

WATER, TOURISM AND SPORT. A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

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Abstract: The article deals with the complex connections between water, tourism and sport, generating reciprocal conceptual and development connection. For sport and tourism, water is an important asset, since ancient times being used in either physical activities or in complex balneo plannings with curative purposes. The water-based sport-tourism activities are connected and related to surface and underground water resources, supporting this way the recreational or sport aspects (e.g. navigation, sailing, swimming, rafting), while the chemical and thermic features (of the underground waters, or the salt lakes, sea and ocean waters etc.) support the curative aspects. Water-based facilities should be incorporated spatially and functionally in the complex sustainable development processes.

Key words: water resources, water-based activities, tourism, sport

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INTRODUCTION

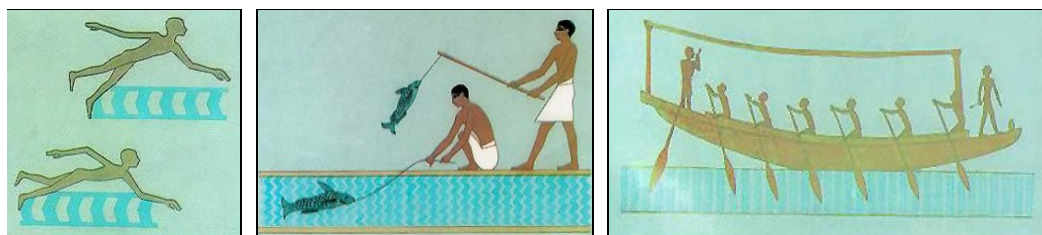
Water is the essence of life on Earth, it is a magic, unique „substance which so well hides the consequence of our actions upon it. And which is seemingly so plentiful” (Wilkens et al., 2002). The seas and oceans, together with the major rivers of the world Tigris, Euphrates, Nile, Ganges, Indus, Changjiang, Huanghe, have favored the emergence of the great ancient civilizations. Their heritage is based on the rich cultural-architectural and historical treasures, combined with the natural settings, like great landscapes with cliffs, peninsulas, bays, estuaries, islands along the seashores, or spectacular geological and geographical forms from the valleys, like gorges, canyons, waterfalls and cataracts. All these combined resources represent nowadays powerful attractions turning these areas into important tourist destinations, designed for cultural visits, water sports, recreational or curative activities. Since ancient times, in addition to the efforts for meeting the basic needs (eg. shelter, food procurement) the mankind promoted diverse physical activities correlated with water.

This fact can be stated as early as the Neolithic (7000-3000 BC), when the first forms of fishing emerged. During this period, the main physical activities were running,

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jumping, fighting but also activities that brought mankind to or into water, i.e. swimming or rowing¹. The ancient Egyptian sports included a lot of team sports, but also sports practiced on water, like swimming, fishing and rowing (Figures 1). For rowing they used to have a leader to control their movements, similar to what we have today.² The ancient Egyptians were using the boats for fishing and traveling, but also for a sport activity.³ It's well known the fact that the Egyptians practiced swimming. Men used a swimming style very similar to the nowadays „crawl” style, while women used a style similar to nowadays „bras”.

In the Museum of Louvre we can find statues explaining mankind practicing swimming (Lupan, 2001). The ancient Egyptians practiced swimming on the Nile, where they hold swimming competitions, but also in the swimming pools from the palaces. Fishing was a sport practiced by kings and princess⁴.



Figures 1. Swimming, fishing and rowing in the Ancient Egypt
(Source: <http://www.touregypt.net/historicalessays/ancsportsindex.htm>)

Besides the physical activities, the ancient times records complex balneo planning designed especially for remedial purposes, that were using the underground mineral water resources. This initial stage of tourism activity, specific to the Antique Civilizations deeply impacted the evolution of tourism to the present days, being the roots of the modern days health tourism. Hippocrates, the classic philosopher, physician of the Hellenistic Age, the *father of modern medicine* understood the natural healing power of water, using it both externally and internally in treating various diseases⁵. Various ancient civilizations, i.e. the Indian Ayurvedic (5000 BC), the Egyptians (3000 BC), the Chinese (1000 BC), the Greeks (700 BC), the Persians (600-300 BC), the Hebrews (200 BC), the Romans (100 BC – 400 AD), understood the importance of water using it in engineering projects (e.g. the Rome aqueduct water supply), at bathroom and bath pool facilities for recreation or treatment (e.g. the Roman baths daily capacity was 6000–8000 bathers), for spas, steams and mud baths based on the thermal springs (e.g. Spa in Belgium before 100 AD, Baden – Baden in Germany in 211 AD, Baths of Caracalla near Rome), for spiritual purposes in combination sometimes with healing purposes (e.g. ritual purification through immersion in the Dead Sea, or the purification baths during the Greeks Temples visits) (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Smith & Puczkó, 2009). The phenomenon evolved and expended in the upcoming centuries, so we mention the Turkish Baths (800 AD), the Finish Saunas from the Baltic (1000 AD), the travels for healing to the thermal waters (eg. to Buda, or Carlsbad), or the affluent citizens travels for recovering or healthy experiences to Bath, Wiesbaden, Vichy, Aix-en-Provence (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Smith & Puczkó, 2009).

