REGIONAL, COMPETITIVE AND QUALITATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN TOURISM DESTINATION

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Abstract: The sustainable management of destinations is essential for tourism development, especially through the efficient use of spatial and land planning and by controlling the development and investment decisions in the infrastructure and services. Ensuring that the new tourism development is scale and type appropriate to the needs of the local community and environment, the sustainable management can enhance the long-term economic performance and the competitive position of a destination. This requires a support framework involving all stakeholders at regional and local levels, and an efficient structure to facilitate the partnership and the effective leadership. A prerequisite for the existence and the continuity of the quality of tourist destinations in Romania is to remain competitive. Actions taken in this purpose should be considered as part of establishing a sustainable feature, which is one of the most important competitive advantages. Therefore, in order to ensure competitiveness, sustainability and long-term prosperity, tourist destinations should place more emphasis on the full integration of sustainability concerns within their decision-making and management practices and tools. Finally, to achieve a tangible progress, the demand from both the leisure market and the corporate travel profile should send stronger and more consistent signals. Tourists need to be able to develop and strengthen their capacity to make choices for sustainable development. Awareness can facilitate the sustainability and ethical attitudes and practices of responsible individual tourists. The growing understanding of consumers in terms of sustainability might affect tourist destinations to demonstrate this concern and act accordingly, thus increasing the attractiveness - as is the case of Romania.

Rezumat: Dezvoltarea regională competitivă şi calitativă a destinaŃiilor turistice din România.
Gestionarea durabilă a destinaŃiilor este esenŃială pentru dezvoltarea regională a turismului, în special prin planificarea utilizării eficiente a spaŃiului şi a terenului, precum şi prin controlul dezvoltării şi prin deciziile de a investi în infrastructură şi servicii. GaranŃând faptul că noua dezvoltare a turismului este, ca scară şi tip, adecvată nevoilor comunităŃii locale şi mediului natural, gestionarea durabilă poate consolida pe termen lung performanŃele economice şi poziŃia concurenŃială a unei destinaŃii. Aceasta necesită un cadru de sprijin care să împlice toate părŃile interesate de la nivel regional şi local, precum şi o structură eficientă care să faciliteze parteneriatul şi conducerea eficace.O cerinŃă de bază pentru existenŃa şi perenitatea calitativă a destinaŃiilor turistice din Romania este de a rămâne competitive. AcŃiunile întreprinse în acest scop ar trebui considerate ca parte a procesului de creare a unui caracter durabil, ceea ce reprezintă unul dintre cele mai importante avantaje concurenŃiale. Prin urmare, pentru a-şi asigura competitivitatea, viabilitatea şi prosperitatea pe termen lung, destinaŃiile turistice ar trebui să pună mai mult accent pe integrarea deplină a preocupărilor privind durabilitatea în cadrul procesului decizional şi în cadrul practicilor şi instrumentelor de gestiune ale acestora. În cele din urmă, pentru a înregistra un progres vizibil, cererea, atât din partea pieŃei activităŃilor recreative, cât şi a întreprinderilor de profil turistic, ar trebui să trimită semnele mai puternice şi mai coerente. Este necesară sensibilizarea turiştilor pentru a-şi putea dezvolta şi consolida capacitatea de a...
face alegeri în favoarea dezvoltării durabile. Sensibilizarea cu privire la durabilitate și etică poate facilita apariția unor atitudini și practice individuale responsabile din partea turiștilor. Înțelegerea crescândă a consumatorilor în ceea ce privește durabilitatea ar putea influența destinațiile turistice să manifeste interes în această direcție și să acționeze în consecință, măreindu-și astfel atractivitatea-ca în cazul României.

Key words: destination, tourism, sustainable management, competitive, attractiveness

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of this century and millennium, the tourism and the travel industry worldwide was the most dynamic sector of activity and at the same time, the most important generator of jobs. From an economic point of view, tourism is also the primary source of the recovery of national economies of those countries that have significant tourist resources and exploit them properly.

