

# TOURIST ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT IN MOLDAVIA

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## **Abstract:**

*In the tourism sector the elements of attractiveness are responsible for the development level of tourism in that territory. These provide important information about the inventory of components attractive to tourists and information about the perceptions and expectations of tourists. The article is a reference to better highlight the positions that urban region from Moldavia hold in terms of tourist attractiveness, given that in recent years, many cities wish to gain international recognition through tourism. This will make an ascending hierarchical classification to allow coherent and logical identification of attractive areas.*

*Key words: attractiveness, competitiveness, cities, Moldavia.*

## **1. Introduction**

The attractiveness of a region depends on the number of existing tourism resources, but also how these resources are evaluated and perceived by tourists. Simple inventory and grouping of existing resources in a territory may not help determine the degree of attractiveness of the area. Thus, attractiveness of some resources depends not only on their inherently value, but also on the perceptions that tourists have about them. Not all destinations that have major attractions are seen as attractive by tourists.

The concept of attractiveness recently imposed in the domains of economic and regional policies, as a result from competition and rivalry that occurs between territories.

For a city or region, attractiveness shows the power of attraction, making that territory to attract people, investments that are designed to enhance the influence it will have on other areas. Specialists in many fields have attempted to identify factors that increase the attractiveness of contemporary territories.

Lollier, Prigent et al, 2005, believes that in the context of globalization the determining factors are: market size and dynamics, human resources, research and innovation, transportation network,

cultural and tourism environment. Between these factors, transportation network and the cultural environment plays an important role in urban tourism. Transportation network facilitates people's access to cultural elements with its various components (architecture, heritage, landscape).

Attractiveness can not be treated globally, because there are different types of attractiveness, some quantifiable, others less measurable, being more subjective in nature.

Tourism development process is dependent on the identification of attractiveness elements that are responsible for the development of tourism in that area. Tourist attractiveness is a demanding and difficult to standardize concept which plays an important role in the tourism dynamics, offering important information about the inventory of components attractive to tourists and also information about their perceptions and expectations.

Research in this domain shows that studies on the attractiveness of some territories are extremely important in understanding the elements that encourage people to travel. Although we may observe similarities between the concept of tourism potential and attractiveness, some authors prefer the

use of the concept of tourist attractiveness being considered a more comprehensive exploration of the relationships that forms between supply and demand (Iașu and Bulai, 2011). While the tourism potential focuses on natural and human resources which together with the infrastructure represent the tourist offer of a destination, tourist attractiveness acts directly on the number of tourist arrivals, ensuring the success of a tourist destination. But both tourist attractiveness and tourism potential are particularly important concepts which directly put their mark on how actors act in tourism.

Tourist attractiveness relies heavily on the impact that tourism destination has on the tourist, implicitly on his satisfaction (Formica, 2000). A tourist destination must succeed to guarantee and provide visitors throughout its entire offer, an experience whose degree of satisfaction exceeds other alternative destinations. Tourist movements are not random and represent a response to an attraction (Brière, 1961).

At the level of tourist attractiveness can be distinguished a number of tangible elements with a very important role in attracting tourists flow: natural and human resources, accommodation and catering facilities, leisure facilities. But touristic attractiveness takes into account other key factors such as: brand image, notoriety or identity of the place.

The image which the tourist forms about a particular destination can influence in a significant proportion the options of others. Therefore, the criteria that evaluate tourism attractiveness have changed gradually, the interest in particularities of tourism supply gradually being replaced by research on the perceptions and motivations of tourists.

The purpose of this article is to identify on a unitary based method, urban centers in the region of Moldavia that have tourism potential. Identification of the attractiveness degree of these cities is extremely important in developing local policies and strategies seeking to improve the competitiveness of regional tourism.

Personal contribution lies in the bibliographic documentation to deepen the concept of tourist attractiveness and processing data from the National Spatial Plan and the National Institute of Statistics, and making synthesized thematic maps, achieving a better understanding of the data provided.

## 2. Tourist attractiveness and competitiveness

The concept of tourist attractiveness automatically implies competitiveness, because it is a precondition and an essential dimension of competitiveness. Thus, if an area is competitive it will be more attractive, attractiveness can be considered a consequence of competitiveness.

Rigorous definition of competitiveness is difficult, perhaps even impossible, and can not be formulated clearly due to its multiple components that lies with in and the numerous indicators through which may be relevant (Gavrilă and Gavrilă, 2009).

*Competitiveness* is defined in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language as *a feature of a product or of an undertaking to face competition of similar products in a particular market*. According to the same dictionary, *attractiveness is defined as an attribute of what is attractive*. Therefore, the importance of competitiveness lies in creating quality and innovative products which must be represented in the form of attractions for demand. Regarding competitiveness in tourism, its complexity makes the approach to competitiveness very broad.

