

TOURISTIC DESTINATIONS LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT AND THE INCREASE OF THEIR COMPETITIVENESS

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English Abstract: Global trends and priorities are changing so that, nowadays, the biggest challenge for tourism is to be both competitive and long lasting, taking into consideration the fact that, on a long-term basis, competitiveness depends on durability. Moreover, climate changes represent nowadays a fundamental aspect that requires tourism industry to diminish its activities that contribute to pollution and destinations to comply with the demand and the types of tourism they provide.

A proper balance between tourists wellbeing, natural and cultural environment needs, as well as destinations and companies development and competitiveness calls for a global and integrated political approach, where all interested parties should share the same objectives: economic development, social equality and cohesion, protection of natural environment and culture.

Key words: durability, competitiveness, sustainable management, cooperation.

Tourism represents one of the economic activities with the highest potential of generating development and more jobs in the EU. According to some estimates, at presents, tourism has a contribution of 4% to the European Union GDP, having different values between 2% - in a certain number of some new member states – and 12% in Malta. Actually, tourism indirect contribution to GDP is higher, that is more than 10% of the European Union GDP, assuring at the same time more than 12% of the existent jobs.

Tourism also has a special importance regarding the jobs offer for the youth, who are two times more numerous in tourism field than in other economic departments.

Having in view the number of jobs in the tourism field, it has been obviously that tourism has brought its contribution significantly to the objective from Lisabona, that is, to create more and better jobs. Tourism importance within the community economy should be increasing, as one may expect an over 3% increase in the yearly demand.

To find the proper equilibrium between the autonomous development of destinations, as well as their environment protection, and the development of a competitive economic activity can represent a real challenge. Tourism can, more than any other economic activity, develop processes closely related to environment and society. And this is possible due to the fact that touristic destinations development depends on their natural environment, on cultural features, social interaction, security and the local population wellbeing. These characteristics make tourism the main engine of preserving and developing destinations, both directly, by supporting income, and indirectly, by offering an economic justification for providing other types of support.

Global trends and priorities are changing so that, nowadays, the biggest challenge for tourism is to be both competitive and sustainable, taking into consideration the fact that, on a long-term basis, competitiveness depends on durability. Moreover, climate changes represent nowadays a fundamental aspect that requires tourism industry to diminish its activities that contribute to pollution and destinations to comply with the demand and the types of tourism they provide.

In the near future, European tourism will focus on the quality of tourists experience – they will realize that the destinations which give much attention to environment, employees and the local communities are the

ones that are more likely to show more concern for tourists needs. The interested parties will protect competition advantages that make Europe the most attractive destination in the world – they will protect its intrinsic diversity, as well as the landscapes and the culture. By approaching sustainable development matters in a responsible way from the social point of view, tourism industry will be able to provide new products and services, of a high quality and increased value.

A proper balance between tourists wellbeing, natural and cultural environment needs, as well as destinations and companies development and competitiveness calls for a global and integrated political approach, where all interested parties should share the same objectives: economic development, social equality and cohesion, protection of natural environment and culture.

These objectives should also guide the interested parties in their policies and activities that influence the impact of the European tourism, as well as in supporting tourism as a tool for sustainable development in the holding countries.

Destinations sustainable management is essential for tourism growth, especially by planning the efficient use of land, as well as by checking the development way and by the decisions of investing in infrastructure and services. Guarantying the fact that the new tourism development is proper to the needs of the local community and the natural environment, long-term management can enforce the economic performance and the competition position of a certain destination. This requires a support team that should involve all interested parties on regional and local level and an efficient structure that should facilitate partnerships and efficient leadership.

A main requirement for enterprises is to stay competitive. The activities developed in this view should be considered as part of the effort to create a long-term character, one of the most important competition advantages. Hence, in order to assure its competitiveness, viability and prosperity on a long-term base, enterprises should focus more on integrating these concerns within the making-decision process and within their management tools and practices. An important role in this process is held by services and support associations of enterprises.

Finally, in order to progress more steadily, the demand, both on the part of spare-time activities and on that of enterprises, should send more powerful signals. First of all, it is necessary to make tourists sensible for being able to develop and enforce their ability to make choices in favor of the long-term development. Making them sensible about durability and ethics can facilitate of some responsible individual attitudes and practices to arise on the tourists' part. Consumers increasing understanding of the concept of durability can influence enterprises to show their interest in this respect and take proper actions.

In order to achieve the purpose of a competitive and sustainable tourism, all activities should respect the following principles:

- **A global and integrated approach** – In the process of tourism planning and development one should take into consideration all types of impact that can arise. Tourism must also be well balanced regarding the activities with great impact on society and environment.
- **Long-term planning** – the sustainable development refers to protecting the needs of our present and future generation. a sustainable planning calls for the ability of supporting different types of actions in the course of time.
- **Finding a proper rhythm for development** – The level, the rhythm and the form of development should reflect and obey the character, the resources and the needs of communities.
- **All interested parties' involvement** – A sustainable approach requires a serious participation to the making-decision and applying process on the part of all interested parties.
- **Using the best available knowledge** – The activities and policies should be drafted on the base of the best available knowledge. The information concerning trends and effects in tourism, as well as competences and experiences, should be disseminated all over Europe.
- **Diminishing and managing risks** (the caution principle)- If there are any doubts concerning the results, an overall assessment should be done and certain measures should be taken for preventing and avoiding harmless effects on the environment and the society.

- **Setting and obeying limits (if necessary)** – Certain sites and regions should admit their limit capacity, and if it is necessary, tourism development and the number of tourists should be limited.

