of the paper is: observation method, logical analysis and synthesis, analogy and comparison.

Paper research is made mainly from literature review and data analysis. The first discussion point is the connection between marketing and ecotourism and the importance of planning in this context.

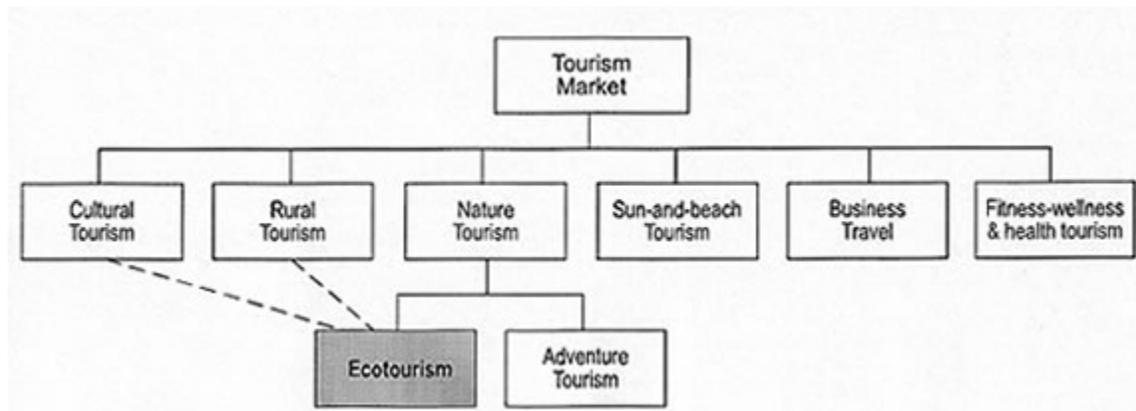
The second chapter debates upon current trends of ecotourism in Moldova by showing the contribution of different agencies and by analyzing a survey’s data. Then, in a more specific cadre, the paper takes a Moldavian eco-touristic destination and suggests improvements by changing the market segmentation and activities offered. Towards the end, the research provides some general suggestions for ecotourism evolution in Moldova.

2. Marketing Concept in Ecological Tourism

Although questions of how ecotourism as a concept is to be defined have begun to subside, the question of how a given definition might be operationalised for marketing and research purposes remains (Blamey, 1997). Depending on the specific angle taken, different academic publications refer to various definitions. Boo (1990) equates ecotourism with nature-tourism. Tickell (1994) takes a different approach and defines ecotourism as ‘travel to enjoy the world’s amazing diversity of natural life and human culture without causing damage to either’. According to the National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) of the Australian Commonwealth Department of Tourism (1994), ecotourism is ‘nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable’. The NES agrees upon the fact that ecotourism must insure an appropriate return to the local community. Knowing the different views on this concept help us better define and understand the role of marketing in ecological tourism.

Ecotourism as a market segment (figure 1) is a component of nature tourism, and has stronger links to rural and cultural tourism. In ecotourism the prime motivation is generally the observation and appreciation of natural features and related cultural assets.

Figure 1: Ecotourism as Market Segment

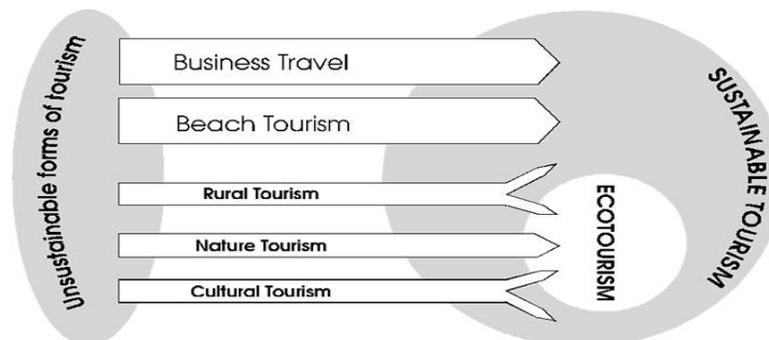


Source: WTO – World Tourism Organization, modified by Strasdas (2001).

According The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) “Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the wellbeing of local people”.

Ecotourism is a part of sustainable tourism and any form of nature tourism, which is planned, implemented and managed in a sustainable way (Figure 02). But moreover cultural and rural tourism can also be ecotourism (Wood, 2002).

Figure 2: Ecotourism as Sustainable Development Concept



Source: Strasdas (2001), cit in Wood, 2002

So, it's a strong relationship between ecotourism and sustainable development results, because (Wood, 2002): (1) Contributes to conservation of biodiversity; (2) Sustains the well being of local people; (3) Includes an interpretation / learning experience; (4) Involves responsible action on the part of tourists and the tourism industry; (5) Is delivered primarily to small groups by small-scale businesses. (6) Requires lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources; (7) Stresses local participation, ownership and business opportunities, particularly for rural people.