Crouch and Ritchie, 1999, believes that within a tourist destination competitiveness is influenced by the following elements:

- *resources and major attractions* (cultural heritage scientific events, recreation, etc.).
- *resources and upstream factors* (accessibility, food and accommodation units, etc.).
- *destination management* (quality of services, development and qualification of

human resources, protecting attractive resources).

- *qualification factors* (safety / security, reputation of the destination, the created brand image, the quality / price ratio).

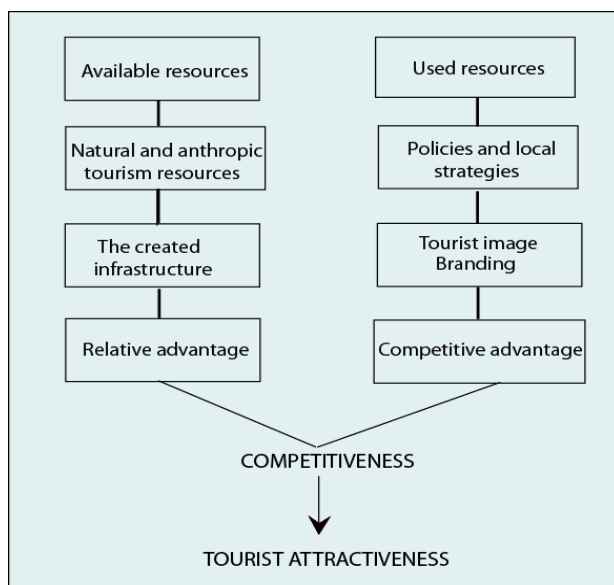
Drawing inspiration from the model of Crouch and Ritchie, economists Dwyer and Kim, 2003, identified the factors that determine competitiveness: existing resources (natural and cultural), created resources (tourist infrastructure), upstream factors (access to destination, quality of service) and factors related to destination management.

These two classifications are intended to illustrate the importance of cultural resources inherited or created and the importance of how they manage to be organized to form an attractive and competitive tourism product.

In the concept of competitiveness can identify two main components - relative advantage and competitive advantage (Figure 1).

The theory of comparative advantage brings forth the abundance of resources and designed infrastructure, while the theory of competitive advantage depends mostly on the competition capacity of these resources to individualize themselves into the tourist preferences. All this aspects highlights the large number of determinants that influence the competitiveness of the tourism product (Gruescu and Axinte, 2010).

The success of a tourist destination is determined by the way it manages to provide tourists, through the entire offer, an experience to equal or exceed other alternative destinations. As a result, through everything which a tourist destination gives for a traveler from the first moment of contact with it (information, photos, impressions, etc.) should arouse interest. In these conditions, only a more complex approach to the tourist destination can provide a high degree of competitiveness.



**Figure 1. The relationship between tourist competitiveness and attractiveness.**  
 Source: Personal approach.

### 3. Tourist attractiveness in NSP vision

At the national level there is a study conducted by the National Spatial Plan Section VI - Tourism, which based on its own and unified methodology manages to assess tourist attraction of administrative units in Romania, taking into account natural and human resources, and specific tourism technical infrastructure. Due to the complex character and uniform methodology applied to the entire national territory, this quantitative assessment has the role to evaluate the true tourism potential of each locality.

Regarding the notion of tourist resource used in the analysis of NSP, the Government Ordinance no. 58/1998 stipulates that these are parts of the natural and human environment, which in their specificity and qualities are recognized, recorded and used in tourism, as far as they are not subject to a regime of integrated protection. Thus, the tourism resource in itself is a tourist attraction, and because it is already exploited in tourism, it comes out of obscurity and into the tourist circuit.

Based on NSP indicators used to achieve a hierarchical ascending classification of urban units from Moldavia, we overlapped the number of tourist arrivals to have a clearer picture of the current state of tourism development. We have identified six classes having the following features (Figure 2):

