

# THE IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA

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*The tourism and travel industry represents, worldwide, the most dynamic sector of activity and, at the same time, the most important job generator, as well as a source of recovering the national economies. Tourism is a complex activity because it generates the circulation of massive sums of money, thus contributing to the development of various economic activities which are favourable to the environment protection and to the globalization process emphasis. Tourism itself cannot be considered as a “positive” or “negative” action, but its very diverse consequences can be evaluated in this manner. In the process of sustainable development of tourism, it is necessary that an increased attention be paid to the quality of the touristic products, which should simultaneously offer “the taste of perfection” and “the perfection of taste”.*

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## **Introduction**

According to the unanimous acceptance, the tourism economic potential is impressing and the benefits which can be generated by a sustainable development cannot miss from any elementary calculation of a marketing planning which can minimize them, considering that tourism, a very strong instrument of development, possesses a natural synergy with the sustainable development concept.

Any research related to the tourism from a certain territory has to take into consideration the phenomenon of the markets' interdependencies. This phenomenon presupposes that no touristic market can be judged independently, without establishing connections with the other markets. The touristic research is under a permanent pressure, on the one hand because of the competition, on the other because of some circumstantial factors, with an economical character, but also extra-economical (inflation phenomena, of economic, political and geostrategic circumstance).

The economical, social, political context from Romania after 1990 has not contributed to the development of the Romanian touristic sector. Moreover, according to the conclusions of the specialists, the effects of the transition to the market economy have determined a decline in tourism, together with other sectors of the economy. Thus, the international tourism demand has registered a decreasing trend because of multiple causes, such as: the low-quality level of the offered touristic services, the lack of diversity in the touristic programs, the reduced possibilities of recreation, etc.

## ***Analysis of the touristic destinations***

Presently, the Romanian tourism is in a period of analysis and profound changes, which is motivated by the preoccupation of being competitive on the unique European market.

With the intention of increasing the quality of the tourism activity, the policies as well as the strategic objectives which will be adopted have to aim at the following:

- the continuous achievement of a touristic product of superior quality, which corresponds to the modern tourism objectives;
- the improvement in the activity of the tourism personnel and in the quality of the touristic services;
- the diversification of the leisure offer;
- encouraging the Romanian and foreign investments in the tourism activity;
- elaborating more aggressive marketing policies which would aim at creating a positive image of the country outside the borders of Romania;
- promoting a competitive Romanian tourism, comparative with the countries which have a developed tourism (Spain, France, Switzerland, etc.).

Romania occupied the 76<sup>th</sup> position out of 124, in the first world classification of tourism and travels, with a mark of 3.91 from a total of 7, between Azerbaijan and El Salvador, according to a classification made by World Economic Forum (published in March 2007), which measures the tourism development potential in various countries.

The touristic potential of Romania is composed of a variety of forms of relief, springs with mineral and thermal water, lakes used for recreation, swimming and sport fishing, a valuable hunting fund amassed in coniferous and broadleaf forests, diverse landscapes from the mountain peaks of over 2000 metres to the plains, to the seaside and the Danube Delta. The grouping of elements with touristic potential, the infrastructure and the development on the Romanian territory is the result of the connections established between man and nature along time, as a consequence of the historic and natural evolution, which has lead to the separation of touristic provinces (regions, areas, centres, localities, etc.) each one reflecting a certain degree of complexity, as a touristic potential, infrastructure, as well as a way of performing the tourism activities. Consequently, the contour of touristic axes that go across various provinces, areas, centres, localities and objectives has been produced.

In this sense, there has been an individualization of the following regions: Maramures, Bucovina, Brasov, Banat, Apuseni, Buzău-Vrancea in The Carpathians and Curvature Subcarpathians, Argeş-Prahova, North Oltenia etc. within which there are areas, centres, and secondary touristic axes comprised in a certain touristic system.

Romania possesses a great variety of natural resources which form a large part of the “basic” touristic product. These include the Black Sea beaches, the Danube and the rivers, the Carpathians and other mountain chains and the Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation. There are 16 national parks and 13 natural reservations which cover 7% of the country’s surface. In Romania there is a vast biodiversity with many species of flora and fauna which are unique in Europe. Romania possesses the richest variety of large mammal species in Europe and it is a major passageway for the migration of birds. Their total surface is of 1,652,403 hectares. The tourist attractions can vary from hunting and trekking in the mountains to recreational walks and winter sports.