2.1 Relation between Eco-Marketing and Ecotourism

The triad eco-marketing - ecotourism – eco-development is the current object of some national and international projects. Eco-marketing, just like classic marketing implies the same links between research, strategy, tactics, action and control, having some final goals as satisfying current needs and wants of the consumer, satisfying the interests of the environment's protection collectivity and reaching the company's goals, insuring long-term prosperity.

The Worldwatch Institute Report (2005) (Cit in The International Ecotourism Society) clarify the different concepts (table 1):

Table 1: Category and Concepts

Category	Definition
Adventure tourism	A form of nature-based tourism that incorporates an element of risk, higher levels of physical exertion, and the need for specialized skill.
Ecotourism	Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.
Geotourism	Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place- its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of its residents.
Mass tourism	Large-scale tourism, typically associated with 'sea, sand, sun' resorts and characteristics such as transnational ownership, minimal direct economic benefit to destination communities, seasonality, and package tours.
Nature-based tourism	Any form of tourism that relies primarily on the natural environment for its attractions or settings.
Pro-poor tourism	Tourism that results in increased net benefit for the poor people.
Responsible tourism	Tourism that maximizes the benefits to local communities, minimizes negative social or environmental impacts, and helps local people conserve fragile cultures, habitats, and species.
Sustainable Tourism	Tourism that meets the needs of present tourist and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future.

Source: Worldwatch Institute Report (2005, cit in The International Ecotourism Society (TIEC))

As we move to a future where green marketing cannot remain separate from a business' operations, the role of the marketing team and its internal influence will evolve as well. At the heart of green marketing is a mission bigger than your own brand – the planet. The actions towards guiding ecological marketing are the following (Ottman, 2011): (1) Insuring consumer satisfaction and contributing to a sustainable and better living standard; (2) Insuring the stability of ecotourism offers, capable of keeping the viability of entrepreneurs from this field; (3) Orienting consumption towards pure ecological products, which positively influences the tourists' health and the surrounding environment under qualitative aspect.

In this context, eco-marketing is directly influenced by the policies, mechanisms and tools of environment protection, as well as the legislative system. It is operational at micro and macroeconomic level for various means of activity, based upon sustainable principles. The elaboration of strategies in developing the sectors of the economy has become a priority in most countries. Concerns for strategic management are due to the fact that strategies are the instruments through which the actions are realized, insuring efficiency in using the country, branch or company's economic potential.

Due to consumerism movements from the 20th and 21st centuries, marketing strategies that are destined to satisfy the consumption needs in report to principles of economic competitiveness, are applied in both social and economic sectors.

The marketing strategy is an important component of the marketing policy, through which there can be established the ways of reaching our objectives. The development range can be various, but is usually associated with 3-5 years (Shankar, 2012). In tourism, the specifics of marketing strategies are dictated by the peculiarities of the touristic product and tourist market. The strategies' complexity results from the content of the marketing mix, structure, dynamics and market requirements, level of competition and criteria that insure the competitiveness of the touristic product.

2.2. Strategic Planning in Eco-Marketing Activity

After reviewing the existing literature and researches in this sector, the current paper proposes a model of strategic planning of the eco-marketing activity. Strategic planning allows the members of the organization to understand what's important and how the role they play and their effort and performance contribute to the organization's short and long-term success. This would allow the focus on the specific characteristics, as well as the necessary resources needed to obtain an innovative eco-touristic offer. It consists of the following steps (Simerson, 2011): (1) Marketing audit of business environment; (2) Establishment of strategic position; (3) Formulate strategic objectives; (4) Elaborate general strategy; (5) Elaborate touristic eco-marketing mix (Price policies, Promoting policy, Distribution policy, Product policy); (6) Implementing strategy; and (7) Controlling the progress made.

We need to mention that the strategic process for touristic eco-marketing is the same as classic marketing, but with an ecologic tendency. It can be highlighted the importance of marketing audit of business environment as a tool of diagnosis and analysis. This shows the opportunities of the touristic market. There are specific criteria like: (1) Level of social and economic development of touristic zone in which the destination is included; (2) Requirements and the way of administering the touristic area imposed by the local community; (3) Specifics of the neighboring natural reservations; (4) Presence of competitors (tourism agents) in the reference area, similar offers; (5) Complexity of touristic products offered by competitors.

As for formulating strategic objectives for eco-marketing tourism, is focused upon identifying some implementation directions of eco-touristic actions. The objectives can be general or specific. For the companies that wish to activate in ecotourism in Moldova, general objectives can be (Sabo, 2006): (1) Developing one or more eco-touristic product on the national or regional market; (2) Keeping the market share for eco-touristic products; (3) Maximizing medium-term and long-term profits; (4) Developing new markets; and (5) Creating and maintaining a favorable image of the company among eco-tourists, as well as the high value of eco-touristic products.

