

THE EVOLUTION OF TOURISM IN THE NORTH – WEST DEVELOPMENT REGION (DURING 2009 – 2011)

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Abstract: *Fourth year PhD candidate at the University of Oradea, under the guidance of Professor Mrs. Alina Bădulescu in the doctoral research project entitled: "Doctoral studies and Ph.D. candidates for competitive research on a knowledge based society", a co-financed project by the European Social Fund through the Operational Program for Human Resources Development 2007 - 2013, Priority Axis 1. "Education and training in support for growth and development of a knowledge based society" I chose to present this subject in order to demonstrate the connection that exists between tourism and development regions of Romania. Having as research topic "Tourism and development in the Euro regional context" I felt it would be appropriate to devote a subchapter in presenting the evolution of tourism in developing regions of Romania. The research methodology that was used consisted in documentation from the specialised literature and statistical data collection from the site <http://www.insse.ro/cms/rw/pages/index.ro.do> in order to gather representative data on the evolution of national tourism for the 2009 – 2011, in each districts of North-West. The first part of the paper presents the foreign visitors who come to Romania, hence the largest number of foreign visitors and how it evolved from 2009 to 2011 the number of foreign tourists in Romania. The second part deals with the existing tourism potential in the North-West region and the opportunities offered by the region. The three part deals with the main touristic indicators in the six counties of North-West and the differences between them. The analysis is based on the comparison of main tourism indicators showing the tourist activity in the development regions of Romania, namely: the number of arrivals, number of nights and existing tourist capacity. The last part presents the steps that should be followed to overcome the losses caused by the crisis of 2008-2009 and to ensure a positive growth of the indicators analyzed.*

Keywords: *districts of North-West; tourism potential; touristic indicators;*

JEL classification: *L83*

1. Introduction

Romania presents a touristic potential of great diversity, which offers the tourist the possibility to choose a tourist destination in order to spend leisure time in any time of the year.

Tourism creates opportunities for regional and local economic growth, contributing all the same in creating new jobs. Thus, capitalizing tourist attractions in different parts of the country can contribute to the economic recovery of some declining urban and outlying rural areas by favouring the emergence and development of local firms,

making areas with low economic competitiveness in areas that are attractive to investors.

The indicators through which is characterized the tourist activity in Romania, in the eight regions of the country are: the number of arrivals (tourists' lodging), the number of overnights, existing tourist accommodation and the operating accommodation capacity.

Following the evolution of foreign visitors in Romania, during 2009 - 2011, it can be noted that in 2009 the global crisis also reflected upon Romania's tourism, registering a decrease of 15% compared to 2008, and in 2010 and 2011 a slight increase was recorded but without reaching the values recorded in 2008.

Table 1: Arrivals of foreign visitors in Romania on continents and origin states

Continents and origin states of foreign visitors	Arrivals of foreign visitors in Romania (thousand people)		
	2009	2010	2011
Europe	7.203	7.098	7.180
Africa	17	21	22
America	169	171	182
Asia	171	195	211
Australia and Oceania	14	13	15
Unspecified countries	1	:	1
TOTAL	7.575	7.498	7.611

Source: made by the author based on data obtained from National Institute of Statistics, [Online], Available: <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>

According to the statistical data given by INS, in 2011 the highest weight of foreign visitors was represented by those from Europe with 94.3%, Asia by 2.77% to 2.39% America.

If we extend the analysis by countries located in Europe, we observe that between 2009 - 2011 the situation is almost constant, that is the largest number of foreign visitors to Romania was registered by two neighboring countries with Romania, respectively Hungary (1.546 thousand visitors in 2011) and Bulgaria (797 thousand visitors in 2011).

If in 2010 in comparison to 2009 the arrivals in the lodgings registered a slight decrease of approximately 1%, in 2011 the situation changed, the number of arrivals increasing with almost 16% in comparison to 2010.