The Romanian structures of tourism aim at the following:

- seaside tourism;
- the Danube Delta;
- mountain resorts;
- spa resorts;
- the capital and the county capital cities.

The structures of tourism from the seaside benefit from the shortest season, open, in average per year, for less than three months. The touristic season in the Danube Delta also functions for less

than six months a year. As a tourist destination, Romania's strong points aim at the following structures: geography and environment, culture and cultural heritage, infrastructure, transport and communication.

The geography and the environment are the strong points in the natural tourism potential through: the Danube Delta biodiversity (the Biosphere reservation which belongs to the UNESCO world heritage); the diversity of the national parks and of the protected natural areas (7% of the surface of the country) with forests, lakes and unpolluted rivers; the seaside and beaches of the Black Sea; the Carpathian Mountains; the Danube River; a large number of caves; the flora and fauna diversity (large number of unique species or with the highest density in Europe, especially large carnivores); 35% of the mineral water springs in Europe and of mofettes which offer a wide array of spa treatments; temperate-continental climate; good natural conditions for tourism activities (ski, mountain trekking, equitation, cycling, water sports, etc.).

The assets in culture and cultural heritage are represented by: the diversity of the heritage objectives—convents, archaeological sites, fortified constructions, including seven objectives/areas which are included in the UNESCO world heritage; medieval citadels; rural settlements where the traditional lifestyle can be experimented; museums with various themes; impressive artistic programmes—classical as well as modern; a wide variety of festivals, traditions, folklore; legends—Dracula, etc.

From the perspective of the tourism potential in the mountains, the most imposing areas are the following: Bucegi-Postăvaru, Piatra Mare, Parâng, Cindrelul, Șureanu, Retezat – Țarcu –Muntele Mic, Semenic-Aninei, Bihor-Vlădeasa-Muntele Mare, Rodna, etc., the touristic resorts and complexes that offer great possibilities of valorisation for the winter sports, mountain trekking, cave tourism, mountain-climbing, hunting, and sport fishing, spa treatment, religious, cultural tourism, ecotourism, etc.

The spa-tourism potential is famous on the international market because of the natural treatment factors, such as: mineral waters, mud and therapeutic gases, saline bioclimate, ionised-air bioclimate, phytotherapy (herbalism), partially exploited in the national spa resorts (approx. 24) and the regional and local (or localities) spa resorts which are not certificated (approx. 36). In addition to these favouring elements, we mention the professionalism of the medics, as well as the variety of traditional Romanian spa treatments and medicines.

The touristic potential of the Black sea littoral constituted of the famous tourist resorts includes a wide array of elements, such as: the mineral waters from Mangalia, Venus, Neptun, Eforie; the sapropelic mud from Techirghiol and the peat mud from Mangalia; the chlorine-sodium filled water of Techirghiol lake; the marine bioclimate and other natural and cultural-historical tourist attractions, dissipated on approx. 70 kilometres between Capul Midia and Vama Veche.

The Danube Delta tourism potential is represented by its ecologic value, by the landscapes, fauna (ornithological and piscicultural), cruises and expeditions organised in special surroundings with cultural and economical traditions specific to the local Russian, Ukrainian and Romanian communities.

The tourism potential of the Danube River and the adjacent region impresses because of the attraction area preferred for tourism: the Danube gorge and the Iron Gates, Danube's lakes, etc.

Romania's fauna and flora potential, rich in scientifically interesting species, but also for hunting, with ecosystems unique in Europe, represents important premises for the development of the Romanian tourism.

The Romanian tourism industry is distinguishable for its speleological, hiking and climbing potential as well as for the extreme sports possibilities offered mostly by the mountainous area.

The modernization, revival and development of the Romanian tourism are influenced by the climate of Romania which favours tourism during the entire year because of the comforting thermal regime, the snowfall which allows the development of winter sports, the therapeutic value of the bioclimate being a mountain incentive.