¹ <http://cyd.ro/izvoarele-istoriei-educatiei-fizice-si-sportului/>

² <http://www.touregypt.net/historicalessays/ancsportsindex.htm>

³ <http://www.ancient-egypt-online.com/ancient-egypt-sports.html>

⁴ <http://www.touregypt.net/historicalessays/ancsports1.htm>

⁵ *** (2006), *Hippocrates*, Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia. Microsoft Corporation

At a later moment this phenomenon decreased in intensity by the fear of disease spreading, or in other cases bathing was considered immoral by religious purposes, situation changing during the European Renaissance (the 16th century), when the water therapy (balneotherapy) was appreciated (eg. the sulfurous springs in Abano, the mud baths in Padua, Lucca and Caldiero, the 200 Spas in Venice, Italy), further the 17th century, based on a better understanding of waters properties besides temperature (e.g. chemical, mineral), records the use of water in other ways (e.g. drinking, bathing cures), while the 18th century acknowledges the healing effects of the seawater (France) and finally the 19th century brings packages of treatment (modern Spas in Germany using the combined healing properties of fresh air, cold water and the diet) (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Smith & Puczkó, 2009).

Based on its physical-chemical properties and the diversity of the organization forms and spatial distribution (Teodorescu et al., 1973), water is considered in the 20th century an important economic resource, where the curative and healing characteristics, in addition to the water based experiences for recreational, leisure and sport are highly appreciated. The great diversity of the water environments, i.e. *rivers, streams, lakes, estuaries, beaches, coastlines, marshes, small-islands, wetlands* offer specific opportunities for tourism and sport activities, with a multitude of water based activities for different age categories, education levels and personal preferences. The water resources planning and management for sport and tourism activities should incorporate specific sustainable development practices and systematic approaches for meeting the basin needs considering the safety of water supply sanitation, for protecting the ecosystems, for promoting cooperation between the water users stakeholders, for managing risks (e.g. floods, pollution) and for valuing water in all its diverse values (economic, social, environmental, cultural) (Gupta, 2011).

DATA AND METHODS

This complex research paper analyses from a theoretical perspective the specific interaction between three elements, water, sport and tourism. Water is a valuable resources and it could be the ground for development and implementation of sport and tourism water-based activities and facilities. In order to elaborate the study, several methods of geographical research have been used (Cocean, 2005). The innitial stage was represented by the bibliographic documentation, when various works, projects, scientific articles, books of geographical and sport nature have been consulted, directly or indirectly connected with the topic of the article. The water resources issues are widely approached in the scientific, i.e. the underground waters (Pricăjan, 1972), the water role for tourism and regional planning of the destinations (Gunn & Var, 2002; Ilieș et al., 2014), the water as a tourist resource (Cocean, 2007; Cocean & Deszi, 2009), the water for the wellness and health tourism (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Smith & Puczkó, 2009), the water potential and its complex use (Bătinaș & Sorocovschi, 2012).

The field observation helped us better understand the geographical phenomenon, to learn more about the projects implemented by the water stakeholders (local authorities, private investors, non-profit etc.), to find out about the current status of sport and tourism water related activities and facilities. Water-based sport-tourism activities are developed in connection to the surface and the underground resources, generating specific sport, tourism, recreational, curative and cultural activities. All the data obtain was analyzed and synthesized, in order to be able to elaborate the conclusions. Considering the socio-economic importance of the water-based activities in the growth of a region, the specific facilities and activities should be incorporated in the development mechanism and strategies from regional and local level.

