

THE QUALITY OF THE TOURISM SERVICES UNDER THE SIGN OF SUSTAINABILITY

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The intensive development of tourism represents a unique challenge in history. That is why we have to be prepared that in the 21st century we should cope with the "avalanche" represented by the quality of life, especially related to the food quantity and quality needs and the greater need of people to recover rapidly and pleasantly through holidays and tourist travels. A first step in this sense, which we assume, is the superior educational effort to train real professionals with certain competences for solving the complexity of these realities that we live. The society becomes more and more aware of all these realities.

The activity of the international organisations shows that their efforts for the development of food and tourism are more and more appreciated by the population. Urgent actions based on the mature thinking and quality scientific interpretations are necessary, in order to stop, on the one hand, the food decline in certain areas of the world, and on the other part, for the proportional and harmonious development of food and tourism on more expanded areas, and to reconcile man with nature, to focus on agriculture and on the ecological and biologic food and eco-tourism, to leave future generations an environment at least as favourable as the one we inherited. All these wishes mean important changes in the economy and of everyday life, request large investments and sacrifices, a new mentality. It is not easy to fulfil these tasks, but we must think about what would happen if we did not solve these problems. In a short while we would block the normal evolution of the contemporary human society.

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The establishment of the potential markets, the marketing strategy and the radical change of the training manner for the personnel in tourism represent the main areas where Romania needs to act in order to reevaluate the tourist potential in the next 20 years.

We all believe that it is the moment that the main tourism operators in Romania⁶⁹³, the local tourism agencies, the consultancy companies in the field had the last word regarding the development and the promotion of tourism in Romania, that they accepted the change, even if the change produces enthusiasm when we are its authors and it seems threatening when we are its subjects...

⁶⁹³ Mazilu Mirela Elena, *The Actors involved in sustainable tourism of a destination*, published in Proceedings of The 2nd International Tourism Conference: "Sustainable mountain tourism-local responses for global changes", Drobeta Turnu Severin, Sept. 26-27, 2009, Universitaria Publishing House, Craiova, pg. 215-221;

The transparent access to the funding offered by the European Union will facilitate the development of tourism and of infrastructure in the tourist potential areas of Romania. Of course this depends to a great extent on Romania's capacity to "create viable projects" for tourism, and here the human resources have an important role.

The impact on tourism is not relevant on a short term. There is no guarantee of the fact that the foreign tourists will be more interested in Romania upon its entry in EU, but only a chance which must be reevaluated through an aggressive promotion on the member states market, doubled by the offer of quality services. We must take into account the improper infrastructure in many regions of the country, the poor quality of the tourist services and the existing prejudices towards our country in the West.

On long and medium term, if Romania knew how to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the quality of EU member, it could become one of the veritable tourist destinations not only exclusively for the old member states, but also for all the member states or not from the Central and Eastern Europe. It would be ideal to transform professionally and especially with the tourist potential, exceptional even, the recognition at the highest forums from the European and world tourism field, the Illusion into a sustainable reality!

This article tries to offer a pertinent analysis after 3 years since the adhesion to the European Union, of Romanian tourism following the 2 diagnosis informational axes: advantages + disadvantages offered by the adhesion and the impact on the quality of services in tourism, themselves dependent on the quality of the human resources who perform it:

Advantages:

- Europe, the first destination of the world: over 60% from the world tourism;
- the desire of the European people to discover the aesthetic borders;
- "the opening of the gates" for the spa tourism of the EU countries;
- a huge market of consumers, including tourists;
- the rapid development of the low-cost flight market and their arrival in Romania;
- the cancellation of the customs check-ups - ease of the traffic flow;
- the pressure for the Romanian authorities to hurry the development of the road, railway, naval infrastructures, funded with European public money;
- the competition, including for the tour-operators, the hotel managers and the Romanian restaurateurs will develop.

Disadvantages:

- the material basis - approx. 50% from the hotels and restaurants - is not ready for the competition with the neighbouring countries;
- infrastructure: especially the road one, behind the one of the countries which adhered;
- closing the access for retired persons and the persons with health problems, to the medical services through MMSSF in the Spa resorts;
- the high taxes on the work force - small wages, the migration of the qualified and skilled work force to other markets;
- the incapacity of the institutions which train the work force - vocational and for adults - to provide an optimal number of personnel with qualifications (more diplomas than skills) - in comparison with the demand of the internal market for the basic jobs, supervisors and top-management;
- non-concluding some commercial conduct codes between the hotels and the tourism agencies - barrier in the correct function of the internal tourist market.

The quality of the services in the hospitality industry

Who generates/closes the quality of services in a unit?

