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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Iosif, D. (2013). Contributions to geosites perception in the Iron Gates touristic area based on some in situ analyses. *Cinq Continents*, 3(8), 169-178. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-382874>

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO GEOSITES PERCEPTION IN THE IRON GATES TOURISTIC AREA BASED ON SOME *IN SITU* ANALYSES

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Cite this document:

Iosif, D., 2013. Contributions to geosites perception in the Iron Gates touristic area based on some *in situ* analyses. *Cinq Continents* 3 (8): 169-178 [Available online] URL : http://www.cinqcontinents.uv.ro/3/3_8_Iosif.pdf

Contributions to geosites perception in the Iron Gates touristic area based on some *in situ* analyses

Daniel Iosif

Contribuții la percepția geositurilor din regiunea turistică Porțile de Fier bazate pe câteva analize *in situ*. Geositurile sunt forme ale reliefului cu valoare științifică, estetică, ecologică, economică sau culturală, în raport cu percepția lor de către oameni, care completează patrimoniul natural al unui teritoriu. În ultimul deceniu, aceste geosituri au fost strâns legate de fenomenul turistic. Acest studiu este unul empiric, ce analizează câteva dintre cele mai importante geosituri din Defileul Dunării în România. Punctul de vedere din care analiza este concepută este reprezentat de cel al turiștilor prezenți în zonă în perioada de vară a anului 2011. În consecință, s-au realizat 105 chestionare *in situ* și s-au extras, pentru acest articol, cele mai relevante întrebări și răspunsuri. Rezultatele indică perspectiva turistică existentă în prezent asupra fenomenului turistic în Defileul Dunării.

Cuvinte cheie: geosit, Dunăre, valorizare turistică, chestionare.

Contributions to geosites perception in the Iron Gates touristic area based on some *in situ* analyses. Geosites are relief forms with a scientific, aesthetical, ecological, economical, and cultural value, in respect of human perception, that completes the total heritage of a given territory. In the last decade, those geosites were strongly related with the touristic phenomenon. This paper presents an empirical study about some most important geosites of the Danube defile in Romania. The point of view from which the analyze is made concerns the opinions of the tourists presented here in the summer of 2011. Consequently, we have made practically 105 questionnaires *in situ* and we have extracted some of the special questions among them. The results indicate the tourists' opinions about the actual touristic phenomenon in the Danube defile.

Key words: geosites, Danube, touristic valorization, questionnaires.

1. INTRODUCTION

The results of this article can be taken individually or they can be correlated with another study already published, which also analyzes the touristic phenomenon in the Iron Gates area [1]. This article can be considered as a continuation of the study mentioned above. The two papers make a clear opinion on the touristic perception of the Iron Gates area, exactly as it is at this moment.

The Danube Defile on the Romanian side is a valuable natural unit of an unique character along the entire 2,875 km length of the Danube. A lithological and morphological variety in the relief, a climate with sub-Mediterranean influences, a complex biotic cover, as well as a multitude of historical, cultural and religious remains, lend the landscape an aspect of originality. Historical relics attest to thousands of years of human habitation on this territory. To the West, the boundary of the park coincides with that of Baziaș village, while to the South, the limit follows the Danube watercourse downstream to the dam at Gura Vaii (Figure 1). To the north, the boundary follows the southern flanks of the Locva Mountains, it partly includes the Almăj Mountains and almost the entire area of the Mehedinți Mountains [2].

The Iron Gates are situated in the area between the Baziaș locality and Drobeta Turnu-Severin city (Caraș-Severin and Mehedinți County) for a distance of about 140 km. The name applies to the region where the Danube River cuts through the Carpathian Mountains forming a spectacular defile. The Danube Defile contains some of the best preserved archeological sites from the southeastern Europe. Many were discovered during the surveys undertaken in 1960, before the construction of the two hydropower