The objectives can then be specified depending on the entrepreneur's functions in the industry. The positive development is dependent on successful strategies to limit tourist numbers, inform and educate both visitors and locals, and to manage and control the area efficiently (Gossling, 1999). It is important to focus on: (1) Improving resource quality, management modernization of reservation; (2) Attracting a large number of tourists sensitive to environment problems, including in ecotourism programs local cultural-historic locations, hiring local residents in tourism, gaining funds for conserving the historic and natural inheritance for nearby villages; (3) Establishing a strategic partnership with local suppliers, implementing some quality standards, promoting a good image of eco-touristic destination etc.

3. Eco-tourism Opportunities and Development in Moldova

Moldavian ecotourism is an excellent opportunity for the development of areas where favorable conditions and resources exist, a safe alternative for integrating natural landscapes and ecologic biodiversity into international tourism attractiveness. However, the modest sizes of urban areas in Moldova do not allow mass tourism to appear.

3.1. Tendencies of including eco-touristic products in the Moldova's general tourism offer

Being one of the newest branches of national economy, the tourism industry in Moldova has some positive trends, offering new advantages to entrepreneurs. The variety of available natural and cultural-historic touristic resources is a sure motivation in the efforts made towards the development of tourist branch.

Touristic circulation in receiving tourists comparing to the amount of outbound tourists shows that Moldova is a country that imports tourism. This is why developing receptor tourism is an obligatory and unconditioned necessity. Stimulating touristic circulation in our country is also necessary as Moldova has an important touristic potential, which is unfortunately not used.

Attracting a large number of western and eastern tourists can substantially contribute to increasing the income levels and to realize an increased economic efficiency in touristic activities in Moldova.

In order to increase competitiveness of the touristic offers in Moldova on the international market, economic agents should modernize existing products and innovate new ones. By creating attractive touristic offers, it can be developed one of the most profitable directions of national economy. Given this line of reasoning, it is necessary a collaboration between the “actors” of the touristic industry regarding the formation, promotion and commerce of touristic products. Initiating ecotourism development in Moldova requires organizing, planning and managing at state level the touristic activity.

Tourism agencies play a special role in promoting eco-touristic products that:

- a) Sell touristic products as main activity;
- b) Intermediate contractual relations between consumers and suppliers;
- c) Keeping contact with touristic consumers and taking measures to promote fidelity;
- d) Organizing trips;
- e) Transmit the feedback from consumers to suppliers.

Organizations that In Moldova, there are 210 economic agents licensed in tourism, most of which are engaged in sending tourists abroad. Only 25% of them deal with inbound tourists (National Bureau of Statistics).

The National Association of Tourism Agencies of Moldova was founded on 25th of April 2002 and is a non-governmental organization based on volunteer work from legal persons that practice tourism activities and has the objective of coordinating, monitoring, protecting, promotion and representing the interests of its members, taking specific actions to the tourism activity. Nowadays, ANAT has 60 company-members and 3 hotels as associates.

This is one of the main professional organizations from this field in Moldova, which comprises the entire range of services provided in the touristic area. Members currently hold 80% of total sales in the tourism service in Moldova. Through the base objectives of ANAT, we can mention (ANAT):

- a) Organizing symposiums, conferences, expositions with touristic theme;
- b) Participating to international conferences, congresses and expositions;
- c) Participating as an expert to elaboration of documents and rules regarding touristic legislation;
- d) Collaboration with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Moldova;
- e) Contributing to the improving of staff hired in touristic agencies by elaborating a program destined for their training;
- f) Creating regional centers of consultancy regarding development of rural and ecologic tourism;
- g) Elaborate and promote new touristic routes throughout Moldova;
- h) Assist to license offering of touristic companies;
- i) Monitoring various conflicts that may appear between agencies on the touristic market;
- j) Editing publications in tourism field;
- k) Contributing to promotion of touristic image of Moldova on international level;
- l) Insure information supply for foreign partners regarding the touristic activity of Moldova.

Main actions made by ANAT were:

- a) Participation of ANAT experts in elaboration of durable development strategy of tourism in Moldova for the years 2003-2015 (approved by the Government in 2003);
- b) Participation of ANAT experts in elaboration of General Urbanism plan of Chisinau (tourism compartment);
- c) Organization of national seminar “Human resource management in tourism” in 3-5 November 2003 (co-financed by project PNUD-Moldova “Sustainable development of tourism”);
- d) Organizing the participation of Moldova with own materials at the international exposition from Germany in 2003 and 2008, Russia and Moscow – 2004, 2005, 2006, Great Britain 2006;
- e) Organizing international tourism exposition “Sport. Leisure. Tourism” in Moldexpo, Moldova – 2003-2012;
- f) Organizing professional training at national level “Instructing and training of employees in touristic activity in rural areas”, in partnership with National Center of Employees Training in Tourism (co-financed by project PNUD-Moldova “Sustainable development of tourism”);

- g) Editing touristic guide of Moldova for years 2003-2012;
- h) Editing “Tourism and leisure” magazine (ANAT is founder);
- i) Editing methodological material from touristic sector (guide of tourist legislation, brochures).