DISCUSSIONS AND RESULTS

Water-Based Sport & Tourism Activities

The paper analyzes the interrelation between water, tourism and sport, linking this three elements into a mutual reciprocal conceptual relation, in the same time building constructive connections between water-tourism-sport. The article considers the water as a valuable and powerful resource, recognizing its importance for tourism and sport (Vasvári et al., 2015). The article does not deal with issues like water sanitation or safety, resources availability or quantity.

Further, the paper understands the water as a resource that increases the attractiveness of a destination, stressing the importance of the many tourist and socio-economic activities based on water resources which uses the hydro-tourist potential, like the landscape and its energy, curative, recreative potential (Băținaș & Sorocovschi, 2012). Water is not consumed in the sport-tourism activities, but these activities can have a great impact on the quality of the water resources, so the attractions can be affected when the water resource quality is affected (Gunn & Var, 2002), therefore for sport and tourism to maintain the water quality is a real need.

For example, the Blue Flag is the voluntary international eco-label system, awarded to authorities (municipalities or marinas) that consider the environment is vital for the local tourism development, being directly connected to water management, so this prestigious eco-label for tourism certifies the quality of environment in the very complex sustainable development mechanism (e.g. the Blue Flag is applied in Europe, Morocco, South Africa, Canada, New Zealand and the Caribbean)⁶. An example of a Blue Flag certified beach, where surf practicing is possible, is the beach located in north-western Portugal, in Mathosinhos (Figures 2), near the city of Porto. This beach offers surfing opportunities and for beginners there are several surfing schools, which provide all the necessary equipment and certified instructors.



Figures 2. Surfing in Mathosinhos (Portugal), a Blue Flag Beach

The aquatic environment is a sensitive issue, i.e. the streams, rivers, lakes, estuaries, shorelines, marshes, or islands are systems with a high natural-ecological, cultural or scientifically value, offering therefore specific opportunities for education and nature understanding, recreation and relaxation, being in the same time vulnerable to tourist activities (Grecu & Iosif, 2014). These fragile natural environments are surrounded by human impacted landscapes, so within delineated territory marked by borders, legal measures have to be imposed for protecting and conserving the nature and its elements

⁶ <http://www.blueflag.global/>

important for the landscape, geology, paleontology, speleology and biodiversity (IUCN, 2012; Newsome et al., 2013), in addition to these elements also the protection of the economically important species and their habitats, of the drinking water catchments, the special zones for bathing should also be considered.

The protected areas are in close connection with the water and the aquatic environment, these fragile environments are valuable assets for the local communities, their values and resources should be used to promote integrated sustainable development mechanism through emergence of new types and forms of tourism, where education, conservation and protection should be achieved, as these areas can be viewed as destinations. Beyond relaxation and recreation, the educative focus should be promoted, as the tourist understand the protected areas, without damaging them, these combined activities supporting new forms and types of tourism within the region. The visits should be integrated into appropriate approaches to the protected areas planning and management, enhancing local economic opportunities, protecting the natural and cultural heritage, enhancing the overall quality of life (Eagles et al., 2002), raising the environmental awareness of the locals considering the natural assets (Ilieș et al., 2015).

Water-based sport-tourism are activities undertaken in connection and relating to water resources, to the surface resources (running waters, lakes, seas and oceans, waterfalls, glaciers) and to the underground resources (thermal and mineral springs, endokarst rivers, karst springs, geysers) (Gayle, 2007). Part of these activities benefit from the energy potential, based on the mechanic energy (of the water courses, the river sinuosity, the waves, the tides, the currents), supporting the recreational aspects (the river sectors for extreme sports, navigation, sailing, swimming, rafting, or recreative activities), on the chemical and thermic energy (heating exchanges) supporting the curative aspects (based on the physico-chemical characters of the underground waters and on the salt lakes, sea and ocean waters, e.g. heliotherapy) (Băținaș & Sorocovschi, 2012). In addition to the above elements, the specific landscapes and geolandscapes, i.e. lake, deltaic, marine, glacial, generates even more attractiveness and enhancing the mentioned sport and tourism activities (Ilieș & Josan, 2009).

Water, Sport and Recreation

The main “*tool*” for moving on water is the boat with all it’s diverse types that we can find. Boats can be motorized or human powered. Considering mankind’s competitive nature, but also it discoverer gender, boating led to the development of different activities, some of which we may call or benefit in full of the term “*sport*”. Depending on the type of water, the type or shape of the boat or the “*rules*” implied in boating, we can today define specific sports or activities, i.e. white water rafting and kayaking. Both are consolidated sports today, both use the manpower, the rivers in the process and the boats. But, the similarities end here. In white water rafting, we use an inflated boat from one up to 12-15 people, on a very rough, fast and technical course, while kayaking is a discipline less technical but more physical demanding.

