

*The Tourist Potential of Coasts and Deltas: A Look at the Romanian Coastal Areas*, Gheorghe Romanescu, 2012, Parthenon Verlag, Kaisterslautern und Mehlingen, 284pp, €34.90, ISBN: 978-3-942994-02-6

Although the concept of 'tourist potential' may be unfamiliar to an English-speaking readership it is something that is very well-developed within the Romanian geographical tradition. It can be defined as "the assemblage of natural, economic and cultural-historic elements which present certain possibilities for tourist valorification, give a certain functionality for tourism and so constitute premises for the development of tourist activities" (Erdeli and Istrate 1996: 9). Essentially tourist potential is a set of judgements by an expert authority (who, however, may not necessarily be a specialist in tourism) about resources or places that could be developed for tourism. There are many accounts published in Romania of the tourist potential of a particular geographical area (from an individual river valley to an entire country) or analyses of how particular resources/landscapes have potential for touristic usage. As such, this book can be situated within this academic tradition. Tourist potential as a concept is of some use in compiling resource inventories or undertaking SWOT analyses at the level of the destination. Ultimately, however, the concept has major limitations, first of which is the failure to consider tourist demand (and the influence of the broader external environment on tourist demand). Tourism potential is considered to exist if an expert deems it to be so, regardless of whether any actual or latent demand for the region or resource is apparent.

This is a book by a Romanian physical geographer and, despite the title, most of it (eight of its 12 chapters) are not about tourism at all. Instead, the focus is more on the sea and coasts from the perspective of physical geography. Thus the book includes chapters on water-land relations; oceans and climate; hydro-meteorological conditions at the Romanian Black Sea; ocean currents; waves; tides; classification of seas; and the flora and fauna of the Black Sea. Of itself this is interesting material (if sometimes written at a rather elementary level) which employs a range of global case studies. Tourism does not make an appearance (apart from fleeting references) until chapter 9 ('Natural tourism potential of the coasts and deltas'). However, even here the focus is largely on the physical environment of coasts and the ways that these create opportunities and possibilities for tourism development but also impose constraints on such development. Chapter 10 focuses on the Romanian Black Sea coast. Again, the focus is on the physical geography of this area with only a brief discussion of tourism development. This section includes the questionable claim that most tourist infrastructure developed after 1990 and overlooks the extensive tourism development that took place during the communist period. A further short chapter examines 'The tourist potential of the sea setting' which is largely an overview of the types of tourism activities that can take place at coasts, using a range of international case studies. The final chapter – 'Coastal tourism planning' – is perhaps the least convincing. It begins with an overview of coastal tourism development in different parts of the world. This is followed by a discussion of tourism development at the Romanian Black Sea (which, in fact, is largely focused on one part of the Romanian littoral north of the city of Constanța) including an account of the upgrading of urban infrastructure in some Romanian resorts. However, there is little reference to broader tourism planning or policy in coastal areas.

To readers in the English-speaking world this may appear a rather strange book: wide-ranging, sometimes lacking a clear focus, and covering a lot of material that is seemingly unrelated to the title. However it is a book which has to be understood within the context and academic tradition in which it was written. It might be fair to say that this is not a book which 'travels' easily outside this context. Ultimately it will be of some use to anyone interested in the Romanian coast and it also offers a clear and accessible English-language introduction to the physical geography of the Romanian Black Sea. It is illustrated with numerous maps, diagrams and photographs and makes use of a broad range of international case studies. To scholars of tourism it has some interest in asserting the importance of the physical environment in influencing and constraining tourism development at the coast. However, the book only tells half the story since there is almost no consideration of how human activities, practices, policies and planning shape the nature and form of tourism activities at the coast. To be

frank, it seems that this book has been given the wrong title: quite simply, most of it is neither about tourism nor about the Romanian Black Sea.

Erdeli, G. and Istrate, I. (1996) *Potențial Turistic al României*, Editura Universității din București, București

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