

STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN ROMANIAN MOUNTAIN REGIONS

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Mountain tourism represents an important component of tourism in Romania, which unfortunately is not exploited at its real potential, and whose development does not take into account the principles of sustainability. Changes occur in the environment, especially due to global warming, are affecting the development of this type of tourism, both globally and at national level. Also very often, spatial development in the mountain areas does not take into account the carrying capacity of the environment, and it is often a chaotic development. In this context, it is necessary to develop a strategy for tourism development of mountain area, with specific objectives and strategic actions that take into account the idea of sustainability. With this paper we are trying to emphasize the need for such strategies, and we are shaping some of the strategic objectives.

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Of the multitude of needs which man has to face, the travel is very important, coming after the primary needs (physiological). As a tourism destination, Romania has sufficient resources (geographical, manmade, culture, spas, etc.) to attract tourist customers from all over. Barriers that hamper the full realization of this strategy is especially connected to the lack of professionalism of staff in tourism businesses and organizations, and the absence of marketing optics. Because of these reasons the present paper is trying to provide researchers and practitioners a minimum of information and arguments for the transformation of Romanian tourism in a profitable business for operators and a means to economic recovery national.

Within the national strategy of development of Romanian tourism is necessary to establish a hierarchy of priority areas to be considered in the period immediately following, taking into account the potential offer and categories of tourism demand that could be met through the existing supply.

Priorities and challenges in developing sustainable tourism in mountain regions - climate change

One of the most important challenges in sustainable developing of tourism is the global climate change, and this is more important when we talk about tourism development in mountain regions. The type of climate and the weather has a strong influence on the tourism industry, over the resources underlying it (biodiversity, the consistency of the snow pack needed for ski, reserves of water, etc.) and on the duration and quality of the tourist season. Despite the growing significance of tourism in the global economy and relations with climate, there are researchers who claim that the vulnerability of individual sectors of tourism and tourist destinations to climate changes, was not treated properly⁸³.

83 Scott D., Climate Change and Tourism in the Mountain Regions of North America, International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism, Tunisia, 2003, p.1.

Within the "International Tourism and Hospitality in the 21st Century", Butler and Jones (2001), stressed that "climate change can have a huge effect on the world of tomorrow and the tourism and hospitality industry in particular. The most worrying aspect is that the major problems of the century are ignored by this industry. The World Tourism Organization held in 2003 (9-11 April) at Djerba in Tunisia, the "International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism" with over 150 participants from 42 countries and six international organizations, the first of its kind. With this occasion the WTO tried to bring an alarm signal on the deep implications and impact that may have climate change on tourism and hospitality industry. There are two critical environments - coastal regions and the mountain - for tourist activities, to which climate change can have devastating effects.

Seaside tourism season is particularly affected because of beach erosion, sea level rise, the occurrence of catastrophic natural phenomena (storms, hurricanes, tornado, etc.) reduction of water reserves, etc. While some regions experience a decrease in tourism demand, others - less important today as tourist destinations - can record significant increases. In mountain regions, it is very likely that the demand for winter sports to fall very much. Season will shorten, opportunities for young tourists to learn ski will decrease, but it will increase pressure on the mountain resort at higher altitudes (above 1 600 m) etc. As a result, the summer season will be longer with record increases in demand, a phenomenon that will have negative environmental consequences of disasters⁸⁴.

Major changes in terms of tourism demand will have an impact on multiple sectors (economic and social), for example on employment, local transport, infrastructure etc. However, with the exception of the destination for winter sports, taking into account climate change, loss of some tourist destinations can be found in the demand for alternative destinations.

Climate change affects mountain regions of the world, including popular destinations for winter sports in the Alps or the United States of America, the same reduction layer of snow because warmer winters (eg. 1°C increase of temperature causes a collapse a layer of snow to 150 m), of the ski season gets shorter amounts of precipitation in the form of high rain during winter months etc. The winter sports are already threatened in several regions of Switzerland and Austria and Scotland recorded a deficit already considerable snow during winter. The effects of global warming are felt in our country, where the ski season has been extremely limited in 2006-2007.

In Romania, the effects of climate change and of global warming are felt for several years. Rains cause flooding in many mountain regions and landslides, while the snow showers are becoming fewer. Winters tend to become increasingly hot, the days with extreme negative temperature are downward and statistically classic winter days tend to be less. Although these trends cover most of the country, there is regional differentiation. Assessment studies conducted by specialists in the period 1961-2000 showed that there was a significant trend of decrease of snow cover in the western part of the country, especially in the Apuseni Mountains, in north-east of the country.

This trend of decreasing the snow layer, already observed in the west and north-east of the country and which might increase in future issues to management of water reserves, reserves that in our country are threatened by future effects of change climate.