- the owners of the business;
- the management;
- the employed personnel;

- the utility providers: chosen or imposed (the monopolies);
- the business partners;
- the central and local state authorities;
- the Parliament, the Government and the governmental agencies through laws (with a positive or a negative effect on the tourism sector);
- the local councils through decisions on the development plans, the taxes and the fees, the investments in the infrastructure, utilities etc.;
- the forces of the tourist market (internal and external);
- the clients - the guests.

The quality of the human resources, the key to the success of the tourist services

The training, the recruiting and the employment of the specialised human resources

- the vocational system;
- the professional training system of the adults;
- the apprenticeship at the work place;
- the evaluation of the acquired skills using other methods than the formal ones;
- the lack of practical abilities of the ones from the university educational system;
- the lack of transferable credits systems, for the access to a carrier;
- the economic operators' lack of interest to ensure the access to a productive practical course for the students;
- the families' lack of interest to financially support the access to a carrier of the young people who turn to the industry of hospitality;
- the lack of national marketing policies for the tourism carriers (similar campaigns to those for the military carriers);
- the expenses with the professional training etc. of the human resources considered, unfortunately, expenses not investments - from the employees part: approx. 1% from the total of investments;
- the human resources are not perceived as "assets", but as employees, thus it is very difficult or impossible to apply the principle "HR Assets Management".

The competitive advantages⁶⁹⁴ of the hospitality industry in Romania

- the Relatively positive attractiveness of the basic jobs;
- the still cheap work force - a trap for the employers;
- tourism and the hospitality industry: are not gathered by the EU under one company, they function based on the subsidiary principle;
- Romania - still unknown to the European public, who travels, so this becomes a target for the coming years;
- very many natural products: vegetables, fruit, dairy products etc., which can, by their revaluation, in hotels and restaurants, ensure the quality of the Romanian tourist product
- the Romanians have a preference for the services, having as proof their success in the employment in the hospitality industry from EU countries, especially Italy, Spain, Great Britain, Germany;
- the ones who come back home and work in the same sector - over 75% - will bring added value to the quality of the services provided, based on the exigencies for quality of the citizens of the countries where they have worked for a short while;

⁶⁹⁴ Melinda Căndea, Felicia Aurelia Stăncioiu, Mirela Mazilu, Roxana Cristina Marinescu, The Competitiveness of the Tourist destination on the future Tourism Market, published in WSEAS Transactions On Business And Economics, VOL.6, Issue 7, August 2009, pg. 374-384, www.wseas.us/e-library/transactions/economics/2009/29-592.pdf

- the tourist potential, the improvement of the infrastructure, the coming of the great tour-operators and of the international chains will push forward the development and the competition; hence they will generate the acute need for quality of the performances and of the hospitality services.⁶⁹⁵

Conclusions

According to the data published by the Statistics Office of the EU, the financial crisis propagation has obviously affected tourism in the EU. According to the statistics, last year, the number of night spent in the EU hotels was of 1.578 billions, recording a decrease of 0.5% compared to the previous year. The same figures knew an increase of 3.4% in 2007 compared to the previous year and respectively an increase of 2.9% in 2006. If we make an analysis of the different periods, we can notice the obvious influence of the financial crisis on tourism. Compared to the similar period of 2007, between January and April 2008, the number of nights spent in the EU hotels recorded an increase of 1.6%. This figure dropped 0.5% between May and August, and between September and December, when the crisis worsened, this number decrease drastically with 3.2%.

- The crisis transferred to the private sector, thus tourism suffered a lot. This was felt in the degree of occupation of the accommodation units in the country, which decreased significantly with 20% (in hotels).

- The world economic crisis has a powerful effect on Romania, which does not have a developed market economy, but an economy based on the consumption and loans. What we can expect from the tourist point of view, nobody can answer. The rich persons suffer less; unfortunately, there is the wide majority of the population, affected by the economic crisis effects, which will suffer its costs: unemployment - due to the bankruptcies from the private sector, the investors leaving to other countries etc.

- All these make Romania very vulnerable from a financial point of view, because Romania's economy of 19 years has functioned according to a model of the so-called market economy, which has had as basis the privatization of all the state companies, from all the domains of activity: industrial, extractive, communications, agriculture, tourism etc. After 1989, for the development of industry and the private sector, the attraction of foreign and Romanian investors, the development of infrastructure and of agriculture and tourism had to be done through the granting of fiscal facilities and bank loans with low interests, with a grace period of 5 years. If these facilities had been granted, Romania's economy would have developed these 19 years, which passed and we would not have had to borrow from IMF.