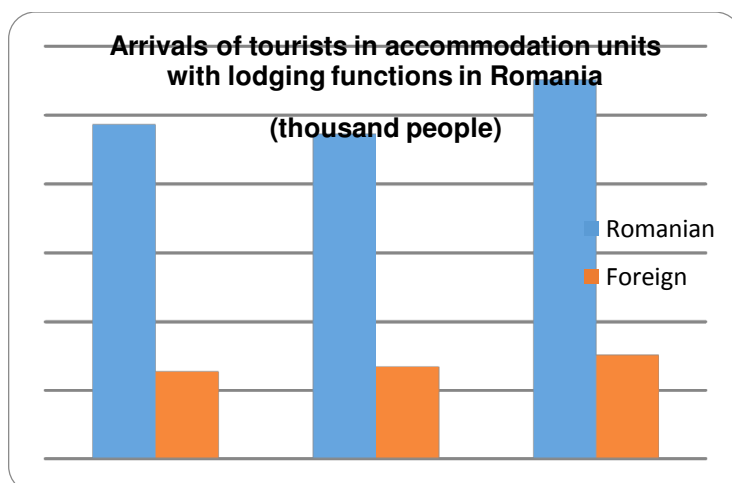


Figure 1: Arrivals of tourists in accommodation units with lodging functions in Romania

Source: made by the author based on data obtained from National Institute of Statistics, [Online], Available: <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>

In 2011, the arrivals of Romanian tourists in accommodation units with lodging functions represented 78.4% in the total number of arrivals, in comparison to foreign tourists that represented only 21.6%.

In 2011, three regions of the eight development regions in Romania (Center-20.4%, București–Ilfov-18.25% and South – East -16.14%) represent over 50% in the total of registered arrivals in accommodation units with lodging functions.

The North – West region ranks forth (among the 8 development regions) registering 11.38% in the total of arrivals in accommodation units with lodging functions.

2. The North – West Region of Romania

The North – West (Northern Transylvania) is one of the 8 development regions of Romania and includes the following counties: Bihor, Bistrita-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Satu-Mare, Sălaj. The surface of the region is of 34.159 square meters, representing 14.32% of the surface of the country, with a total population of 2.744.914 inhabitants. The region includes 421 administrative and territorial units: 6 counties, 42 cities of which 15 municipalities and 398 communes and 1.823 villages. The region has a strategic geographical position, it borders with Hungary and Ukraine as well as the Central Region, West and North - East of Romania (Regional Development Agency North West).



Figure 2: North-West development regions

Source: <http://www.runv.ro/harta.html>

2.1. Tourist Attractions in the North – West Region

The most representative types of tourism in this area are:

- Balneal and treatment tourism;*
- Mountain tourism;*
- Cultural tourism;*
- Urban and rural tourism;*

Balneal and treatment tourism in the region is based on the existence of thermal waters and disused salt mines. The North - West region has a rich potential of thermal waters, the most famous resorts in the region are: Băile Felix and 1 Mai (10 km from Oradea) and Sângerz Băi. Promising potential is present also in the following localities: Tinca, Tășnad and Marghița. Also, the existence of salt mines (unfunctional) and of salt lakes from Ocna Dej, Turda, Ocna Șugatag, Băița present a special attractiveness for the tourists of the region as well as from the nearby regions.

Mountain tourism focuses on winter sports and extreme ones. Maramureș Mountains and the Apuseni Mountains represent excellent opportunities for the development of mountain tourism. Thus, if we take into consideration the entire region we can notice the existence of a representative number of mountain resorts: Stâna de Vale and Băișoara (Apuseni Mountains), Borșa, Piatra and Fântânele (in the Northern part of the Oriental Carpathians).

Cultural tourism is distinguished by popular culture and ethnographic heritage, fortresses and monuments (Oradea, Bistrița), fortified churches and monasteries of

wood in Maramureş (monuments Unesco). Also in this region are more than 170 protected areas, two national parks and two nature parks included in tourist circuits.

Urban and rural tourism

In the region one can also find traditional urban areas (Oradea, Baia Mare, Bistriţa etc.) with a rich historical and cultural heritage that are (or can be) included in the tourist circuits.

Tourist areas in the Apuseni Mountains, Transylvania, Maramureş Mountains and Transylvania Plain represent real touristic attraction for tourists eager to spend their free time in nature.

