



ROMANIAN TOURISTS INTEREST IN TRAVELING ABROAD. CASE STUDY: AUSTRALIAN NGOs

Gabriela Cecilia STĂNCIULESCU¹, Aurora Costina LINCĂ², Adrian Cătălin VOINILA³

^{1,2,3}The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, ¹E-mail: cecilia.stanciulescu@gmail.com, ²E-mail: aurora.linca@yahoo.com,

³E-mail: adrian.voinila@gmail.com

Abstract *The present paper analyzes and compares the involvement of Romanian NGOs versus Australian NGOs, assuming that, although these two countries are very different, Romanian Non-Governmental Organizations might benefit from the experience and involvement of Australian NGOs. This study depicts the journeys made by Romanians during 2008-2014, which reveal that most of them are traveling within the European Union and very, few to Australia. The main NGOs in Australia, which take measures of protecting natural resources that attract tourists and are actively involved in promoting them and continuous visitors' education, are presented herein. Through interactive programs, NGOs can act as tourist entertainers, which brings them into contact with many tourists, either Romanian or foreign. This represents, as well, a means of earning money, which are to be later invested into environment protection projects.*

Key words:

Coral reefs, niche tourism, environment, tourism development, sustainable tourism

JEL Codes:

L32, M14, M38, O13, Q57, R53

1. Introduction

There are some countries in Europe that have a long history in tourism and with a great contribution to GDP in terms of revenue from tourism: Greece, France, Spain, United Kingdom, just to name a few. In Romania, however, the share of income from tourism in GDP was not and still is not very high, but it is growing constantly. Globally, tourism and travel industry contribute with about 9.5% to global GDP each year. In 2013, in Romania, tourism contributed with RON 33.1 bln, meaning 5.1% of GDP (***, 2015). These figures were influenced both by Romanians who traveled in Romania and by foreigners who chose to spend their holidays here. Worldwide, tourism is one of the top five sources of foreign exchange for 83% of countries. Furthermore, it represents the fastest expanding industry, growing yearly with 4.6% (around year 2000). (WTO, 1998)

Most Romanians often travel within their country borders, but an increase in the number of those who prefer spending their holidays abroad was noticed in recent years. Table 1 depicts the number of tourists of Romanian origin who left Romania between 2008 and 2014 (in thousands). The data were retrieved from National Statistics Institute of Romania website, and the means of transportation by which tourists traveled are: by road, by rail, by air and by water.

Table 1. Romanians traveling abroad by various means of transportation

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number of Romanian travelers (in thousands)	13072	11723	10905	10936
Year	2012	2013	2014	
Number of Romanian travelers (in thousands)	11149	11364	12299	

Source: www.insse.ro

According to the definition, departures represent the measurement unit for Romanian visitors who travel abroad and are registered when leaving the country. The same person in the country can make several journeys abroad, each time being registered as a new departure (Popescu, 2016). Even if the multiple counting of a person exiting the country might be considered a mistake, it could be assumed, as well, that the ratio of people leaving the country several times a year is constant during the analyzed period, so that the error can be ignored. Moreover, it should be noted that table 1 presents the persons leaving the country irrespective of the purpose, destination or duration of the journey.

Before 2007 (the year when Romania became a member-country of the European Union), the number of Romanians leaving the country ranged between 6.388 mil. in 2000 and 8.906 mil. in 2006. The large number

of exits in 2007 (10.980 mil.) was encouraged by the fact that Romanians earned the freedom to travel within the European Union only with their identity card and without other supporting documents. The influence of the economic crisis can be easily derived from the table above, having a great influence until 2011, when the number of people leaving the country registered again an upward trend.

One can say that in 2011, 54% of total population (according to 2011 census, total population was 20.121.641 residents) left the country, which means that, in spite of the democratic policy and the fact that Romania is an EU member, the economic level and the touristic education are still very low compared to the rest of EU member-states.

Case study: Australian NGOs involvement in touristic promotion

Scientists state that there are more species of plants and animals in the sea than on land. This is an additional reason for tourists to be involved in continuously protecting this special environment (i.e. the water) that human kind has yet to entirely discover.

1. Natural richness and tourism

Black Sea seaside – There are about 1.500 species of animals in the Black Sea, especially invertebrates, fish, dolphins and even some seals in the region of Kaliakra Cape. From economic point of view, the most important fish species are: herring, pelamid, anchovies, horse mackerel and sturgeons. (***, 2016)

Australia's Great Barrier Reef - It is the largest worldwide coral reef system, covering circa 344.400 km² and comprising 300 islands and 3.000 reefs in various development stages. Current research methods and continuously progressing equipment are helping to understand the formation and survival methods which marine plants and animals have adopted (State, 2009). Being such a vast area, there are still many regions not reached by biologists, however they have discovered so far over 1.500 species of live fish, 130 species of sharks and stingrays, 6.000 species of mollusks, shellfish and dolphins, six out of seven species of worldwide endangered turtles (***, 2016).