Romania's touristic offer and programme are also favoured by the cultural-historical heritage, very representative for our county, because of the multi-millenary history of the Romanian people, crystallized due to the following:

- The existence of more than 680 values of cultural heritage of national interest, such as 197 churches and monastery ensembles, 36 monuments and architecture ensembles. 11 castles, mansions and palaces, 70 urban architectural ensembles (civil buildings), 20 historic centres and archaeological sites, etc. A large part of the historic and art monuments are values of the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage (fortified churches, churches with exterior frescos, Dacian citadels, Sighisoara citadel, etc.).
- The Romanian ethnographic and folkloric treasure of a great originality is represented by the popular architecture, specific to the Romanian villages (from Maramures, Bucovina, Oltenia, Dobrogea, Transilvania, etc.).
- The craft industry, woodwork, the art of decorating, fairs and the traditional cultural-religious manifestations also represent the offer of a touristic product with a decisive role in choosing destinations.

The revival and development directions of tourism aim also at the technical-economical potential of Romania, objectified through engineering works of art, bridges, dams, old stacks, salt mines and mines, old factories and railway station buildings, vineyards and studs, etc.

Its geo-touristic position offers Romania several advantages due to the following:

- the presence of three natural components characteristic for the landscape and the social-economical structure of the country, components of great value and entirely European: the Carpathian Mountains, the Danube River and the Black Sea;
- the touristic transit function, because Romania ensures the connexion between the countries of Central, Nordic and Eastern Europe with the ones from the southern part of the continent and from the Near and Middle East;
- the European roads network with the seven road arteries and European corridors North-South (IX) and East-West (IV), between the railroad route and the Danube River (corridor VII), that establish the connections between the countries of the continent and the Black Sea basin.

In comparison with other tourist destinations, Romania has a weaker performance especially caused by the infrastructure regarding the road transport, but also as a consequence of some precarious aspects concerning the human resources and the public perception about the importance and value of tourism.

In the analysis of the market segments and the visitors' profile it has been found that, presently, there is no data to allow the analysis of the market segmentation concerning the foreign visitors. The only source is represented by a series of ad-hoc studies, as well as the official statistic data related to the nights spent which are included in "statistic data regarding the Romanian tourism", various editions of the National Statistics Institute, only the 2002 and 2008 editions being analyzed. (Table no. 1)

Table no. 1 Tourists arrivals and nights spent by the foreign tourists, according to the location

Location	Tourists arrivals (number of tourists)			Nights spent (number of overnights)		
	2001	2007	% of the total for 2007	2001	2007	% of the total for 2007
Littoral	44469	58191	3.75	373106	346765	9.67
Spa resorts	26383	36252	2.34	149349	157594	4.39
Mountain resorts	87903	118706	7.65	212525	286323	7.98
Danube Delta	5552	20445	1.32	13543	33610	0.94
Bucharest and other	686078	1143916	73.76	1474670	2412456	67.27

county capital cities						
Other localities and tourism itineraries	64124	173447	11.18	167338	349691	9.75
TOTAL	914509	1550957	100	2390531	3586439	100

Source: National Institute of Statistics. *Romania's Tourism*, 2002 and 2008 editions

According to the analysis, a considerable increase in all the locations in the number of tourists arrivals, from 2001 to 2007, has registered; the most spectacular being registered in “Bucharest and other county capital cities”, namely 457838 tourists. In what concerns the number of overnights, it can be observed that, in general, it registered an increase in almost all the analyzed locations, exception to this situation being the littoral location. Here, the number of overnights decreased from 2001 to 2007 by 26341 units. Regarding the other locations, the most spectacular increase of the number of overnights has been registered in “Bucharest and other county capital cities”, namely 937786 units. An interesting variation in the visitation structures of the seaside resorts and of the mountain resorts, with a larger period of the stay registered at the Black Sea than in the mountain resorts, namely, almost 10 nights compared with almost 8 nights, for 2007, which suggests that foreigners who visit the seaside do it as part of their destination, while numerous visits to the mountain resorts belong to the circuit, along with other locations.

The “Bucharest and other county capital cities” and “Other localities and tourism itineraries” categories include not only the business or official visitors, but also the ones who get an accommodation on their way to other destinations and the foreign visitors who make short shopping trips, the ones who participate to events or who visit tourist attractions.