3. The Evolution of Tourism in the North – West Region

3.1. Arrivals of tourists in accommodation units with lodging functions in the counties of the North - West region

In comparison to 2009, arrivals in accommodation units in the North – West region in 2010 registered a decrease of 4%. In 2011 we can observe a 13% increase in the number of arrivals compared to 2010. The counties that registered the highest number of arrivals in the North West were Cluj (35.9%) and Bihor (28.1%) the two counties comprising 64% of the total number of tourists in the region. On the last place is Sălaj (29,012 tourists), with a weight of only 3.62% of the total arrivals in the region.

In 2011, arrivals of Romanian tourists in accommodation units with lodging functions in the North West region represented 84% of the total arrivals, in comparison to the foreign tourist arrivals which were only 16%.

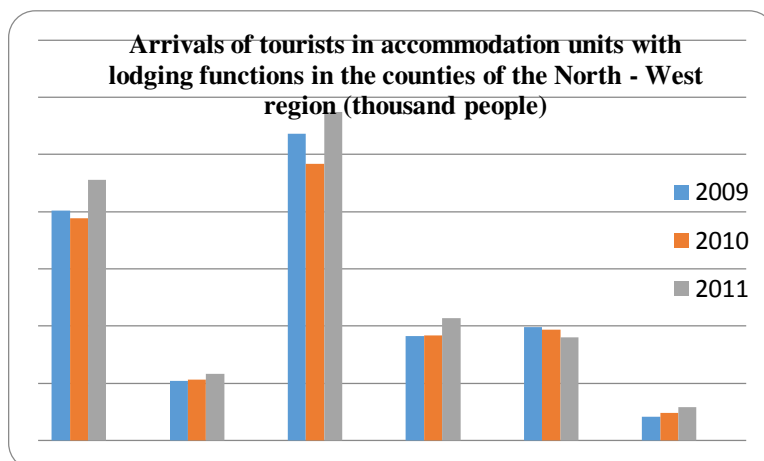


Figure 3: Arrivals of tourists in accommodation units with lodging functions in the counties of the North - West region

Source: made by the author based on data obtained from National Institute of Statistics, [Online], Available: <https://statistici.INSSE.ro/shop/>

According to INS, in 2011, the destinations chosen by foreign tourists were those of Cluj (5.75% of the total tourists) and Bihor (4.50% of the total tourists) probably due to existing tourism potential in the two counties. Romanian tourists' preferences were

identical with those of foreign tourists; the largest number of arrivals was recorded in Cluj (24% of all tourists) and Bihor (48.15% of the total tourists).

3.2. Overnight stays in accommodation units in the counties of the North-West region

Overnight stays in tourist accommodation units decreased in 2010 (1.885 thousand overnights) of 11% compared to 2009 (2,099 thousand overnights). In 2011 (2.085 thousand overnights), according to the figure below, can be observed a positive change, registering a value similar to that of 2009.

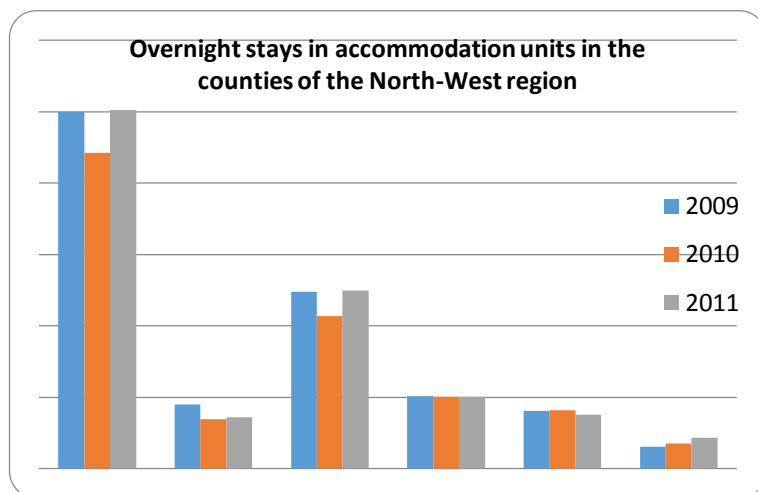


Figure 4: Overnight stays in accommodation units in the counties of the North-West region

Source: made by the author based on data obtained from National Institute of Statistics, [Online], Available: <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>

Romanian tourists' overnight stays in accommodation units in 2011, represented 86% of the total of overnight stays, while the overnights of the foreign tourists represented 14%.