Another “*tool*” very fashionable today is the “*board*”. Again, like with the above example of the boat, the board has different shapes, and is used in different styles on different “*terrain*”, to define different disciplines. Water skiing, surfing or wakeboarding or kiteboarding are the most common disciplines today. The main “*sans tools*” water activity is the swimming with all it’s different shapes and styles, weather it’s used just as a relaxation or as an intense physical activity. A discipline that combines all of the above could be wakeboarding in some situations. Of course one can’t swim while in the boat and riding a board, all at the same time. But wakeboarding does imply after all, boating, swimming and riding a board. Without one of these three, wakeboarding would be impossible. Wakeboarding implies the use of a board to slide on the surface of the water,

very similar to the snowboarding, but it implies some form of towing. The tow could be either from a motorized boat, either from a closed cable course. Wakeboarding is addressed at all genders starting from ages of 14, without a limit of age.



Figures 3. Sport and tourism facilities in Omszk Wakeboarding Centrum, Budapest (Hungary)

As we mentioned previously, it is very similar to snowboarding, surfing or skateboarding in the fact that the rider has a similar stance on the board, with a sideways trajectory. The shape of the board is a lot smaller, with convex radii on the heel and toe edges and with straight edges on both ends. In general, the board has directional fins on the lower side and is bidirectional, allowing the rider to ride both ways, “*regular*” with the left foot forward or “*goofy*” with the right foot forward. Considering that these board sports are all closely related, the trick nomenclature is mostly the same (e.g. backside 360 would describe the same move and it would be called the same in all the other mentioned board sports). Even though wakeboarding becomes more and more popular among teenagers, it is still not an Olympic discipline.

In fact in 2016 it was presented as a trial sport, and it is still in discussion whether the 2020 Olympics will contain wakeboarding⁷. In the relationship with tourism, wakeboarding is dependable on the location of the practitioner and the location of wakeboarding facilities, nearby or far away. Usually, wakeboarding requires big open spots with calm water, either lakes or wide and smooth rivers. In some cases, the use of the boat for towing can be replaced with a an artificial closed loop cable installation. An example of a wakeboarding cable park is the Omszk Wakeboarding Park (Figures 3) from Szentendre, Budapest (Hungary). In this location it is possible to practice wakeboarding from April till October, and the beginners can take learning classes with professional instructors. For beginners, lower speed at the cable installation are offered, so they can learn how to ride. This park offers the possibility to rent or even to buy the equipment for wakeboarding. The location of the park has an easy access, close to the highway. Rafting is practiced worldwide at a large scale. In Romania, river rafting is not as popular like in other countries, despite the fact that Romania’s rivers have the needed features (e.g. the water flow capacity, the river sectors technical characteristics).

A great place for practicing river rafting is on Crișul Pietros in the Apuseni Mountains (Figure 4). The route is wild and dangerous, suitable for advanced athletes, with a lot of experience. It is available in spring when the flow capacities are high, but unfortunately there are no rafting facilities available. The section of the river which is appropriate for rafting is the Boga-Pietroasa sector.

⁷ <http://www.wakehq.com/article/wakeboarding-for-the-2020-olympics>



Figure 4. Rafting routes on Crișul Pietros River (Romania) (Source: Pop, 2014, 134)