In this context, the main arguments leading to the need to develop tourism, result from the following:

a) the tourist resources are practically inexhaustible, tourism is one of the economic sectors with real prospects of long-term development;

b) the operation and complex exploitation of tourism resources accompanied by an effective promotion on foreign markets can be a source of increasing foreign exchange earnings of the state, thus helping to balance the external balances;

c) Tourism is a safe labour market and made available for the redistribution of other unemployed labour forces from other economic sectors;

d) Tourism is a means to promote the image of a country, thus participating in the promotion of exports of goods and services on the world market, both implicitly and explicitly;

e) Tourism, through its multiplier effect, acts as a dynamic element of the global economic system, generating a specific request for goods and services that drives the increase in their production, thereby helping to diversify the structure of the national economic sectors.

The harmonious development of tourism throughout the territory contributes to the economic and social growth and alleviates the imbalances arising from various areas, constituting a significant source of revenue enhancement for the population.

Tourism is a means to develop rural areas by extending the specific supply area and creating jobs in rural areas other than traditional ones, improving living conditions and increasing the income of local people;

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By respecting and promoting the principles of the sustainable development, tourism is a means of protection, conservation and recovery of the cultural, historical, architectural potential and folklore of the country;

By adopting a strategy of sustainable tourism development and by enforcing environmental protection measures, the fundamental values of human existence (water, air, flora, fauna, ecosystems, etc.), tourism is an ecological vocation at the same time. On a social level, the tourism acts as an active means of educating and raising the education and civilization of the people, having a special role in the use of public leisure. The main results obtained from studies are that the **perception of Romania as a tourist destination** is unclear; it does not have a reputation as a bona fide destination for occasional tourists. This is caused in part by:

- Weaknesses in destination marketing
- The absence of government support to tourism
- Unprofessional practices in the tourism business
- Low standards of services for visitors
- Inadequate tourism infrastructure, facilities and ways of spending time.

The most positive perceptions towards Romania are among Israelis, over one quarter of them have remarked the beauty of the landscape "as the best impression and only 2% have observed "poverty".

There is a considerable difference between the attitudes of those who directly lived the Romanian tourism experience after having visited the country and those who did not\(^2\).

The first have a much stronger understanding of Romania than the second group. To give you an example, Hungarians who visited Romania noted that the tourist facilities and beautiful landscapes of the countryside and the warmth and the hospitality of people exceeded their expectations, by contrast, those who have not visited Romania yet, have a negative perception regarding the road, accommodation units, public safety, hygiene and service level. Research in Austria showed that visitors were "pleasantly surprised" on their journey to Romania. Even among the French, the finding was that Romania receives positive feedback in terms of its image. But visitors in Romania have also noted the low level of environmental protection and the large amount of garbage, etc.

Synthesizing the models proposed in the studies, a possible model of competitiveness of the tourist destination is presented in Picture 1.

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Fig. 1. Determiners in the competitiveness of the tourist destination

Factori determinanți ai competitivității destinației turistice

The model includes six determiners: the attractions and the tourist resources that the respective destination has; the support factors and other resources; the situational conditions/determiners; qualifiers; amplifiers; the conditions of the demand; the policy; the planning and the development of the destination; the inventory/the management of the tourist destination.

The attractions and the tourist resources existent at the level of a tourist destination include: the geographic position, the natural and anthropogenic tourist resources, the organisation of some events, the relaxation and animation activities, the tourist equipments, and the commercial network dedicated to the tourists.

The success of a tourist destination is determined by the way in which this one manages to guarantee and at the same time to ensure its visitors, through its entire offer, an experience that can equal or exceed the multiple alternative destinations.

Building a cult for quality in tourism is a difficult process that needs the professional qualification of the personnel and an ethic education for the change of mentalities.

In order to achieve this, an education and motivation program of the staff is necessary divided on groups of professions and especially for the managerial levels, differentiated for those who will directly take part in the creation of a proper quality climate within the team, as well as showing attention, the desire to satisfy the needs, to answer to...
these needs as well as possible. This means among others: to apply the quality management, to completely involve the personnel of the unit regardless of the job and the qualification, to implement systems of evaluation and rewards, to elaborate rules and to educate the personnel etc.