During these three years, the highest number of overnight stays in the region was registered in Bihor County representing 48% of the total of overnight stays.

3.3. Tourism Infrastructure in the North – West Region

In 2011, in the North – West Region there were a total of 8,831 thousand lodging places (12.90% of the total of tourist accommodation units in Romania) being placed second among the 8 regions, the first place being occupied by the Center Region which holds 12,867 thousand lodging places (18.81% of the total tourist accommodation units in Romania).

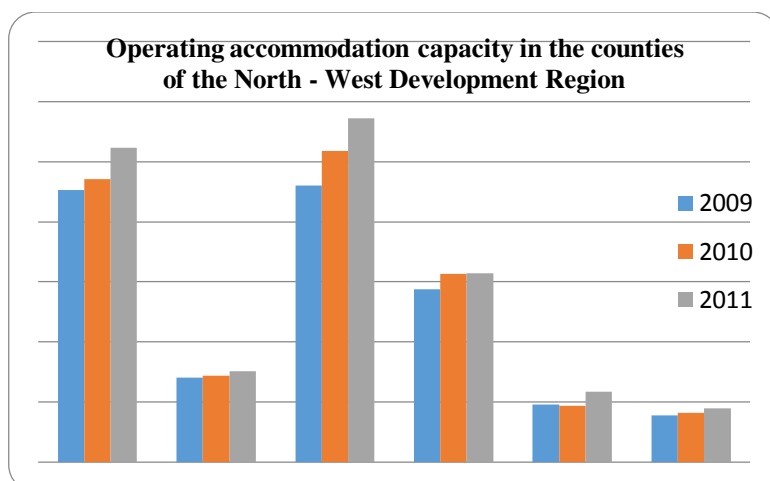


Figure 5: Operating accommodation capacity in the counties of the North - West Development Region (Units: places-days)

Source: made by the author based on data obtained from National Institute of Statistics, [Online], Available: <https://statistici.INSSE.ro/shop/>

Operating accommodation capacity showed an upward trend during the analyzed period.

Following the figure 5, between 2009 -2011, there is a relatively continuous upward trend of operating accommodation units in most counties.

In respect to the operating accommodation capacity, the most impressive growth is recorded in Cluj County, where the number of accommodation units increased in 2011 (2,858,256 number - places), 24% more than in 2009 (2,303,416 number - places). If we analyze the distribution of tourist accommodation units according to the counties in the North – West region it can be observed that most of them are in Cluj (32.36% in 2011) and Bihor (29.58% in 2011) and they withhold the largest accommodation capacity with a number of 5,471 thousand lodging places, which represents about 62% of the accommodation capacity of the North-West region and the fewest are in Satu Mare (6.63%) and Sălaj (5%).

The net use index of the lodging places in 2011 was 23.60%, in the total number of operating accommodation units, decreasing with 3.97% compared to 2009 (27.57%). This was due to the increase of the tourist accommodation capacity in 2011 to 16.57% compared to 2009, while the number of overnight stays in 2011 decreased by 0.67% in comparison to 2009.

4. Conclusions

2011 (compared to 2010) represented a positive year in the evolution of tourism in the North – West region, registering an upward evolution for all indicators in comparison to 2010. Thus, in 2011 we witness a 13% increase in the number of arrivals in tourist accommodation units and in the case of the number of overnight stays and that regarding the accommodation capacity we can notice again an upward trend.

To ensure positive growth in the coming years should keep in mind the following:

Although the region has a diverse tourist potential (geothermal resources, cultural heritage etc.) is needed to develop the intervention the intervention of accessibility in the main tourist areas in the region. Certainly the lack of an international airport in Oradea prevent foreign tourists wish to visit this town and spa resorts (Băile Felix, Băile 1 Mai) located near the town.

To attract foreign tourists in this area is needed tourism infrastructure and tourism services adapting their requirements.

To ensure quality service needed hiring of specialized personnel in the tourism sector.

Seasonality is also a problem facing North-West, as one of the main strategy should be to channel on finding ways to extend the tourist season.

Another sensitive point refers to the low level of promotion of tourist areas in the region. It would be ideal to create a regional brand with which to identify that region.

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