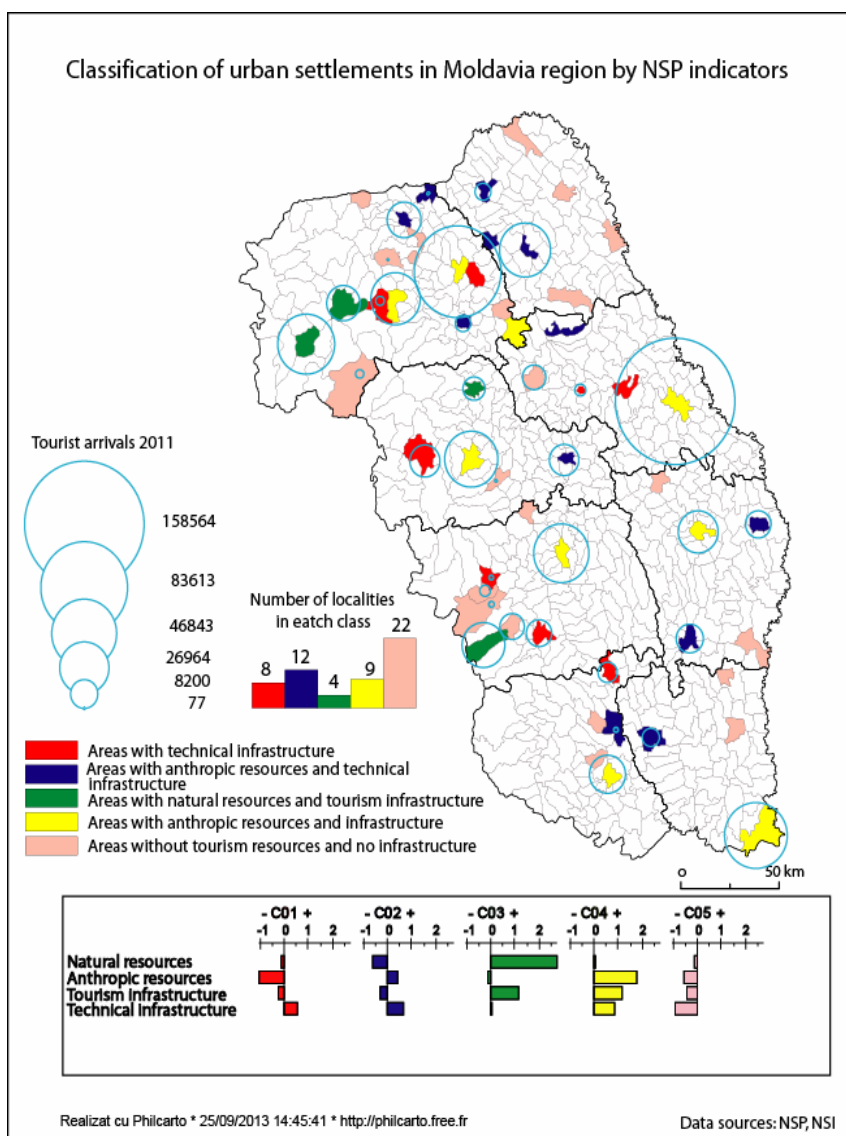
- First class includes a number of small urban areas that stand out only at the technical infrastructure level (eg Bicaz, Moinești, Onești, Buhuși, Podu Iloaie, Târgu Frumos, Salcea, Frasin). The mere presence of the technical infrastructure can not create the necessary premises for the affirmation of tourism in these localities. To become attractive there are required a series of

other resources and activities in which to establish complementary relationships.

- The second category is represented by small cities (Mărășești, Tecuci, etc.) that have human resources and technical infrastructure. In the absence of adequate tourism infrastructure, tourism affirmation in these areas becomes an elusive goal.

- The third group consists of a number of locations nationally recognized for their valuable natural resources and diversified tourist infrastructure. Can be mentioned cities such as Vatra Dornei, Câmpulung, Târgu Neamț and Slănic Moldova. The existence of exploitable mineral spas, of some climatic and environmental factors scientifically recognized, and of some adequate technical facilities provides the opportunity for urban areas to be classified as health resorts (Vatra Dornei, Slănic Moldova).

- Spaces with human resources and infrastructure correspond generally to county seats (Galați, Focșani, Bacău, Iași, Suceava). Compared to other forms of tourism, urban tourism is more complex and diversified, human resources being key elements, contributing to the increase of tourism attractiveness, cities representing the most favorable environment for the accumulation of cultural goods. In this context, concerns about development and preservation of cultural and historical elements are a decisive factor in increasing the competitiveness of a tourist town. They perform the role of polarizing centers, both by their own resources and through the services they offer, and there are in most cases, the gateway to the region. In brochures and tourist guides, cities from this category are identified mostly with the architectural heritage.