The success of a tourist company, the effect of its competitiveness (see picture 1) are determined by the process of attraction, winning, satisfaction of the clients’ needs, and especially by gaining their loyalty, offering good quality services and products. Following this pattern, the company will record the expected profit, following the effects of cooperation for the achievement of the competitiveness of a tourist destination. (picture 2).

![Diagram]

**Fig. 2. The effects of the Competitiveness of the Destination**  
Efectele competitivității asupra destinației

The quality management is defined according to ISO 9000 as being “the assembly of activities of the general function of management which determines the policy in the field of quality, the objectives and the responsibilities, in order to implement them within the system of quality through specific means like: the planning of quality, the control of quality, ensuring the quality and the improvement of quality”.

The essential objective of quality management is the achievement in conditions of maximum efficiency of those products which: entirely satisfy the client’s requests, are in conformity with the requests of the society, with the standards and the applied specifications, take into account all the aspects regarding the protection of the consumer and of the environment, are offered to the client at the price and the deadline agreed together.

In 2009, Romania has recorded a success: it has climbed up 4 places in the top of the destinations preferred by the tourists from the EU in 2009.
Romania is currently on the 26th place in the ranking of destinations preferred by the tourists from the European Union, according to a recent report Euro-barometer, drawn up by the Gallup polling agency. Last year, Romania was the 30th destination in the preferences of the tourists from the European Union.

According to the statistics drawn up by Gallup in the 27 countries of the European Union, half of the 27000 respondents said that they would leave for holiday in their native country or in another EU country.

Prices are perceived as low in Romania. This can be both an advantage for tourism development and a problem. While low prices may provide incentives for the development sector, the destination that is known worldwide as a “cheap” destination will have difficulty in attracting market attention when trying to diversify into higher categories of attractions and facilities. Low prices would not be an important component of the marketing strategy of destinations in Romania.

The consequences of poor information and knowledge of the attractions in Romania and the supply of products are that the motivations for travelling are relatively low compared to the competing destinations. Of the respondents without experience in visiting Romania, less than half are clearly interested in visiting Romania during their next leave:

- UK 27% (an additional 27% who "may have an interest" compared to 45% for Bulgaria, 40% for Croatia, 38% for the Czech Republic, 36% for Russia, 32% for Hungary and 28% for Poland).
- French 39% (vs. 60% for Hungary, 59% for Croatia, 53% for Russia, 52% for Poland, 50% for Bulgaria and 49% for the Czech Republic).
- Italian 16% (with another 16% who responded with "maybe")
- German 3% in the next three years (plus 16% "maybe")
- Hungarian 32% for all purposes ("definitely" or "probably")
- Austrian 20% (an additional 38% who responded with "possibly")
- Israel 35%
- Danish 37% of those who have not previously been in Romania (50% who have previously visited Romania)

The analysis of the reasons of the people who have not visited the country yet provides answers related to:

- the lack of information / knowledge;
- the absence of positive destination marketing, and
- The fears related to the tourism infrastructure, facilities and services.

First of all, the tourist circuits to visit the cultural / heritage objectives in Transylvania presents the greatest interest in all markets, for example 41% of Italians who have expressed interest in visiting Romania want to make a trip of this kind. For tourists from Germany, Scandinavia and France, the Black Sea remains a strong point of attraction.

Secondly and in contrast to the first point - many Europeans interested in visiting Romania are in younger groups. 23% of the French respondents in the study who are interested in spending a holiday in Romania were aged between 25-34 (compared to 19% of the total age group interviewed). In the UK, the "possible visitors" in Romania – i.e. those towards which the marketing activities should be directed to turn their interest in demand - are more strongly oriented towards the active tourism than those who say they would like to
visit Romania. The analysis of the UK market highlights the opportunity to have as the target audience:

- Explorers (independent travellers looking for unique destinations).
- Adventure seekers, and
- Students.

