



PROSPECTS OF ROMANIAN TOURISM

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Abstract

Romania has always found itself on the playground where the great world powers exert their influence. Throughout the centuries, some of these powers completely vanished, others changed and are still in a process of changing, but the geostrategic importance of this zone has not changed in the context of international relations. In spite of all this, Romania does not take advantage of its position at the centre of Eurasia. The country's infrastructure reflects the great problems it has been facing and the disadvantageous tourism prospects emerging from its situation. Romania is among the states with the worst road infrastructure, and perhaps most importantly, among the states where citizens' trust in politicians is at the lowest point. In the general global ranking, Romania's economy is outranked by that of Costa Rica, the Philippines or Malaysia, according to the World Economic Forum 2015-16.

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EVOLUTION OF TOURISM IN ROMANIA

According to the Global Competitiveness Index (GCI), Romania ranked 53rd out of 140 analysed state economies. Overall, Romania's economy scored a 4.3 out of 7. Additionally, Romania's performance in the field of tourism is surpassed by states such as Albania and Botswana. Looking at these official statistics, Romania's prospects due to its geographical position and natural riches are at a disadvantage, overshadowed by its structural and economic shortcomings (Andrei I., 2011).

The country's geostrategic position will, in a shorter or longer run, impose its complete connection to East-West flows of all kinds – economic, energetic, transport, commercial, human and touristic, as well as to the entire modern infrastructure they sustain. In the light of this knowledge, the role that tourism and travel must play in the development of Romania's economic and social future is indisputable. In the perspective of global competition, Romanian tourism infrastructure highlights several essential elements that need to be adjusted, and that will raise it to the global standard. Thus, the new necessary infrastructure must be based on the following factors (Iorio M, 2010):

- The power of the state economy to generate income for a sufficient amount of citizens in order to enter the field of mass tourism. Otherwise, the country loses 80% of potential tourists. Providing the necessary income for the practice of mass tourism refers to the whole ensemble of global-type tourism (resembling that of developed countries). The diminishing of domestic tourists by 80% has an obvious and overwhelming impact on the material basis of a market economy.
- The existence of a social pact, implicit or explicit, regarding a life standard that will encompass the existence of a vacation from work, as well as its type: restoration, treatment or business. The lack of this social pact lands the country in the category of “trader tourism” forms, or even grey or illegal forms. In this case, travel is no longer tourism, hospitality and relaxation, but merely the ability of visited destinations to tolerate tourists.
- The legislative system is essential for the proper functioning of international tourism. It is impossible to explain the hesitant and delayed manner in which the Ministry of Tourism adopted a legislature, although the initiative of some actors of the tourism market was inadequate and inconsistent.

ROMANIAN TOURIST BRAND

In 2010, Austria saw 261.000 Romanian tourists spending on average €103 per day in the summer season and €129 per day during the winter season. This is than a Polish, Czech or Hungarian tourist spends. In Bulgaria, it is estimated that between 2010-14 the country hosted an average of 250.000 Romanian tourists each season, practically stolen away from the Romanian seaside. Starting with 2011, they revealed the following tendencies:

- The continuous decrease in the number of seaside tourists depending on the evolution of sales;
- The poor sales of social programs;
- The increase of sales in external destinations: for example, Bulgaria reported sales increases of 250% for most Romanian tourism agencies;
- INS statistics for the last trimester of 2011 reveal a 3.2% decrease in the number of foreign tourists registered at border points, compared to 2010;
- The National Association of Tourism Agencies (ANAT) reveals a 15% decrease in the number of seaside tourists, and a 25% decrease in financial influx.

The Ministry of Tourism concludes that private entrepreneurs do not tell the truth in their registered statistics. As a result, several actions seeking to address tax evasion were undertaken. Unfortunately, as long as the issues are discussed in the context of a seasonal environment where employees are hired for a pre-determined period, not an indeterminate one (Turnock D., 2012).

At one point, there was desire for a Manual of tourist brand to be created, as well as brochures that would promote Romania's controversial tourist brand. A selection of offers was organized for the purchase of services regarding the creation of the Manual and the related promotional services. The estimated value for this project was at €100.000, VAT excluded. After being launched at the Expo 2010 Shanghai under the slogan "Romania – Discover the Garden of the Carpathians", Romania's tourist brand was also launched on the German market during an event in Munchen. The brand's visual identity was anchored in a design deeply anchored in Romanian nature and tradition. The leaf included in the design intended to suggest the variety of relief forms that characterize the country, as well as the

primordial elements of earth, water, wild nature, adventure and dynamism (Iorio M, 2010).

ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN TOURISM SECTORS

1. Seaside tourism

Tourism law hopes to obtain the obligatory in-season activity of seaside tourism operators between 1 May – 1 October. Operators who do not comply are to be strongly sanctioned. Additionally, it hopes to offer a favorable environment for the development of tourism activities.

The Ministry of Tourism aims to motivate hotel patrons by threatening them with fines and the suspension of the qualification certificate. This is the vision and support method of seaside tourism. Another provision refers to the creation of theme parks for tourists.

Transport

Romanian Railways (CFR) provide a seriously flawed transport to the coast. It has been facing the same critical problem for the past 10 years: replacing the rails between Bucharest – Constanta. In 2014, the 230km distance was covered in six hours, and in 2016 in two hours. Road transport on the highway has become the simplest, most plausible solution, with a 2 hours long journey.