The National Association of Rural, Ecologic and Cultural Tourism from Moldova is the initiator of opening first businesses in agro-touristic areas. Its main activity domains are (Moldova Tour):

- a) Elaboration of sustainable development strategies of tourism in areas with major potential;
- b) Diversifying and improving tourism products;
- c) Training and consulting possible suppliers of ecotourism services;
- d) Elaboration of informational, methodological support, business plans for people interested in developing touristic businesses in rural area;
- e) Developing a network of rural touristic households;
- f) Organizing promotion campaign of household from the network of rural tourism.

ANTREC also collaborates with similar associations from other European states, like ANTREC-Iasi, in the project “A Moldavian Tour – promoting over-the-border tourism”. The initiators are seeking to create a touristic guidebook that would include detailed information about the possible types of tourism, as well as creating a web page.

4. Methodology: Market Research in Assessing Eco-Tourism Concept

For selecting the opportunities and deficiencies of the eco-touristic activity in Moldova, in the process of practical research of the problem, there was made a market research regarding the integration tendencies of the eco-touristic product in the incoming tourism in Moldova. The research methodology applied with this purpose is based upon identification of tourism managers’ opinion regarding the role and place of ecotourism in creating the touristic offer of Moldova. The purposes of the research were the following (National Tourism Agency):

- a) Classification of tourism forms according to their demand from incoming tourists;
- b) Identify the managers’ perception on ecotourism;
- c) Identify touristic regions with increased productivity for developing ecotourism;
- d) Determine the actual way of integration of the eco-touristic product in the structure of touristic offers of interviewed agencies;
- e) Evaluate the complexity of present eco-touristic offer;
- f) Identify the main standards, according to the managers’ opinion, in creating competitive eco-touristic products;
- g) Determine attractive eco-touristic activities in ecotourism;
- h) Identify the optimal time period for ecotourism;
- i) Evaluate the degree of availability of tourism agencies regarding possible investments in this field.

The research methodology was composed of two parts: exploratory research and descriptive research. In the first part (exploratory), the National Tourism Agency identified the tourism agencies operating in Moldova and gathered general information about their activity to see which are suited for the descriptive research. After sending a participation request to the managers and elaborating a questionnaire, the descriptive research starts. In the end, data is collected and compiled into a public report.

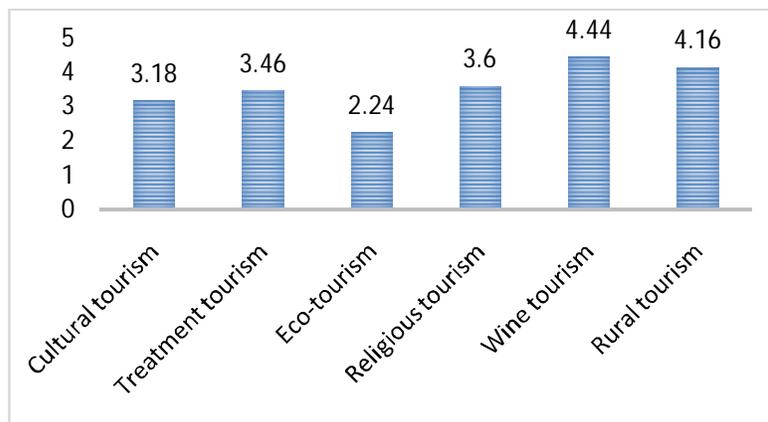
The study is based on primary information that allows identification and evaluation of expert’s opinion on ecotourism in Moldova. In order to collect the primary data, there was used the questionnaire method, on a sample of 50 national tourism agencies.

5. Data Analyses

The majority of ecotourism stakeholders desire change. Tourists can get a different experience, which is available in special places. Entrepreneurs see a chance to sell various equipment, hand-made souvenirs. Permanent residents living near the eco-touristic area would have more job offers and a higher income (Geoffrey, 1996).

The data reflected in graph 1 shows the weight of different types of tourism in the general industry. As Moldova is known internationally for its wine and rural museums, there 2 types have the higher score. Ecotourism has the lowest one, as it is not yet penetrated the local tourism market.

Graph 1: Level of Tourism Forms in National Offer, According to the Moldavian Tourism Managers' Opinion



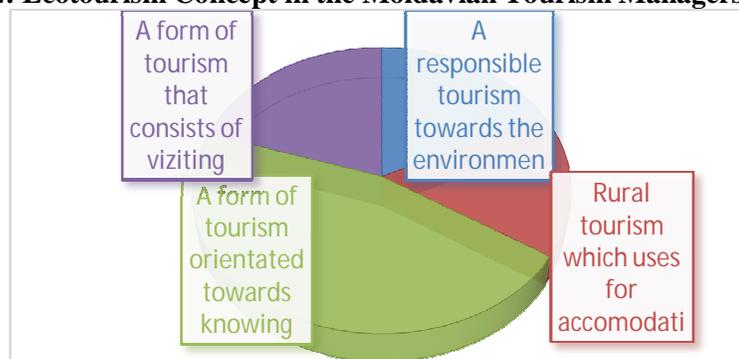
Source: Made by authors according to research data

The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (Hansen, 2007). Ecotourism goes beyond sightseeing to enhancing visitors’ understanding of the scientific and ecological features of our natural attractions. This means that ecotourism must (Tourism Western Australia, 2006):

- a) Recognize the intrinsic value of nature and accept that National Parks are primarily for conservation of fauna, flora and landscapes;
- b) Promote and develop ecologically and culturally sustainable travel and tourism;
- c) Promote and foster the conservation of and investment in the natural and cultural resources used for tourism;
- d) Develop ethics and standards for ecotourism;
- e) Educate and inspire tourists through participation to enjoy and appreciate the importance of natural and cultural assets.