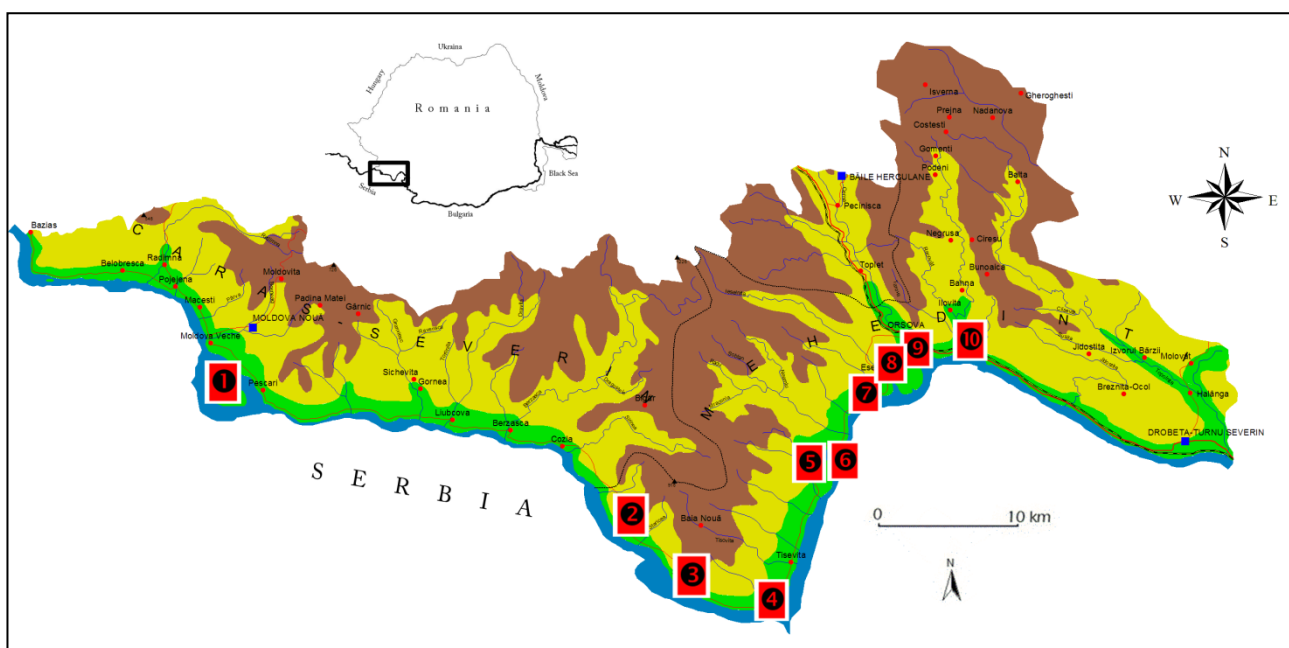


Figure 1. The map of Iron Gates region. The numbers represent the geosites: 1- Island of Moldova Veche; 2- Trescovăț Hill; 3-Șvinița natural amphitheater; 4-Trikule fortress; 5-Ponicova Cave; 6-Cazans gorges; 7- Decebal sculpture; 8-Sf. Ana Monastery; 9-Cerna bay; 10-Vodița Monastery.



Photo 1. Tourists in the Iron Gates region

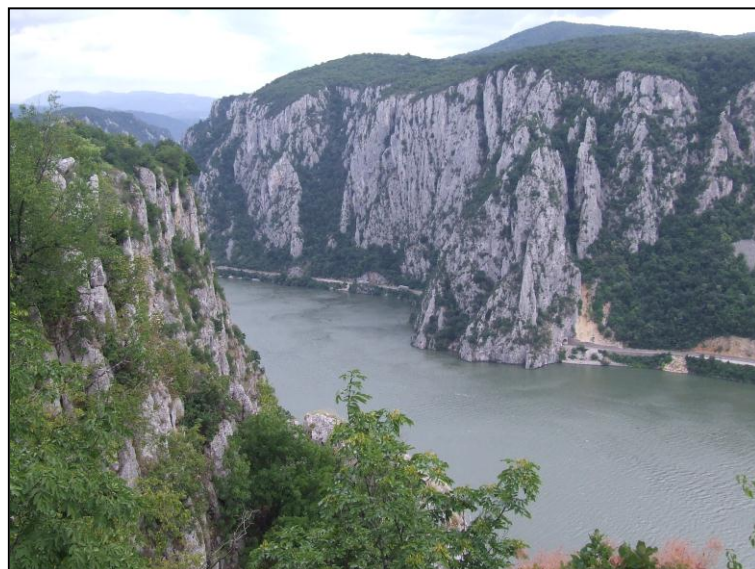


Photo 2. The main touristic objective of the Iron Gates: the Cazans region

stations started. The karstic relief and the interesting vegetation which contains southern elements and many rare species of plants are other attractions which recommend visiting these places.

Geosites (term which includes also the geomorphologic sites) are relief forms with a scientific, aesthetical, ecological, economical, and cultural value, in respect of human perception, that complete the total heritage of a given territory, including the biodiversity and human creation [3-9]. In the evolution of the human society, the relief was not only a support for the economic activities, but it also fulfilled a strategic role, of defense against invasion and war. Thus, some relief forms gained cultural and historical value, as special constructions for observation and defense occurred: citadels, castles, observation towers, etc. Some of these artifacts are functional to the present day, while other resist only as archaeological vestiges, revaluing the comprising relief, providing the latter a cultural and educative value that may be utilized through various touristic activities [10]. This also applies to numerous vestiges and artifacts in the Danube gorges, emphasizing the strong relation between the relief and the human communities living here.

2. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

In this paper, we will analyze the touristic region in a relative new geographical perspective. We will use the new concept of *geosite*, a concept which has until now a great impact of geographical researchers. Many studies concerning this point of view have applied for the territory of Switzerland [11-16] or Italy [17-20]. In Romania, this new approach is at its beginning, but there is great potential [10, 21-25].

For this empirical study, we have used 105 questionnaires made in our study region. Those questionnaires were made in one week of June 2011, near the city of Orșova (Photo 1). In this campaign we had the help of the students in the second year of the *Touristic Studies* program held by the Faculty of Geography, Bucharest University.

The questionnaire used was modified and completed after a questionnaire of Comănescu and Nedelea [22] and it is structured in sixteen questions, with the propose to gain information concerning the actual touristic phenomenon and the tourists' perception regarding the main touristic attractions.

After the questionnaires were fully completed, we made a database with all the information. For the present paper, we have extracted some of the results of the questionnaires, especially those which are directly relating with the touristic perception of the geosites and landscape.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

We start this presentation of results with the profile of the interviewed persons. In the table 1 are the age, the sex, the nationality, the studies and the place of birth of all the people who spoke with us. We retain that 96% of the respondents were Romanian and only 4% were from one another country (Germany). Almost all of them had the age between 21 and 60 years old.

Age (years old)				Sex		Nationality		Studies		Place of birth	
<20	21-40	40-60	>60	M	F	Romania	Other, which?	High school	University	Urban area	Rural area
30%	51%	46%	0%	61%	39%	96%	4% Germans	42%	58%	70%	30%

Table 1. The profile of the respondents

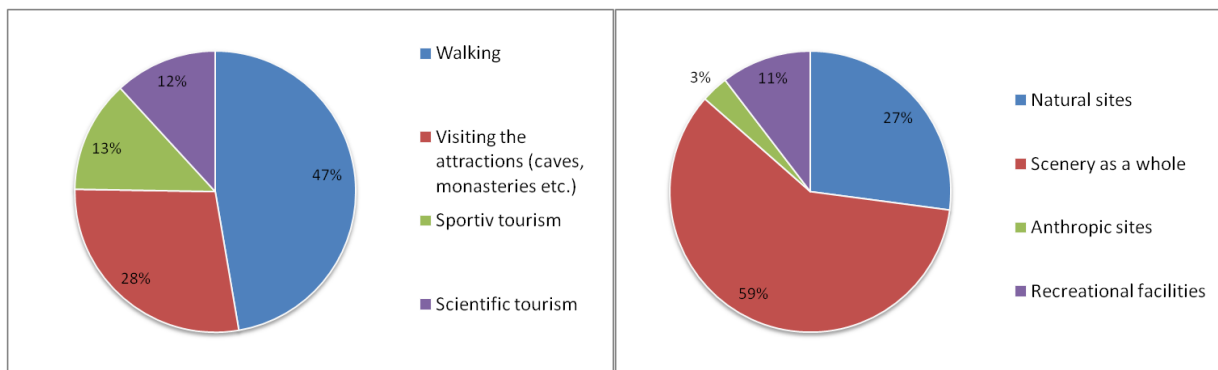


Figure 2. What the tourists prefer to do most

Figure 3. What the tourists love in this area

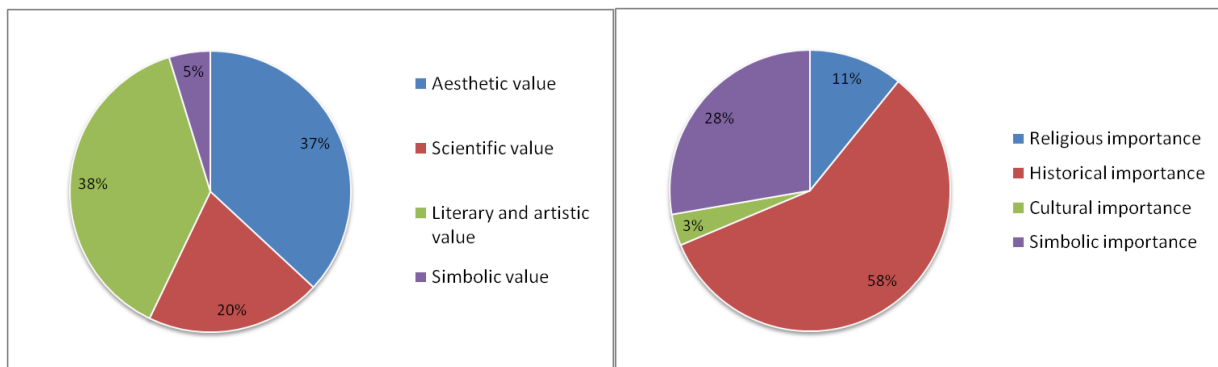


Figure 4. For a natural site, what is the most important value in a touristic valorisation