**Figure 2. Classification of urban settlements in Moldavia region by NSP indicators.**

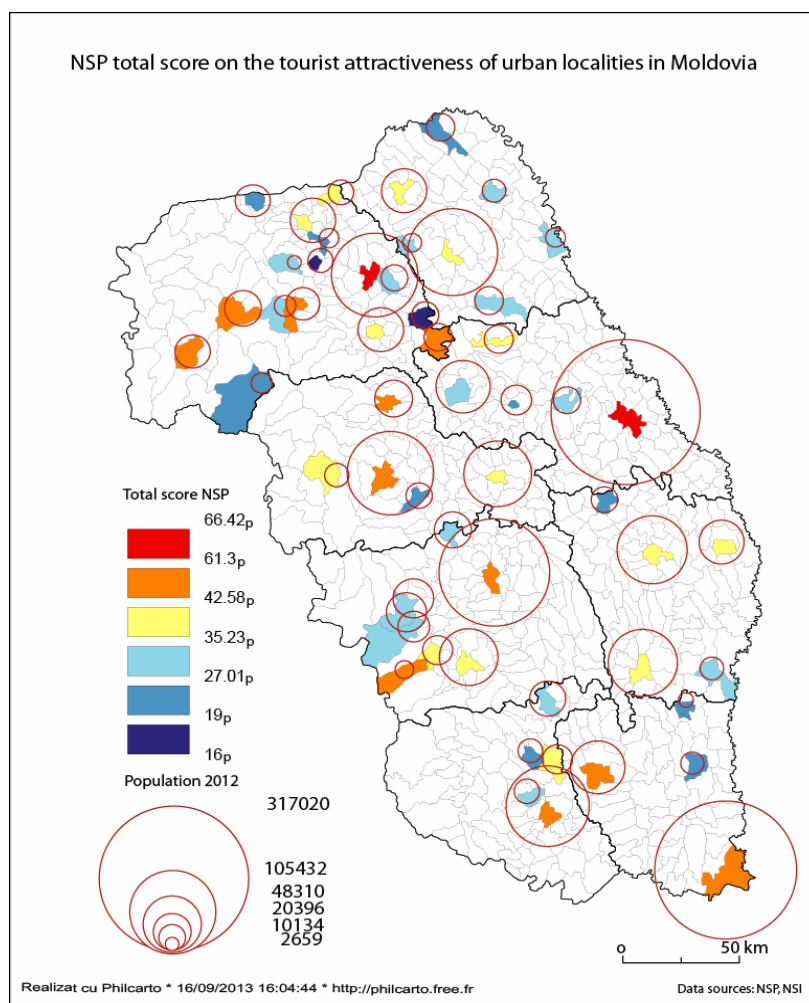
Source: *Personal approach.*

- Areas without tourism resources and infrastructure are extremely numerous (22 of the 55 existing urban areas in the region) which shows that currently these are not attractive places for tourists and can not develop an actual offer this sector.

Within this category we can distinguish: cities that meet a small number of tourists and cities that do not have any arrivals. For example, Târgu Ocna, a classic pattern mining town, had reinvented himself in tourism, with the changing socio-economic conditions. In this situation are also cities like Comănești, Dărmănești, Dolhasca. The other cities that do not record any number of tourist arrivals could develop by implanting economic activity in other sectors that provide goods and services specific to the urban environment.

For general assessment of the conditions that tourist cities in Moldova meet, we used the synthetic mapping cumulating tourism resources and also tourism and technical infrastructure (Figure 3). Urban score varies between 16 and 66.42 points, the maximum score being owned by the city of Iasi and the minimum one by the cities of Liteni and Cajvana. The highest scores belongs to the large cities (Galați, Bacău, Focșani, Piatra Neamț), but also to the small towns that have special natural conditions (Vatra Dornei, Gura Humorului, Câmpulung Moldovenesc, Slănic Moldova) which favor the development of the tourism function of rest, recreation and so on.

Based on the scores obtained it can be appreciated the tourism importance that cities located in the upper hierarchy have as being one of national level and with real possibilities of taking it to the international level only for the city of Iași.



**Figure 3. NSP total score on the tourist attractiveness of urban localities in Moldavia.**

*Source: Personal approach.*

#### 4. Conclusions

The attractiveness of tourist destinations is the result of cumulative effort that requires coherent policies and strategies applied long-term, that aim a permanent increase of product and service quality, but also to satisfy the desires of a wide segment of tourists.

Establishing urban centers with tourism valences from the region of Moldavia is determined by the distribution of natural and human resources, but also by the infrastructure serving this sector. The quantity and quality of these tourism resources determines the size, strength and diversity of tourist movements.

In Moldavia the urban areas are heterogeneous, have different sizes, tourist resources, infrastructure, but with a common feature for many cities: the

possibility of developing tourism. Identifying these types of tourist places allows a better knowledge and understanding of the tourist phenomenon in urban space. Cities must ensure a high level of diversity and complexity of resources and tourist facilities enabling satisfaction in terms of quality of the needs for different segments of tourists. Attractiveness exerted by urban tourism is not punctual, determined by visiting a single city. In these conditions, an opportunity for the valorisation of resources with tourist valences consists from the developing of specialized routes between these cities.

In this region it is necessary to make a study on urban tourism, because only a detailed evaluation of each city can offer a concrete vision for the local actors.

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