Graph 2 confirms that tourism managers have a vague conception of what ecotourism is, each of them understanding a certain characteristic of it, but not the whole meaning.

Graph 2: Ecotourism Concept in the Moldavian Tourism Managers' Opinion

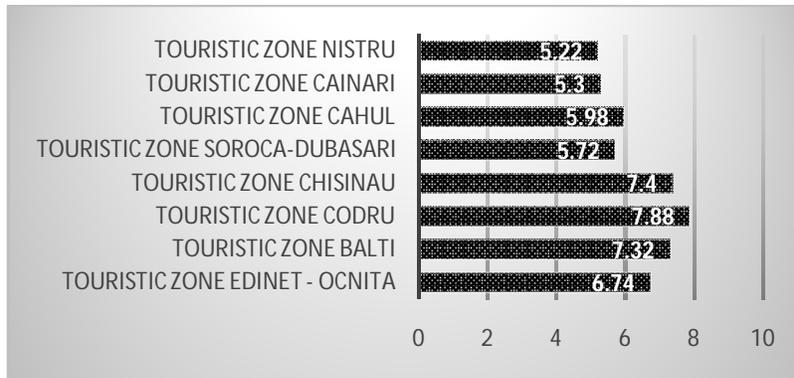


Source: Made by authors according to research data

According to the interviewed managers, the most important areas in creating eco-touristic products are (graph 3):

- a) Touristic zone “Codru” includes the scientific reservation where there are rare tree species, specific for the temperate climate;
- b) Touristic zone “Chisinau” includes the capital city with all its parks, a famous monastery and a beautiful river beach;
- c) Touristic zone “Balti” includes the scientific reservation “Royal Forests” with a net of multiple small rivers;
- d) Touristic zone “Edinet – Ocnita” includes several exploring caves and a beautiful scenery on rocky relief.

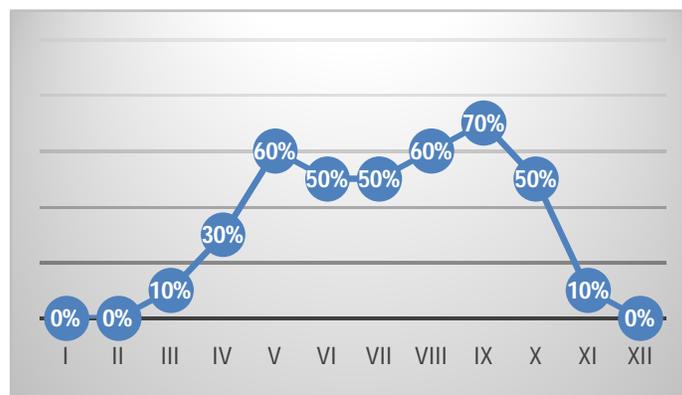
Graph 3: Level of Touristic Zone Importance in Moldavian Tourism Managers' Opinion



Source: Made by authors according to research data

Graph 4 shows the climate influence upon the development of tourism. As can be seen, the optimal period for eco-touristic activities in Moldova is May-September, meaning the warm period of the year.

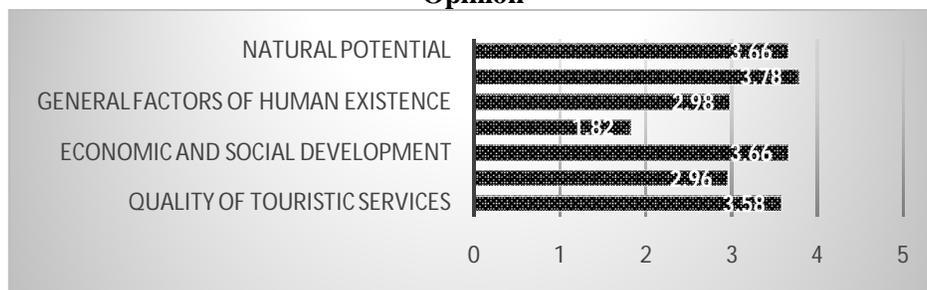
Graph 4: Optimal Period for Eco-Touristic Activities in Moldova According to Tourism Managers' Opinion



Source: Made by authors according to research data

From the information reflected in the graph 5, natural and human potential, in the managers' opinion, allow the development of ecotourism. At the same time, some other elements of current eco-touristic offer have been noticed as causing a low level of tourists' satisfaction. The impediments to an efficient eco-touristic activity are the low level of general and touristic infrastructure and low level of social and economic development