Figure 5. For an anthropic site, what is the most important value in a touristic valorisation

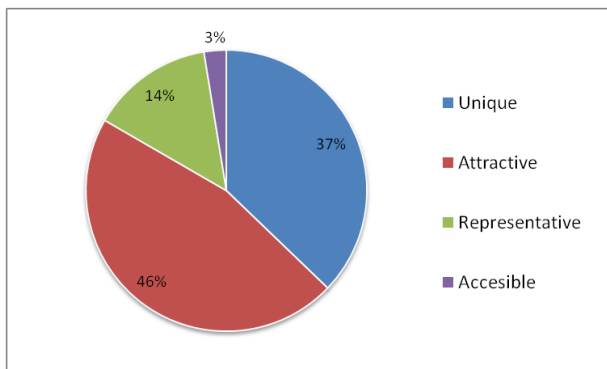


Figure 6. To be a real attraction, what is the most important characteristic of a site

Firstly, we remark that almost half of the respondents (47%) love to take walkings in this area (Figure 2). The region attracts tourists for its landscape and for its tourist circuits in fresh air. Another half of those tourists (28%) want, in their walking, to visit the region attractions like the monasteries and the caves. Only a quarter of the respondents came here to make a form of sportive tourism and scientific tourism. The proportion is equal for each of them (13% and, respectively, 12%).

The pleasure to take walkings is directly linked with the next results: 59% of the tourists love the most the general landscape in this area (Figure 3). The natural sites came the second in the tourists' opinions. Only 11% of the tourists came here to enjoy the recreational facilities.

Another two questions were related with the most important value for a natural site and, also, for an anthropic site (Figures 4 and 5). The tourists prefer the aesthetical value for a natural site, correlated with the literary and artistic value. For them, a natural site must have a special aesthetics and it must be charged with literary and artistic values. The third option was the scientific value (a fifth). On the other side, for the anthropic sites, the results were very clear. The historical value is the most important, with 58% of responses. Then, there are the symbolic and religious values.

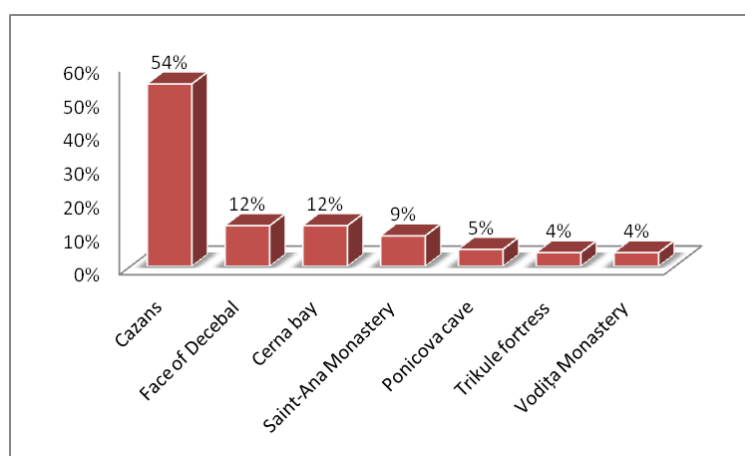


Figure 7. To be a real attraction, what is the most important characteristic of a site

Another very relevant question which helped us to understand the actual touristic phenomenon and to estimate what are the tourists' demands was that who ask the visitors about the most significant characteristic of a site in the perspective of a touristic valorization (Figure 6). 46% of the respondents said that the attractiveness of a site makes it a visited one. Also, the uniqueness of a touristic point is a very significant characteristic (37%) when we talk about tourism. The same tourists have said that the accessibility is not a problem in a touristic promotion (only 3% have mentioned accessibility as the main characteristic).

In the first figure were represented the ten most important geosites from our region concerning the touristic utilization. Answering at the question regarding the attraction which has the biggest impact for them, the tourists have responded, in their great majority (54%) that the Cazans region is the most beautiful from all this area (Figure 7).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Concisely, after the analysis of the results, we can conclude with these main ideas:

- The tourists come in this area especially to make promenades in fresh air;
- The aesthetical value of a natural site is more important than the scientific one;
- The majority of the tourists visit this region especially for its landscape potential to the detriment of the historical/cultural potential;
- For a site to have a great number of tourists, it must be attractive and unique;
- The main tourist objective in this area is the Cazans Region, which can be viewed as a result in the tourists' desire for aesthetic values and their wish to take walks (Photo 2).

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