Changes in the climate of Romania are fitting in the global context, taking account of regional conditions: temperature increase will be more pronounced during the summer, while in north-western Europe the most pronounced increase is expected during the winter. After the estimates presented in the IPCC AR4, Romania is expected to increase the annual average temperature over the period 1980-1990 similar to the whole of Europe, there is little difference between the models with regard to the first decades of the XXI century and more in terms of end of the century:

- between 0.5° C and 1.5° C for the period 2020-2029;

84 WTO, Climate change and Tourism, 1st International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism, Tunisia, 2003, p. 8.

- between 2.0° C and 5.0° C for 2090-2099, depending on the scenario (eg. between 2.0° C and 2.5° C in the case scenario which provides the lowest increase in global average temperature between 4.0° C and 5.0° C in the case scenario with the most pronounced increase in temperature).

In mountain regions, most affected by the impacts of climate change will be the resorts for winter sports. Increasing temperatures will reduce the tourist season, and opportunities to make sport and recreation will diminish. As a result it will create greater pressure on areas at higher altitudes. Simultaneous summer season will be a greater demand, with negative effects on environment and tourism capacity in excess of certain support areas, which will lead to a diversification of activities this season⁸⁵.

In Romania, the most popular resorts for winter sports are in the Prahova Valley (Sinaia, Predeal, Azuga, Bușteni) and Poiana Brasov. Reduced rainfall in the form of snow was felt in recent years in these resorts, and tourism operators have seen reductions in the number of tourists. In some resorts, winter sports are not the main or only form of tourism practiced, but as Sinaia, Predeal or Poiana Brasov and provide facilities for organizing conferences, business meetings etc., making the tourism business to hold a major share in the number of tourists, and the receipts.

A number of mountain resorts (Arieseni, Borșa, Stana de Vale, Văliug, Lupeni Cavnic Baia Sprie etc.), which have no other alternative activities for the winter season, only skiing, will feel more powerful the effects of climate change. Climate change affects tourism activity in Romania and there were taken measures to mitigate the adverse impacts they have on tourism and local communities.

Climate change involves:

- Lack of summer rainfall, more warm than before, which causes increased tourism opportunities within the country;
- Less cold winters, which are favorable for tourism during the year;
- More outdoor activities, favored by the warm weather.

Tourism is generally based on short-term plans, without taking into account the effects of climate change in the long term. In case of mountain resorts can be applied a range of adaptation strategies in order to counter the effects of climate change, such as:

- resorts endowment with machinery that generates artificial snow to help supplement and expand the areas covered with natural snow;
- creation of additional tourist attractions in mountain resorts, alternative to winter sports in winter, so that this cannot be affected by lack of snow;
- introducing tourism activities that can be practiced in mountain resorts (eg. tourism business) in order to address other segments market expansion;
- the extension of the summer season and creation of travel packages for people who can take holidays off season, especially those of the third age.

Some of the measures to be taken, in order to reduce the effects of climate change on tourism, are available in the long term, such as: construction of a technical material in high mountain areas or a tourist infrastructure to address other segments of tourists (business, health tourism etc.).

Tourism is not only affected by climate change, but also contributes to them. Thus, transport tourists to holiday destinations, the resulted waste etc., generates emissions of greenhouse gases. The influence of climate change on tourism should not be regarded isolated whereas major changes in tourism demand may have strong effects on economic and social policy in those areas (eg. the demand for labor, transport infrastructure). Also other sectors, such as agriculture, energy industry, manufacturing industry, the local network of small businesses, which represent a resource of raw materials and materials for tourism, may be affected by changing weather

85 *** Ghid privind adaptarea la efectele schimbărilor climatice, material disponibil la adresa www.mmediu.ro/departament_mediu/schimbari_climatice/GASC.doc

conditions. There is a need of an action plan that takes into account all these aspects and the interference between sectors of the economy.

Climatic conditions are changing rapidly, creating problems to the tourism operators. Therefore, the tourism sector must develop the capacity to adapt, to maintain viability and to continue to generate economic and social benefits to the local communities, but also to enrich the life experience of tourists.

Characteristics of the mountain tourism resources in Romania

The touristic potential offered by the three sectors Romanian Carpathian (Eastern Carpathians, Western and Meridional) is very valuable and diverse: spectacular relief (karsts, glacial lakes and valleys, strange rocks, grows Alpine narrow, waterfalls), fauna and endemic flora and valuable medieval fortresses, castles and palaces, churches and monasteries, tourist villages where traditions and the port have remained unchanged for hundreds of years. Tourism development in mountain areas should be considered by the responsible authorities a priority to relaunch the Romanian tourism on the internal market and the EU market. Defining the strategy for tourism development in mountain area that offer was based on a good knowledge of mountain tourism potential, the degree of recovery of its international economic situation and European experience in the field.

The strategy starts from the idea of developing mountain tourism on small areas, adapting to the local specifics and in accordance with the new concept of economic regionalization in Romania. Mountainous area no longer been seen only through sports tourism season or climbing trips, but as an area which may develop other alternative forms of tourism: ecological, rural, cultural, speotourism, entertainment, religious, etc. If mountain tourism product, to identify the best strategies we can use matrix GEC (General Electric), adapting it to the requirements of sustainable tourism. In this matrix to evaluate the attractiveness of the market the product as high, medium or low, and effective competition in the same way: high, medium or low. Tourism product review will be placed in the appropriate category, and this position will be used to develop future strategies.