Graph 5: Elements That Influence the Eco-Touristic Offer in Moldova According to Tourism Managers' Opinion

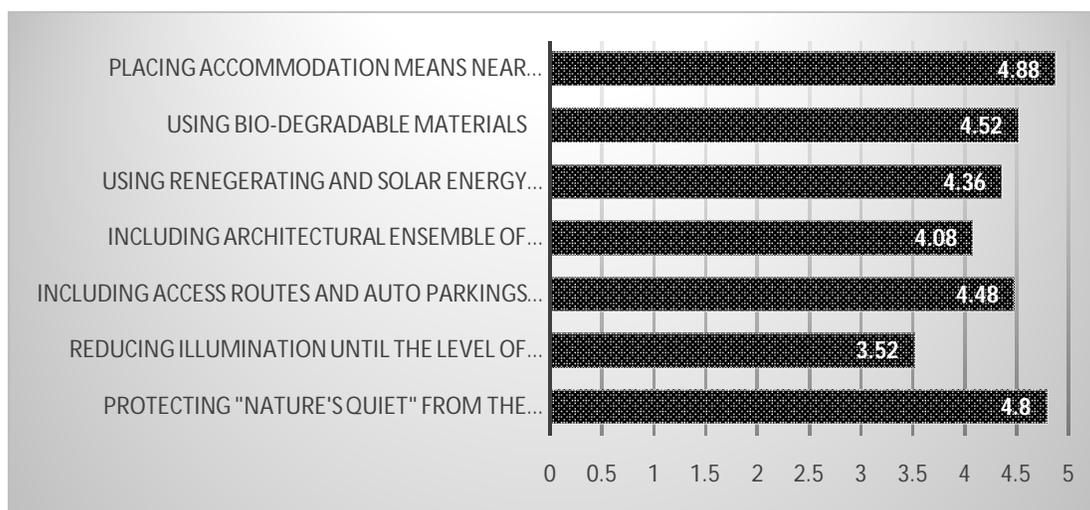


Source: Made by authors according to research data

Also, other deficiencies are the lack of information in ecological tourism, almost no facilities for accessing touristic zones mentioned by 82%, and 86% respectively. Other 42% consider the worsening of the environment's cleanliness is another factor that limits ecotourism. Also, the entrepreneurs see the problem of village depopulation (people went abroad to work) to be a negative factor.

By asking the tourism managers' opinion upon the importance of implementing and respecting some regulations, there were obtained the following data reflected in graph 06. While there are numerous articles on the meaning of the terms ecotourism and sustainability, and even textbooks on how to implement an ecotourism project, or on ecotourism itself, there are hardly any comparative studies which try to assess whether ecotourism has positive or negative effects on the areas or species on which it is founded. It is certainly very difficult to measure objectively or classify a project as being successful or sustainable, given the variety of factors involved (Kruger, 2005). That's why specific regulations should be imposed in order to reduce as much as possible the negative effects.

Graph 6: Level of Regulation's Importance in Formation of Eco-Touristic Products in the Moldavian Tourism Managers' Opinion



Source: Made by authors according to research data

Evaluating the degree of importance of regulations in forming eco-touristic products is reflected on a 0 to 5 scale in graph 6. From this investigation, it is shown that the majority of proposals are accepted by the managers as having major importance. This proves the high level of acceptance in insuring the quality and competitiveness of eco-touristic offers, competing with countries from the European Union like France, Italy, Poland and Switzerland.

Approximately 70% from the interviewed tourism agencies are considering to invest in various projects related to creating and promoting ecotourism in Moldova. As reason for the other negative answers is the financial situation of their company, having a low return. The credit limitations and financial partnership from state and banks are a fundamental barrier regarding investments in this field at the present time.

5.1. Marketing Actions in Developing the Eco-Touristic Product "Royal Forests"

Natural reservation "Royal forests" represents the oldest and most massive forest from Moldova and is considered one of the oldest meadow forests in Europe. This group of oaks that have been there for centuries are testimonies of the country's history and their past fame. Along with these forests, there is a farm of aurochs (rare animals that are the country's symbol), a lake, and beautiful views in "A hundred hills" (rocky landscape). The eco-touristic potential of this reservation gives it a unique character in Europe due to its variety and originality. It is one of the most representative and valuable areas from Moldova.

At the present time, the natural reservation "Royal Forests" has 86 employees, has a profitable activity and has a market experience of over 10 years in organizing touristic trips and excursions in ecologic areas (MoldSilva).