Thirdly, active holidays present a low interest, for example 20% of Italians want to go hiking, 14% want to go on a canoe trip on the Danube and 9% want to practice water sports, winter sports or other sports such as riding.

To better highlight these issues, the SWOT analysis of the tourist destination Romania stresses as:

**Strengths and weaknesses of Romania as tourism destination**

1. **Strengths of Romania as a tourist destination**

**Geography and the Environment**
- The Danube Delta Biodiversity (Biosphere Reservation, located in the UNESCO World Heritage)
- The diversity of the national parks and the protected areas - 7% of the country - with forests, lakes and unpolluted rivers
- The Black Sea coast and beaches
- The Carpathian Mountains
- The Danube
- The large number of caves
- The diversity of the flora and fauna, in which numerous single species or species with the highest density in Europe, especially large carnivores
- 35% of the mineral water springs in Europe and the pits, which offer a wide range of spa treatments
- The temperate continental climate
- The good natural conditions for tourism activities – ski, mountain hiking, horse riding, cycling, water sports etc.

**Culture and Cultural Heritage**
- The diversity of the objectives heritage - monasteries, archaeological sites, fortified settlements etc., including 7 goals / areas that are in the UNESCO World Heritage
- The medieval castles
- The rural settlements in which to experience the traditional lifestyle
- The museums - various topics
- The musical and artistic shows - both classical and modern
- A wide range of traditions and folklore festivals
- Legends - Dracula etc.
- Sibiu - European Capital of Culture in 2007

**Infrastructure, Transport and Communications**
- A good network of airports
- A large railway network - the fourth largest in Europe

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Regional, competitive and qualitative development of the Romanian tourism

- Extensive road network, with many crossing points
- Airlines with an extensive network of destinations and the presence of many carriers
- High quality bus intercity transport and other means of transport offered by tour operators
- A well-formed river transportation system
- Well-developed telecommunications networks - telephone, radio, GSM, Satellite
- Supply of electricity for 95% of the country

**Human Resources**
- A country with welcoming people and traditional hospitality
- Young people with language skills, providing a potential for the human resources in tourism
- The National Centre for Tourist Education has been established to monitor the professional training in hotel industry
- Travel Courses provided by various other educational institutions
- Many qualified and experienced tour operators

**Legal framework and organization**
- The approval system of tourist activities and providers of tourist services is running, but is under pressure
- Sound legal framework for the management of protected areas (national parks, biosphere reservations) and environmental protection
- National Authority for Tourism specialists with extensive experience, with a coordinating role in the tourism development

**Marketing and promotion**
- Dynamic sector of tourism operators
- National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism (INCDT)
- Network of tourist promotion and information offices of the National Authority for Tourism Abroad
- Comprehensive program to promote tourism abroad - advertising, fairs, mass media and visits of the tour operators
- Existing travel brands - Dracula and Transylvania

**Other**
- Growing interest of foreign investors in tourism development

2. Weaknesses of Romania as a tourist destination

**Geography and the Environment**
- Industrial Pollution
- Decommissioned and polluting industrial units with a negative visual impact
- Waste collection and recycling points weakly spread or ineffective
- Pollution of the Danube, Black Sea and rivers
- Erosion and pollution of beaches
- Climate change is a threat to the mountain ski resorts
- A poor implementation of the environmental legislation due to the lack of human and material resources
Excessive density of tourist establishments in certain areas

Misuse of the forest base

Culture and Cultural Heritage

The state of degradation of many buildings and monuments

The legislation on the conservation and preservation of buildings’ architectural features is not implemented

The quality of presentation and translation into museums is generally of poor quality

The lack of state investment in the development and promotion of cultural objectives - museums, monuments, etc.