Australia is an island continent; therefore it is surrounded by beaches of various sizes. The Coastal Studies Unit at the University of Sydney has counted 10.685 mainland beaches in Australia, in addition to 838 beaches on 30 inhabited islands (***, 2016)

More than 2 mil. people visit Australia's Great Barrier Reef each year, generating an income of over USD 2 bil., which makes tourism an industry having a major impact in Northeast Australia's economy.

Tourism may have a negative impact on this sensitive environment, by humans walking on the bottom of the

water (plants are trampled on), dropping anchors, fuel leaking, excessive fishing. The large number of swimmers, associated with the sweat left in the water and suntan lotions they have on their skins, affect the clean environment in which plants have been growing. This is why NGOs that are involved in environmental protection, by educating in this respect tourists and local people, were created.

Romanian seaside faces, as well, a number of problems: water and sand pollution, global warming, overfishing, crowded beaches and the large number of people entering the water during high season – in July-August. Lack of interest for environment protection, lack of touristic education and awareness in this regard are added to these issues, as well.

The rapidly expanding mass tourism industry in the Great Barrier Coral Reef required massive investments in coastal development to accommodate the high influx of tourists, as there is an increasing demand for hotels, marinas, harbors, shops or sports facilities (Cesar, et al., 2003). These rapid developments had major impacts on coral reefs, on which tourism depends so much (Bryant *et al.*, 1998).

2. Australian NGOs

Non-governmental organizations are actively involved in creating a proper environment for tourism development and there are more than 40 such organizations in Australia that are advocating for environment protection, by educating in this respect both tourists and local residents.

WWF Australia (World Wildlife Fund) is an NGO involved in activities which are meant to stop the environment degradation process and to build a future in which people are living in harmony with nature. With financial assistance from companies like Coca-Cola, Blackmores, John West and others, WWF Australia supported projects related to (***, 2016):

a. *Improving water quality.* Effective action must be taken now to reduce land-based sources of sediment, fertilizer and pesticide pollution. WWF is working with farmers to reduce pollution.

b. *Global warming.* The future impacts of global warming must be included in government plans regarding the reef. It is imperative that action be taken at a national level to reduce CO₂ emissions.

c. *Ending poor fishing practices.* Sustainable levels of fishing in the marine parks are needed to minimize the impacts on the reef's biodiversity. WWF works with commercial fisheries to end poor fishing practices.

d. *Protection from coastal industrialization.* *Fight for the Reef* is a campaign working with the Australian community to protect the Reef and the USD 6 billion tourism industry and 60.000 jobs it supports from rapid and unsustainable industrialization of the Reef's coast.

Their *Fight for the Reef* campaign is run in partnership with the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS).

Right Tourism is an organization that fights against using animals for human entertainment (swimming with dolphins, bloody fights between dogs, roosters, horses, bulls), as well as for protection of the marine areas. Detailed instructions published on the Right Tourism website (**, 2016) educate tourists on how to behave during their holidays, advocating for **Responsible, Informed, Guilt-free and Humane Tourism**.

SOI (*Sustainable Oceans International*)(***, 2016) is partnering with Cairns based 'Sustainable Reefs' and Southern Cross University in order to establish a Reef CPR (coral preservation and restoration) program. This includes a research and training center and coral adoption and planting program that will allow the tourism industry to play a role in helping the reef and to enable fill gaps in knowledge about effective restoration strategies for impacted areas on the Great Barrier Reef. This knowledge will then be used in training programs to build the capacity of the dive industry and key government partners to respond to ship groundings, cyclone damage and general reef breakage occurring at high use sites. Actually, it is pioneering a new philosophy of recognizing that, while the reef is traditionally resilient, it is unable to quickly recover from the huge stresses we are placing on it. Just as we have maintenance programs in land-based parks, we now must do the same with our marine parks. The program covers the science, art and business of restoration, which is key to its success.

The *Adopt-a-Coral* program led by coral mascot 'Ari' will allow tourists, locals and anyone internationally to contribute to saving the Great Barrier Reef. Tourists, especially those snorkeling and diving, can leave the reef in a better condition than they found it, thus turning tourism into a tool for reef preservation.

Agent Green (**, 2016) is a Romanian organization that focuses its activity on the environmental problems that can permanently damage the biodiversity: destruction of undamaged ecosystems, genetically modified organisms, climate change and poisoning the environment factors (water, air and land). Their campaigns are based on sophisticated investigations that provide the necessary evidence to the responsible authorities to enforce and comply with environmental legislation or to initiate processes to improve the legislation. At the same time, the organization addresses the relevant national and international corporations to implement policies and standards that are superior to existing environmental legislation.