Table 2: General Indicators of Economic Activity of “Royal Forests” Reservation (Thousands Euro)

Nr.	Indicators	2010	2011	2012
1	Income	74.42	109.02	197.72
2	Expenditures	62,12	96.13	185.38
3	Profit	12,3	12.89	12,34

Source: Made by authors

The data was taken from the public agency Moldsilva web-site. The table calculation (from local currency to euro) was made by the author according to the national bank’s official exchange rate from 01.11.2013: 1 EURO = 17.64 MDL. We can observe the company has been profitable in the last 3 years, even if the total expenditures have an increasing trend. They are explained by the fact that in this period the reservation’s administration takes measures in improving their product, building eco-touristic routes, places for tourists to rest, entirely with objects made from wood, informative and attention panels, a route for cyclists, two cottages as accommodation, creating a museum of nature and a green library.

Following a personal visit in summer of 2013 and examination of current conditions at the natural reservation “Royal Forests”, there are some eco-touristic marketing objectives that may be proposed:

- a) Active promotion on the regional market as eco-touristic destination;
- b) Harness the area’s eco-touristic potential in a non-polluting way;
- c) Diversifying local economy through tourism.

The eco-touristic product in the Royal Forests has to be specifically defined, based on activities orientated to satisfying consumer’s needs with an increased interest to natural habitats, landscapes, and a serious attitude towards protecting natural resources. The questionnaire made by ANTREC allows us to identify the tourists’ expectations in natural areas: green arranged areas, accessible ecologic objects, exciting routes and a comfortable accommodation with natural alimentation.

Taking all this into consideration, there may be proposed several services to eco-tourists:

- a) Photo-safari (observing flora and fauna of the nature);
- b) Organized fishing (special place for fishing);
- c) Swimming (in the lake);
- d) Water rides (boat or wooden piers);
- e) Natural medicine center;
- f) Park walks;

According to the proposed activities, the commerce of this eco-touristic product needs to have a clear market segmentation with increased interest to nature. As a raw proposal, there are forwarded 7 consumption segments, based upon the reasons to travel and the reservation’s potential to insure viability. The segments are:

- a) Pupils. They can benefit from curricular and extracurricular excursions in order to deepen their knowledge in various classes like biology, geography etc. The channels of distribution are the teachers and school directors.
- b) Students from faculties with eco-touristic profile. They would be interested in thematic excursions, getting their bachelor internship there, group events. The product information can reach this group through student associations or university staff.
- c) Ecologists. This market segment would visit the Royal Forests reservation in order to study the successful management practices of natural areas, and also benefit from special excursions.
- d) Foreign tourists. They can be offered a complete visit of the reservation for 2-7 days or 1 day excursions. This product can be sold by tourism agencies.
- e) Families with kids. The activities that appeal to them could be a weekend in nature, or other group activity that is entertaining and rich in information for the kids. For this market segment, promotion can be made through mass media.
- f) Corporate clients. The reservation is a good place to have an informal meeting, seminars or trainings. The syndicates, NGO-s or event planners are key intermediaries here.
- g) People seeking treatment. They can receive rehabilitation, prophylactic procedures and natural treatment. This product can be marketed through family doctors.

5.2. Strategic Development and Promotion Directions of Ecotourism in Moldova

Ecotourism, having modest dimensions in Moldova, require the aid of marketing promotion to direction business development according to the tourists' consumption preferences and motivations. Marketing is the science of 20th and 21st century, capable of correlating the company's objectives with the environment factors and common interests with society, proving its contribution to an increased efficiency and a more rational consumption of economic resources.

In Moldova, currently in the transition process, there were elaborated strategic documents in most of the economy's sectors. In tourism, the initial phase was reflected in the "National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Tourism" and "Strategy of Economic Growth and Reduced Poverty".

By implementing them, there were made specific actions in tourism development: (National Tourism Agency)

- a) Inventory of natural and human resources available for ecotourism and rural tourism development;
- b) Starting the process of legend collection, to collect information destined to eco-touristic and rural tourism guides;
- c) Starting the elaboration of "Calendar of Cultural Events";
- d) Granting financial and informational support to first eco-touristic entrepreneurs from specific areas;
- e) Organizing trainings regarding ecotourism in 8 districts of the country;
- f) Participation to different international tourism events to exchange experience;
- g) Elaboration of a methodic guide "Manager's guide", destined to tourism businesses in the rural areas;
- h) Elaboration and editing of leaflets, booklets destined to promote rural, ecologic and cultural tourism in Moldova;
- i) Consolidating relationship between eco-touristic businesses and educational institutions, NGO-s and cultural associations.

Ecotourism, as a new form of tourism, highlighted in Moldova's development policies has a series of problems:

- a) Weak eco-touristic infrastructure and low motivation for foreign investors;
- b) Lack of professional training of suppliers of rural and eco-touristic services;
- c) Low number of touristic destinations with potential of transformation into eco-touristic one
- d) Non-efficient informational system;
- e) Few actions regarding conserving and protecting the natural environment;
- f) Low interest of local residents and local authorities to stimulate entrepreneurship in this branch.