The qualitative research performed on the ANT staff (National Tourism Authority), on the Romanian hotel staff and on the travel organisers indicates the following main market segments for the holidays in Romania:

- *pretentious—elitist*: hunting, holidays with friends on Prahova Valley, Breaza – “Davos of Romania” and the golfing capital; Danube Delta biosphere reservation; wine tasting (Transilvania, Moldova, Crişana, Maramureş);
- *cultural tourism combined with ecotourism—young professionals*: Transilvania; Maramureş; Bucovina; Litoralul Mării Negre; Delta Dunării;
- *middle-class families*: Prahova Valley; Black Sea littoral; visits in the surrounding areas in order to spend time in nature, for example with the occasion of celebrating the 1<sup>st</sup> of May;
- *visits to see the parents* for Christmas and Easter;
- *the social category called “working class”*: Black Sea littoral; countryside vacation—either at relatives, or in guesthouses; visits in the surrounding areas in order to spend time in nature; visits to see the parents for Christmas and Easter;
- *older couples*: visits to see their children, to the city; social programmes (i.e.: “a week of recovery—a week at the Black Sea littoral”); visiting the monasteries (i.e.: Bucovina monastery); museums, castles;
- *young people—in groups*: the Black Sea littoral, especially Costinesti resort and Vama Veche resort; active tourism in the Carpathian Mountains; Danube Delta; camps (Eforie Nord, Năvodari, Cetăţile din Transilvania, Râncea –în Munţii Parâng, Bucovina).

There are major variations of the types of amusement trips, between rich people and poor people. The spa resorts clients is almost entirely internal, especially elders with low income, who go to these resorts with the help of treatment tickets offered by the social system.

The low-income clients have the tendency not to choose a hotel accommodation, because they cannot afford the costs. They rent apartments, guesthouses or camps.

The collection and arrangement of the data concerning the accommodations and the degree of occupation of the lodging spaces, classified on areas and accommodation type have to be improved. We consider that a new system of data collection regarding the visitors has to be



introduced consequently to Romania's accession into the European Union, considering that the traditional opportunity of counting the visitors at the border is no longer up to date. The optimal methodology to collect these data will be complex and will have to set standards of information in certain functional directions on the entire territory, and, at the same time, supporting the improvement of these systems at the level of areas and localities.

The tourist destinations have to offer a better evaluation of the general economical impact of tourism and to allow the comparison, from the perspective of performance, with other tourist destinations.

### **Conclusions**

Considering that the following decades will bring about significant changes in the world demographic structure (average age, percentage of the ethnic and religious groups), the trends of the international tourism demand of tourism products/ travel arrangements will develop in all the meridians of the world. The population of the world will double in the next 50 years, the life expectancy and, implicitly, the average age of the population will grow, and the seniors (retired) will have more time and resources to travel. Therefore, the tourism products demand will be elastic and the increase in the interest for touristic programs/ holidays with possibilities of knowing the culture and history of the nations of the world will present a greater interest. Even if the interest is in novel experiences, the majority of potential tourists will want to be able to continue the healthy lifestyle when travelling and the quality of the tourism offer will influence the choice of a touristic destination.

Subsequent to this analysis, in the future it is compulsory to aim at achieving a more uniform distribution of the available accommodation capacity, at the level of the country and the regions, with the purpose of ensuring a better tourism activity.

The need of effort-coordination at a regional, as well as national level in order to accomplish grand projects in the domain of the infrastructure, especially of the transport and communication, which has to be correlated with the development process of the territory, which presupposes the coordination of all the projects with the spatial implications and solving the possible conflicts occurred in this context of profound transformations of the society. In this sense, an assessment, classification and identification model of the most appropriate and efficient ways of valuing the tourism heritage has to be established, using for this purpose a multi-criterion analysis of delimitating the touristic regions, together with a crystallization of the priority actions for each particular case. In conjunction with the touristic areas delimitation, the development of the territory and the appropriate policies in tourism, we have to find solutions regarding the protection of the environment from the tourism activities with a direct impact on the environment.

The starting point in establishing the strategy for improving the position of the destination competition is constituted by the determining elements of competition, which are mainly given by the resources (natural, cultural, of capital, of infrastructure, human), by the quality and structure of bidders, by the behaviour conditions of the demand and by the adaptation of the offer. However, all these have to be correlated with the provisions of the Declaration of Rio and with the enactment of Agenda 21, according to which the sustainable development of tourism represents the global strategic option for this century. The management and the sustainable development of tourism are applicable to all the forms of tourism, in any type of destination, including mass tourism, as well as other varied segments of tourism.

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