Thus, although the predictions say that the number of tourists will drop this year, the operators must try to make a profit offering service packages at attractive prices. The predictions for this year estimate that the number of tourist who visits Romania will drop with approximately 10%. According to the organizations from the Romanian tourism, the world crisis will be guilty of keeping the foreign tourist far from Romania. Only that even before the launching of the financial problems, our country was avoided by the foreigners who preferred to go to Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia or Montenegro.

The promotion only within the tourism fairs with slogans of the type "Romania - always surprising", made with a budget of only five million Euros, equivalent with the one from 1980, did not have any results. The race for enriching of the hotel managers from the seaside who offered terrible services for Ibiza type prices is no longer a solution. Romania has more attitude and human value. We do not have to want to transform our country into another France or another improved Germany.

⁶⁹⁵ Mazilu Mirela Elena, Roxana Marinescu, *The Competitiveness of the Romanian Tourism - a ghost or sustainable reality?*, in Annals of Faculty of Economics, vol.4, Issue 1, Oradea , 2009, pg. 367-372.

Tourism will be affected by the global economic crisis the following years, because all the prices will rise, and the people will pay more attention when they will spend their money. "Tourism will be affected by the world financial and economic crisis these next few years, which first started in the United States of America. This, because everything will be more expensive and people will have to take care how they spend their money. Financial and economic reductions will take place and, certainly, there will be a reduction of tourism. Also, the climate changes and the price of the oil barrel are other factors that will affect the world tourism" (Eduardo Fayos Sola - regional representative for Europe of the World Organisation of Tourism, seminar for the World Day of Tourism, in Poiana Brasov 2008).

From the date we have so far, we can draw the conclusion that the holiday market will record stagnation.

After the worsening of the world economic crisis, the Romanian internal tourism seems to be more interesting so far for the Romanian tourists, but the holiday products for external destinations are launched on the market only at this moment, so that it is too early to express an opinion. It is certain that, at least for the first half of 2009, the tourism for events will be seriously affected, because the majority of the corporations have drastically reduced the travel budgets. These aspects were noticed as early as October, November and December 2008.

2009 represented for Bucharest first year of decline after the spectacular increases recorded in all the fields. 2008 had a decrease of 8% compared to 2007, accelerated during the last trimester and noticed along 2009. This fact was noticed first in the main cities, especially Bucharest, because the travel expenses were the first ones to be reduced from the companies' budgets, and Bucharest was 65% based on the external business tourism and, thus, here the first signs of crisis were felt.

The external business tourism decrease from two points of view, firstly as traffic within the degree of occupation and secondly as duration of stay, which reduced. After the first trimester of 2009, the hotel owners panicked and started the war of prices, which, together with the reduction of the average rate of occupation, meant the entrance into a spiral difficult to stop and control. This war of prices dominated much of 2009 the hotel market in Romania, on all the segments, fact that led to a decrease of the overall turnover of 25%.

In this case we cannot speak about profit, but of survival, respectively to keep all the properties functioning at a certain standard of services and quality. Anyway, the effects of this crisis in our country will be seen during the following years in the decrease of the quality of services to the clients and of the deterioration of the properties, because the majority of the operators have reduced the maintenance expenses, the personnel training and even the personnel, and all these will be noticed on a medium term. Until the end of the year the minimum level of the reduction is expected to be felt from all the points of view of the hospitality market, because, according to the estimations of Trend Hospitality, the trend this fall is decreasing, so that a very difficult first trimester of 2010 is predictable, and only as early as the second trimester the stabilisation is expected to start. The increases in 2010 are not estimated higher than 9% compared to 2009, on this segment.

"The market in 2010 shows signs of revival - at least internationally - but in Romania the state institutions and the economy have to settle first, and then we can hope that the hotel occupation recovers. In a captive market, considered expensive, Romania has the chance to come back through quality service at an optimal price. It depends, I repeat, on the political stability which will generate the economic revival and the healthy travel of the hotel services consumers on all the segments: business, events, leisure, seaside and mountain holidays, circuits etc. The revival, for those who survive, will be felt around September 2010", concludes Mihai Rajnita, general secretary of FIHR.

What brings 2010? The inflation and the interest rate will remain within relatively low values. The investments in hotel structures will stagnate. The major risk will come from the labour

market and will determine a lower number of tourists, because of the growth of the number of unemployed people (the unemployed rate in EU was of 9.5% in July, increased at 10.2% at the end of the year and will remain around 10% in 2010).

The European industry of hospitality will have an evolution of "W" type, in other words the graphics of the main indicators will look like the letter mentioned, with ups and downs which mark 2010 as a period of instability, in which the winners' advantages will be the flexibility and the reaction speed.

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