The interested parties should share their knowledge, making public their positive and negative results, with a view to enforcing the relation between knowledge dissemination and the application of sustainable and competitive practices. To this extent, the interested parties should have a recurrent cooperation at their most often activated levels – either on beneficiaries level or on regional, national or international level – and discuss the problem of sustainable development within these cooperation structures. An example for this type of cooperation is the social dialogue among employers and employees and the companies they are represented by.

The European Commission is said to be available to finance in Romania (seen as a the EU member state) tourism development for the next period – 2007-2013 – by the means of structural funds (the European fund for regional development, the fund of cohesion, the social fund, the European fund for agriculture and rural development, the European fund for fishing). Between 2007-2013 Romania will be the beneficiary of 30 milliards. Structural Funds include the European Fund for Regional development, the Fund of Cohesion and the Social Fund.

- The European Fund for Regional Development will provide tourism financial support by means of two operational programs:
 - The Operational Regional Program of Competitiveness where funds are given for tourism development on national level, for building center national networks for touristic information and promotion.
 - The Regional Operational Program for Regional Development – where funds are meant for tourism development on regional and local level by means of projects of the local public authorities and other projects for increasing services quality and developing the touristic environment.
- The Social Fund will support human resources projects, including those for tourism jobs training.
- The Fund of Cohesion will finance infrastructure and environment projects, including projects for protected areas management that also includes the tourism field.
- The European Fund for Agriculture and Rural Development will support tourism projects that will contribute to activities improvement and reshaping and the labor force in rural regions.

All these operational programs are now working for drafting complement programs that will decide on the ways of access to these funds. Mention should be also made of the fact that ANT is the beneficiary of the Regional European Fund for Development that will be used for promoting and preserving the cultural patrimony, will stimulate the private initiative and will support the policies in the field, will encourage transbordering change of experience, will stimulate inter-regional, domestic and foreign cooperation that contribute to economic development and operates in accordance with the legal provisions and the international agreement concluded in Romania.

The Romanian Government together with the International Organization of Tourism has developed a Master Plan for tourism in order to establish a sustainable approach of tourism development in Romania.

This Master Plan for tourism development refers to a 20 years period, until 2026. More specifically, it includes an action program on 6 years (2007-2013), together with the financial support offered by the structural funds, to which Romania is given access as a consequence of its integration in the European Union, in January 2007.

The next project is to form a general framework of policies for the sustainable and competitive development of the tourism industry concerning natural and cultural resources and to present this project in the form of Master Plan, referring to 2007-2013.

This Master Plan has included certain regions with valuable touristic potential, some of them being unique. such a region is Valcea county, able to provide a competitive type of tourism. This fact is supported by the following arguments:

- Watering potential – Valcea is the only county in Romania where almost all types of affections can be cured, due to the wide range of mineral waters; here one can include three resorts of great touristic interest:⁵⁷ Calimanesti-Caciulata, Govora and Olanesti.
- Mountain tourism is less representative in Valcea county even though the mountain area has a significant percent of its territory.⁵⁸ Due to this situation the highest chances for tourism development exist in all mountains.
- Cultural-Historical-monastic tourism has the best chances to develop, taking into consideration the great number of touristic objectives, proper to this type of tourism, some of them included in UNESCO patrimony (Hurez monastery). Valcea county has the greatest number of churches, hermitages and monasteries in the country⁵⁹, which, unfortunately, have not been included in any program international or national promotion.
- Rural and agricultural tourism represents an alternative activity for agriculture and forestry in Valcea villages, having a large variety of forms.
- Other forms of tourism such as transit tourism that includes the main driving roads that cross the county and that include places for having a rest, fishing and hunting tourism that takes place in the mountain lakes Bradisor, Calimanesti, Ionesti, week-end tourism that has developed lately due to a decrease in incomes – Malaia, Bradisor, Voineasa, Vladesti, Olanesti, Comanca, Govora, Horezu, scientific events tourism that usually takes place in Calimanesti Caciulata and in Rm Valcea, pupils and youth tourism, in school camps with national and international character – Caciulata, Bradisor, Voineasa.
- Supporting tourism development on regional and local level and the improvement of its competitiveness requires human resources training. To this extent, Valcea county provides a special educational system at Calimanesti Highschool, Economic College Rm Valcea, and different types of tourism faculties.

All these components mean a certain potential of developing complex touristic products and opportunities for attracting foreign tourists.

Tourism management and the resort authorities have to solve four weak points that risk to hinder the competitiveness of this field, that is, infrastructure, promotion, that is seldom done at present, lack of public and private partnerships and the staff age.

Small and medium size enterprises play a fundamental role in Valcea county tourism, but they run the risk, due to their dimension, to be less prepared to integrate aspects related to sustainable development and to launch themselves on the market as a part of their activity.

To this extent, more conferences should be organized and more research studies done to increase the awareness concerning some challenges, such as the access to structural funds in the field of tourism, to the working methods that could be applied on local and regional level (for example, a study concerning the impact of great cultural and sport events on the Small and Medium Size Enterprises based on tourism) or to professional courses that aim to improve Small and Medium Size Enterprises services and the human potential in the tourism field on destinations level.

The commitment on local and regional level will be supported by different types of agreements among different types of destinations (rural destinations, mountain ones, town destinations) regarding the sustainable management. To encourage the exchange of good practises related to the sustainable management means to contribute significantly to the touristic destinations competitiveness.

Turning Valcea county into a competitive touristic destination on the base of its natural and cultural patrimony that should comply with the European Union standards and attaining a sustainable development in the touristic field in a superior rhythm is not possible without involving Small and Medium Size Enterprises in public and private partnerships. Valcea county has also to become a touristic brand, both national and international, without a tough exploitation of the natural environment that renders it a unique area.

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