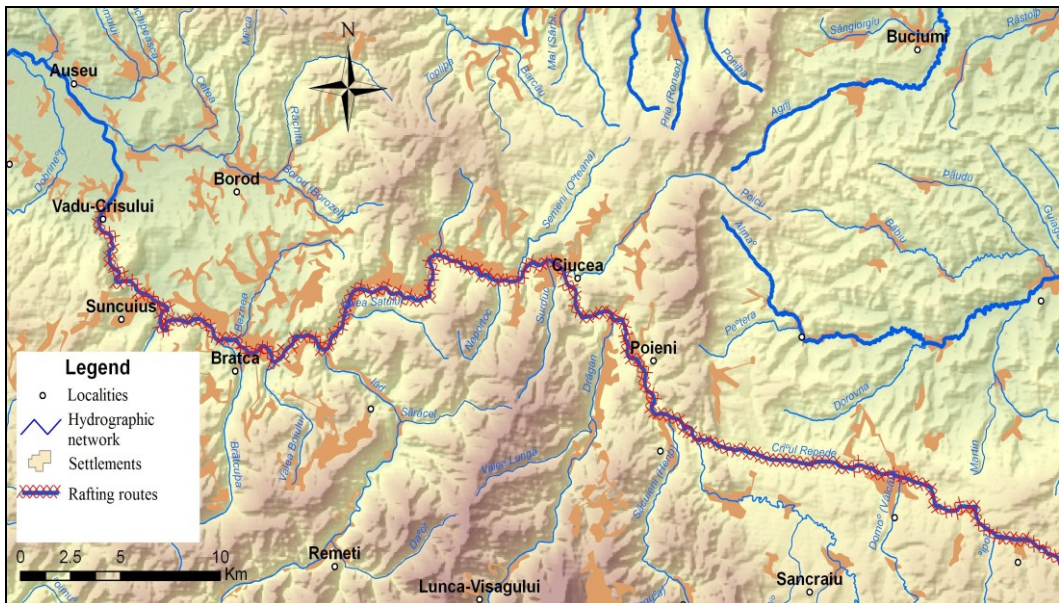
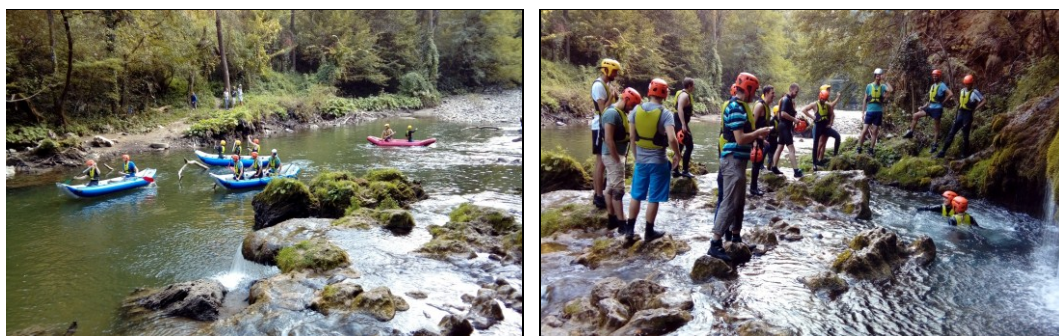


Figure 5. Rafting routes on the Crișul Repede River (Romania) (Source: Pop, 2014, 136)

Further, the Crișul Repede River offers rafting experiences'opportunities between Izvorul Crișului and Vadu Crișului (Figure 5). The sector Șuncuius-Vadu Crișului is very complex, the river and its shorelines offering sport and tourist activities of recreational character of a dispersed nature (Gayle, 2007), including viewpoints, fishing, camping, rafting, boating, tube floating and swimming (Figures 6).

Water, therapy and culture

Spa tourism deals with *“the relaxation or healing of the body, using mainly water-based treatments, like mineral or thermal pools, steam rooms and saunas”* (Smith & Puczkó, 2009, 85). Spa tourism enhances the well-being, offering relaxation for stress management, reflect for meditation, revitalize for energy and rejoice for happiness and entertainment (Smith & Puczkó, 2009, after ISPA 2007). Spas have various forms of water-based treatments, for instance the mineral waters (loaded with a quantity of minerals of more than 1 g/l) are quite diverse (Pricăjan, 1972), i.e. the carbonated, ferrous, chlorine, iodine, sulfide etc waters are located in either the underground or at the surface (e.g. lakes), in combination with other physical properties (termality and radioactivity) do have curative properties and they are used externally (water spa baths used for the external treatment or internally), or internally (the internal treatment cures), while the thermal waters do also have healing effects (Pricăjan, 1972), in the same time representing a main motivation to *“turistify”* a specific area (Cocean, 2005; Ilieș et al., 2011).