The development and promotion actions of ecotourism in Moldova needs to:

- a) Position ecotourism in the touristic industry;
- b) Create competitive touristic products and harness the ecotouristic offer on national and international market;
- c) Intensify tourism circulation, by increasing the number of arrivals with eco-touristic purposes;
- d) Increase the weight of expenses for vacations spent in the country and balance the number of arrivals and departures with recreational purposes;
- e) Promote the national touristic patrimony at national level as well as abroad;
- f) Acquire loyal tourists.

6. Conclusion

Ecotourism is a growing niche within the larger travel industry, with the potential of being an important sustainable development tool. It is a dynamic field, with new techniques and approaches evolving every year (Wood, 2002).

This paper has argued that Moldova is barely beginning to develop this tourism segment. Due to the country's pleasant and rich environment, it might catch on, attracting investors and eco-tourists. The economic potential of ecotourism has remained largely unrealized so far. Many protected areas do not charge admissions fees at all and governments have given little consideration to the question of increasing revenues. As it could have been seen from the research study, it is also required an informational campaign, as people have a vague conception on what eco-tourism is and how can it be used to their advantage.

The present research contributes to a better understanding of this new concept of “ecotourism”, its further growth possibilities in Moldova and determination of strategic directions as marketing object. It also helps readers to identify the current development level of Moldavian ecotourism and products available for eco-tourists. However, due to the fact that the current paper is based mainly upon literature review, future research is encouraged. It is recommended to do a quantitative market research not only on tourism managers, but on prospect consumers as well. Also, future research is needed to advance the improvement model of Royal Forests presented in this paper, in order to have a cost-quality analysis and assessment of future market demand. The present research paper is limited in the author’s proficiency in the field, by the low level of information available online for ecotourism in Moldova that could have been reviewed and time period given for this research.

References

- ANAT (2013). Available in <<http://www.anat.md/anat/index.html>> [Accessed in 03/11/2013]
- Australian Commonwealth Department of Tourism (1994) *National Ecotourism Strategy*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.
- Blamey K. (1997), *Ecotourism: the search for an operational definition*. Journal of sustainable tourism, Volume 5.
- Boo, Elizabeth (1990). *Ecotourism: The Potentials and Pitfalls*. WWF, Washington, DC
- Castilho, Carlos; Herrscher, Roberto (1995). *Ecotourism: paradise gained, or paradise lost?* Panos Media Briefing No. 14. 1995
- Gosling, Stefan (1999). *Ecotourism: a means to safeguard biodiversity and ecosystem functions?* Ecological Economics. 29: 303-320
- Hansen, Amy (2007). *The ecotourism industry and the sustainable tourism eco-certification program*. Sustainable travel international.
- Kruger, Oliver (2005). *The role of ecotourism in conservation: panacea or Pandora’s box?* Biodiversity and Conservation 14: 579-600.
- Moldova Tour web-site (2013). Available in <<http://www.tur.md/rom/antrec/>> [Accessed in 07/11/2013]
- MoldSilva Agency web-site (2013). Available in <<http://www.moldsilva.gov.md/>> [Accessed in 07/11/2013]
- National Bureau of Statistics (2013). Available in <<http://www.statistica.md/>> [Accessed in 01/11/2013]
- National Tourism Agency (2013). Available in <http://www.turism.gov.md/index.php?pag=proiecte_finalizate&opa=view&id=12&start=&l=>, [Accessed in 04/11/2013]
- Ottman, Jacquelyn (2011). *The new rules of Green Marketing: strategies, tools and inspiration for sustainable branding*. Greanleaf Publishing.
- Ross, Sheryl; Wall, Geoffrey (1999). *Ecotourism: towards congruence between theory and practice*. Tourism Management 20: 123-152.
- Sabo M. (2006). *Touristic marketing*. Irecson, Bucuresti.
- Shankar V. & Carpenter G. (2012). *Handbook of marketing strategy*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Simerson Byron K. (2011). *Strategic planning: a practical guide to strategy formulation and execution*. ABC-Clio.
- Strasdas, W. (2001). *Ökotourismus in der Praxis: Zur Umsetzung der sozio-ökonomischen und naturschutzpolitischen Ziele eines anspruchsvollen Tourismuskonzeptes in Entwicklungsländern*. Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung. V. Ammerland, Germany.
- Tickell, C. Foreword In E. Cater, & G. Lowman, (1994). *Ecotourism: A sustainable option?* Chichester.
- Tourism Western Australia (2006). *Quick start guide to a tourism business*. July.
- Wall, Geoffrey (1996). *Ecotourism: Change, Impacts and Opportunities*. In “The ecotourism equation: measuring the impacts”.
- Wood, Megan Epler (2002). *Ecotourism: principles, practices & policies for sustainability*. United Nations Publication Environment Programme.
- World Tourism Organization (WTO) (2013). Available in <<http://www.world-tourism.org/>> [Accessed in 11/12/2013]
- Wood, Megan (2002). *Ecotourism: Principles, Practices & Policies for Sustainability*. United Nations Environment Programme. Paris: United Nations Publication. ISBN: 92-807-2064-3.
- The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2013). Available in <<https://www.ecotourism.org/>> [Accessed in 11/12/2013]