The major goals of the *Green Area* association (**, 2016) aims at increasing public participation, especially of young people, to recycling and protecting the environment; promotion of ecological activities;

conducting awareness programs of environmental degradation and protection of affected areas; establishing collaborative relationships with key institutions and specialized organizations; establishing a link between the private and the public sector in environmental matters; promoting cultural values and touristic sights in Romania.

One step in educating tourists was made during 2015 in Romania, through the Romania-Bulgaria Cross-Border Cooperation Program, called "*Common Borders. Common Solutions*". Experts from Grigore Antipa National Institute of Marine Research, along with those from Constanta Dolphinarium, created the brochure "*Nature teaches you*", printed in over 5000 copies and handed to visitors of Constanta Dolphinarium (**, 2016) Representatives from Natural Sciences Museum Complex intended, through this brochure freely distributed, to inform tourists about the life of dolphins, the species living in the Black Sea, the reasons for protecting them, which is their relationship with the marine environment and what rules should be followed with reference to dolphins. To attract more tourists to the dolphinarium, the project initiators have collaborated with the seaside hotel managers, who distributed this brochure to their customers.

3. Conclusions

Each touristic area faces problems affecting, on the long-term, the natural environment. A good example is the coral reefs zone in Australia, as sensitive as the Black Sea beaches, but much more intensively exploited and polluted.

NGOs have a major contribution in attracting tourists and protecting the environment in the same time. All NGOs worldwide operate based on the same principles: they are organizations independent from governments (even though most of them are financially sustained by governments); they raise funds from individuals, investing money in various social and environmental causes. Australian NGOs are aimed directly at tourists and cooperate with tour operators, hotel managers, carriers and entertainers who provide touristic activities.

Almost two-fifth of the world's population lives less than 100 kilometers from the ocean and most of them are in developing countries. As human population continues to grow, coastal communities become increasingly dependent on healthy fish stocks. Reef-associated fisheries are an important component of this (Burke, 2001).

All these Australian non-governmental organizations have as their main goal the environmental protection, carrying out programs to inform tourists about the direct influence that they have on the environment. In this

respect, they use money from the government or from companies that donate for particular projects.

Such organizations have emerged in Romania, as well, however very few of them are targeting tourists in a direct manner. They usually use non-refundable funds from the European Commission and are entitled to receive 2% from the income tax paid by any employee in Romania, through annual redirection.

In addition to helping to promote certain touristic destinations, NGOs are involved in environment protection, by elaborating methods for tourists education, contributing thus to the creation of sustainable tourism.

damage/#sthash.DUn7EQlp.20lqHdi2.dpbs, accessed 15 March 2016

13. ***<http://www.sup.usyd.edu.au/marine/>, accessed 15 March 2016

14. ***<http://www.sustainableoceans.com.au/Client-sectors/government-a-ngos.html>, accessed 20 February 2016

15. ***<https://weather.com/news/news/worlds-most-amazing-coral-reefs-20130307#/10?redirect=true>, accessed 01 February 2016

16. ***<http://www.wwf.org.au/>, accessed 15 March 2016

References

1. Bryant, D., Burke, L., McManus, J., Spalding, M. (1998). Reefs at Risk – A Map Based Indicator of Threats to the World's Coral Reefs, WRI/ICLARM/WCMC/ UNEP
2. Burke, L., Kura, Y., Kassem, K., Revenga, C., Spalding, M., McAllister, D. (2001). Pilot Analysis of Global Ecosystems: Coastal Ecosystems, WRI, Washington, DC
3. Cesar, H., Burke, L., Pet-Soede, L., (2003), The Economics of Worldwide Coral Reef Degradation, Published by: Cesar Environmental Economics Consulting (CEEC)
4. Popescu, C., <http://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>, accessed 10 March 2016
5. State, D., (2009). Marea Barieră de Corali, paradisul subacvatic din Australia, <http://www.curierulnational.ro/Specializat/2009-01-23/Marea+Bariera+de+Corali,+paradisul+subacvatic+din+Australia>, accessed 20 February 2016
6. ***(2015), EY: In Romania, industria de turism si calatorii contribuie cu 5,1% din PIB, Food&Bar, <http://www.foodandbar.ro/industria-de-turism-contribuie-51-pib/>, accessed 03 February 2016
7. ***World Tourism Organisation (1998) <http://www.world-tourism.org>, accessed 12 February 2016
8. ***<https://www.agentgreen.ro/campanii/>, accessed 10 March 2016
9. ***http://enciclopediaromaniei.ro/wiki/Marea_Neagr%C4%83, accessed 20 March 2016
10. ***http://www.greenarea.ro/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1&Itemid=2, accessed 15 March 2016
11. ***<http://www.reporterntv.ro/stire/natura-te-invata-manualul-de-educatie-eco-turistica-pe-care-il-primesc-vizitatorii-delfinariului-constantina>, accessed 03 February 2016
12. ***<http://right-tourism.com/issues/marine-activities/coral>