Figures 6. Rafting on the Crișul Repede River (Romania)

Worldwide, spatially or historically, there are different perspectives over spas, for example in Eastern Europe in the present days, the spas are connected with balneology, based on the historic Roman and Medieval spas heritage, also it uses the natural settings, the climate, the mineral waters and have a strong therapeutical component, involving healing or treatment of locomotion or circulatory diseases, requiring longer stays or repeated visits (Erfurt-Cooper & Cooper, 2009; Smith & Puczkó, 2009). In some cases the water treatment based on the springs with therapeutic waters, healing gases, spas facilities and seaside resorts, bioclimatic and healing climate, can be combined with recreational, leisure, or adventurous activities (e.g. leisure spa tourism based on aqua parks, beach fronts, pools, saunas, with artificial thematic environments (e.g. Mediterranean features, specific Asian architecture, tropical rainforests) (Smith & Puczkó, 2009, after European Spa Association (ESPA), 2007). The North American approach deals with the so called Day Spas, facilities offering beauty, fitness, wellness services, without accommodation and for a period no longer than a day (Smith & Puczkó, 2007, after North American Associations for Spas (ISPA), 2007). Spa classification differentiates club spas, day spas, hotel spas, holistic spas, baths, resort spas, sport spas and structured spas (Smith & Puczkó, 2009, after International Association for Spas (ISPA), 2007).

Thalasso tourism is based on the seawater cure, thalassotherapy found along seacoast, very popular in Western Europe. Thalassotherapy deals with the use of seawater to revitalize the body, skin, to tone, moisture and improve circulation (Smith & Puczkó, 2007). Thalassotherapy centres use various packages, underwater showers, mud baths,

massage, seaweed, mud and algae wraps. In some other cases the water resources act as spiritual-cultural attractions, the spiritual activities, being integrated with the cultural visits, with learning, relaxation or meditation (e.g. Yoga).

In this idea travelers to religious edifices, i.e. churches, cathedrals, temples, synagogues, mosques, for visits dedicated to religious practices are part of the religious tourism, or spiritual tourism, as they are dedicated to the spiritual enhancement (e.g. the holy places dedicated do religious ceremonies from the Delphie Sanctuary, or pilgrimages became very popular especially in the Middle Ages when churches became known as sacred places where sick pilgrims are reputed to be miraculously healed by Lourdes water for example, or the modern days bathing in sacred rivers, e.g. mass pilgrimage during Kumbh Mela, in which Hindus gather to bath in the Gange sacred river). In the same time the non-religious motivation for the travel also exist as these religious edifices are true historical, cultural, architectural and art monuments, based on their age, size, style and artistic treasures (Cocean, 2007; Cocean & Deszi, 2009), therefore the culture is a strong motivation for travel in this case.

CONCLUSIONS

Beginning with ancient times, people understood the benefits and the importance of practicing water sports. In the beginning, there were just the basic needs (e.g. food, shelter, defense), then other needs emerged, like the need of competing (the water sports), or the need of recreation (the water-based tourism). Water-based sport-tourism are activity undertaken in connection and relating to water, to the surface resources (running waters, lakes, seas and oceans, waterfalls, glaciers) and to the underground resources (thermal and mineral springs, endokarst rivers, karst springs, geysers). Part of these activities benefit from the energy potential, based on the mechanic energy (of the water courses, the river sinuosity, the waves, the tides, the currents), supporting the recreational aspects (the river sectors for extreme sports, navigation, sailing, swimming, rafting, or recreative activities), on the chemical and thermic energy (heating exchanges) supporting the curative aspects (based on the underground waters physico-chemical characters, on the salt lakes, sea and ocean waters, e.g. heliothermy) (Bătiuaș & Sorocovschi, 2012).

In addition to the above elements, the specific landscapes i.e. lake, deltaic, marine, glacial, generates even more attractiveness and enhancing the mentioned sport and tourism activities. The need of practicing the water based physical and tourist activities led to the development of new facilities for water sport and tourism disciplines. The demand for practicing the water sports activities increased and new technics, stiles and branches had to be developed. In the recent years, in Romania the demand for practicing water sport and tourism activities disciplines increased (e.g. river rafting, or wakeboarding). This increasing demand requires appropriate sport-tourism facilities to support these activities. For example, these new and diversified tourism types and forms could successfully complete the existing traditional tourist products, generating these way additional benefits for the local communities, as tourism supports the local economies, being integrated in communities with minimum socio-economic and environmental negative impact (Morar, 2013).

In some cases the lack of collaboration between the local or regional water users' stakeholders, the limited promotion of the water based tourism products, the underdeveloped specific infrastructure endangers the sustainable development mechanism and processes. All the elements needed in tourist planning should be spatially and functionally interconnected, grouped to work together in an integrative manner for the benefits of the visitors flows, benefiting of the water-based activities.

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