The possibility to include a different number of variables is an asset for this matrix, but can lead to a high of objectivity of a performed. For this reason it has established a set of variables that apply to all products analyzed.

The main strategic objectives of sustainable development of tourism in Romanian mountain regions

Tourism development in mountain areas can be easily made by accessing the Structural Funds, through the Operational Development Programs (Competitiveness, Agriculture and Regional), being fully consistent with the Community Strategic Guidelines, since this activity contributes to improving the attractiveness of regions and creation of new jobs. Investment in tourism and culture will allow regional development in general, and in mountain areas in particular, and to use the advantages of their tourism potential and cultural heritage in identifying and strengthening their identity in order to improve benefits for local communities.

Tourism development will take into account the principles of sustainable development for the purposes of conserving and protecting natural and cultural heritage, but also to reduce the anthropogenic pressure on the environment inherent in the practice of tourism on a large scale. The overall objective of the strategy for tourism development in the mountain area is to create a competitive tourist destination, according with economic and social analysis, the SWOT analysis and the overall development strategy of the Romanian tourism. The specific objectives aimed within this strategy are those of increasing the number of foreign tourists by 10% annually and by 5% of Romanian tourists in 2007-2013.

The first aspect to be covered is the creation of committees at regional level with personalities and professional socio-political representative of the mountain area and representatives of ANT. The role of this committee is to present the tourism development plan and to follow specific adaptation to each area, to prepare an inventory of existing tourism resources, to integrate the guidelines for tourism development in national development scheme. To achieve this goal, the committee should pursue two strategic axes: the selection of territories and dynamic partnerships. Selecting territories must take into account that the first destinations that have the greatest development potential. The selection criteria can be: potential planning, dynamic private initiatives and political will. In determining the potential of the territory must be taking into account the natural resources for tourism (landscape, fauna, flora); material cultural heritage (built) and intangible resources (traditions, festivals, fairs , gastronomy), all essential services (pharmacies, banks, mail, medical, church); transport infrastructure must be well developed. It starts from the idea that the size of the territory taken into account should not be very large (up to 1 hour of transport).

The land should attract the attention of investors in tourism, who want to highlight the various elements of its potential. You should focus only on local investors, already present in the local tourist economy, but in November attracted entrepreneurs who are willing to start a business in tourism. Romania needs to take account of the fact that a major problem is the capital and therefore should be pursued as these investors to enter into cooperative relations, association to achieve those common services (fixing of the overall development and management of tourist equipment, programs promotion of the area).

Overall planning, the infrastructure and public services that accompany this development, the balance between human and natural resources are very important for the local communities, focused on a strong cooperation. By contrast, public management of tourism activities can only be partial or temporary. Cooperation will enable all communities to enjoy the benefit of infrastructure development. Modernization of roads would allow development not only of that community who manages a tourist site but also those that are along this road.

A possible tourism development strategy for the mountain areas may have some strategic objectives, like:

- *Reorientation of activities towards sustainable tourism, which contributes to the conservation of the natural environment and protects it.* There can be introduced into the tourism and successfully applied, activities such as equestrian tourism, mountain biking, rafting, canyoning, via ferrata etc. These activities are specific to the summer season, by this trying to attract more tourists in the mountain area off-season (winter).

- *Development of tourism activities according to the carrying capacity of the environment and host communities.* Having some examples of chaotic development of mountain tourism it is necessary to implement solutions to reduce the overall impact of tourism on host communities and over the environment, ensuring the satisfaction of tourists: the ability of support, limits of acceptable change, visitor impact management etc.

- *Understanding and monitoring the impact of tourism on the natural environment, economic, social and cultural environment of host communities to minimize possible negative effects.* To implement effectively limits of acceptable change and the assurance of sustainable use of natural resources, the authorities should have a set of clear and concise informations. Since the impact of tourism management is not an exact science, it is very difficult to quantify the impact of tourism on natural environment and socio-cultural. In this situation, management must be sufficiently flexible to adapt to constant changes.

- *Grants and incentives to members of local communities, in order to support conservation and protecting natural resources and to preserve the specific architecture, traditions and traditional crafts.* Mountain tourism should contribute to local economic development and ensure a degree of community welfare. When the community benefit directly from tourism activities, it will have

a greater interest in limiting the activities unsustainable and conserve natural resources on which tourism depends. In a situation in which communities manage to cover only the costs of travel, benefits will exceed the interest of exploiting resources and protecting the benefits of conserving them. Sometimes this can lead to a situation of hostility and the reluctance of local people towards tourists, the former having the belief that interest tourists to the supreme interests of the community.

- *Developing eco-tourism, rural tourism and agro tourism, or other alternative form of tourism.* The existence of protected natural areas and resources of many cultural, traditional could successfully contribute to the development of local communities, thus respecting the principles of sustainable development.

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