Lack of a database of festivals and cultural events to allow an effective promotion for tourists (domestic and foreign)

Lack of support for the local traditions and folklore

Infrastructure, Transport and Communications

Poor equipment of the local airports and train stations

In some cases, the airport runway extension is necessary to transform them into a regional aviation hub and to facilitate tourism development

Poor quality of trains and buses

Poor quality of roads

Lack of trans-European highways and roads completed

Lack of ring roads around the historic city

The lack of tourist signs towards the objectives and attractions - conventional international brown tourist signs

Insufficient electrification of the railway network

Limited access for disabled people in many hotels and tourist attractions

Lack of sanitation and water supply, particularly in rural areas

Poor use of alternative energy sources

Many accommodation units need upgrading

Camping facilities are often of poor quality

Outdated facilities in many resorts

Lack of parking and sanitation at many tourist objectives

Reduced and incorrectly spread network of tourist information centres

Uncoordinated national air routes and flight schedules

Poor land transport facilities towards regional airports

The lack of an international conference centre specifically for this purpose

Human Resources

Low awareness of the importance of tourism to the economy

Lack of hotel schools

Low wages and difficult working conditions that stimulate labour migration in the hotel industry

Training in the hotel sector does not correspond exactly to the needs of the employers

Lack of training courses in the area

Labour migration in the hotel industry

Insufficient education in schools related to the environment protection and tourism
Poor awareness of the opportunities and potential career development in the tourism industry

**The legal framework and organization**
- The rules for granting authorizations in tourism should be revised to meet current market requirements
- Lack of institutional structures of regional development of tourism
- Lack of integrated tourism development plans of cities / resorts
- Lack of incentives and support mechanisms for investors
- Failure to resolve legal issues concerning ownership of land and property which limits development
- Consultation at the intergovernmental level before developing new laws is weak
- The implementation of the existing legislation is often inadequate - is necessary to set priorities
- the need to establish the priority traffic on certain roads

**Marketing and promotion**
- Lack of a strong, positive image of Romania abroad as a tourist destination
- Lack of a official marketing plan of the national tourist destinations
- Insufficient market research
- Insufficient number of staff from the National Authority for Tourism offices abroad, which limits the market penetration
- Uncoordinated network of tourist information centres in Romania to provide services at different levels
- Insufficient use of the software tools and the Internet for information, marketing and reservation
- reduced collaboration between the public / private sector on marketing problems

**Other**
- Short tourist season at the seaside resorts and the winter sports resorts

As a **promotion**, Romania has not created a clear and strong international market because it has not adopted a systematic and sustained policy to attract foreign tourists. One year, the Black Sea and Dracula were promoted, the following year the Delta and the rural tourism were promoted, all creating a confusing picture in the minds of foreigners interested in Romania.

Promotion must be strong and concerted to provide evidence that distinguish us from the countries of the region, must submit a unique element of attraction to stimulate as many foreign tourists as possible to visit Romania⁴. Just as Greece is the land of sunshine holidays, Hungary is a country spa treatments, Croatia presents Mediterranean "as it once was", and Portugal is the only country in Europe with exit only to the Atlantic. Romania has to find a unique element of attraction around which other national tourist offers should gravitate.

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Romania’s safety, compared with other European countries receiving tourists, may be an opportunity that can be exploited, taking into account the fact that the terrorist attacks have been felt in countries which, until recently, have not had any danger.

Globalization can bring, in turn, in addition to the positive effects of enhanced investment and the increasing employment, negative effects. The latter will be felt especially in the cultural field by damage, for the sake of higher profits, of the customs and of the traditional lifestyle. Thus, traditional dishes will be attuned to tourists tastes, customs and folk traditions will be in danger of becoming synonymous with the Kitsch and cultural values of people will change after dominant cultural values in American culture today (e.g., although we have a specific holiday devoted to lovers "Dragobete" (February 24), celebrated by hundreds of years in Romania, we replace it with an imported celebration "Valentine's Day" because of profits for the 14th of February).

Weighing components and analyzing the four angles of SOWT analysis, we notice with lucidity and realism that we are far from having achieved what the government policy of Romania established: Tourism is a national priority during 2007-2013. ...

It is even visible from the moon that tourism remained a Cinderella that we have to bring out into the world and promote it, very well and with little money and with maximum results if possible...

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