Beaches

The allotment of beaches to certain beach operators who lease them at a wholesale price and sublease them at a normal price raises the price of a sunbed and an umbrella to an unlikely level, as expensive as Miami Beach. The situation of the beaches is confusing. Their tenancy to the so-called beach operators who then rent them out to hotels is the result of political decisions, resulting in consumer prices raised to an extraordinary level.

Parking

Resorts do not have enough parkings to accommodate for the number of tourists. Not even Mamaia does, as the country's most popular resort. Here, consumers still have to pay the barrier fee.

Accommodation

Most hotels in Romania have outdated structures, characteristic of 2-4 star hotels. Romanian tourists, as patriotic as they may be, are no longer happy with this type of accommodation. The Romanian

littoral to the Black Sea is 245km long. Out of this stretch, approximately 70km is effectively the touristic seaside, comprised of a row of resorts containing 249 hotels. The seaside has 21 one-star hotels, most of them in Eforie Nord, 119 two-star hotels, 81 three-star hotels and 23 four-star hotels, most of them in Mamaia.

Degradation of the environment and landscape

Especially in the southern part of the seaside, abandoned and degraded buildings give a sinister aspect to some resorts. If it continues to be neglected by the authorities in the following five years, the Romanian seaside might disappear from the map of global tourism. This is not in the government's best interest. The government should adopt certain projects concerning work legislation, offer unemployment benefits to seasonal employees who emigrate to other countries due to lack of motivation, as well as grant tax incentives to investors.

2. Mountain tourism

The Carpathian Mountains are still the largest area with virgin woods in Europe. The Carpathians occupy 72.000 square km of the country's territory, forming an important ecologic environment, as well as economic, cultural, touristic and recreational. It is a living environment for local populations responsible for sustainable social, cultural and economic growth, and also for the conservation of millennial traditions. Across the Carpathian Mountains are countless resorts of national or local interest, winter sports and recreational complexes, dozens of chalets and an emerging ski domain.

Mountain resorts are generally empty during the work week and teeming with tourists during the weekends. They are a focal point not just for tourism, but also for clubbing, for which the mountains act as a pretext for the younger generation. There is a complete lack of offers meant to attract tourists to specific mountain activities: trekking, outdoor sports, recreation and animation. The prices are unreasonably high for cable transport, ski facilities are outdated and scarce (approximately 60, compared to 800 in Austria), and similar to the seaside situation, there are not enough parkings to cater for tourists.

There is no strategy for mountain resorts to attract tourists throughout the year. Organized tourism no longer exists in the mountain region. Mountain tourism is comprised of segregate groups that respect no law regarding the tourist traffic or the environment. This state of affairs results in frequent risk situations, with increasingly more cases of roving, accident and even death. All of these occur because of the

inexistence or the unlawful disuse of specialized intervention and assistance structures for mountain tourism, respectively certified mountain guides and the National Mountain Rescue Network.

The extension of Romanian ski domain could result in an increase in incoming tourists, who might see Romania as a cheaper alternative to destinations in Central and Western Europe. It is also hoped that this will bring down the costs of an in-season mountain holiday, seeing as the prices are already very high (Turnock D., 2012).

Mountain tourism in Romania continues to suffer because of a poor infrastructure. Some sources claim that for 60 years there has been no investment in this sector, although there have been many attempts in this direction after the 1989 revolution.

3. Balneary tourism

In this sector we are faced with the most dramatic situation. The great majority of facilities are degraded, both hotels and treatment places. In the past 20 years, the main clients have been Retirement Houses, paying small tariffs that allowed no extra profit for investments.

Tourism agents receive recommendations for investment that will enable them to succeed in this domain. Mayors have also been advised to invest in balneary tourism, while the Ministry invested in brochures and leaflets that informed the authorities and the private sector about financing programs.

Balneary resorts in the West of the country lose tens of thousands of tourists every year because they have not managed to expand their services. Also known as the ghosts of Romanian tourism, these resorts urgently need funds, and the investments required in this direction exceed one billion euros. Some patrons of tourism agencies do not sell tickets in balneary resorts because the profits are very low. The tourists do not have any advantage either, and as a result prefer to buy their ticket directly from the reception.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no kind of strategy in place for seaside, mountain or balneary tourism. More than half of European citizens claim that they prefer to organise their own vacations, and Romanians prefer to organize their vacations without relying on tourism agencies. From this standpoint, Romanian occupies the first

position in the European Union, as the last Eurobarometer revealed in 2014 concerning European's attitude regarding tourism (Iorio M, 2010).

Tourism in the actual context of Romania can only become an economic priority if the national macroeconomic framework can support this wish. The economic importance of tourism can result from a national program sustained by financial backings and investments that will allow some balance between incoming and outgoing tourism. The internal tourism existing at this moment and Romania's historical touristic experience can contribute to the elaboration of some national tourist politics. This could be accomplished by establishing a rigorous definition of the main components of touristic policy and building a new vision for Romanian tourism, a successful engine for the future that will still take into account the demands of the European and global tourist market (Turnock D., 2012).

The future aim for the authorities is the promotion of the country's touristic potential and the creation of the necessary infrastructure that will serve the attractiveness of Romania as a touristic destination. The proposals in this direction are: (1) the creation of a positive image of Romania as a touristic destination by defining and promoting the national tourist brand, (2) the development and consolidation of internal tourism by promoting the specific marketing products and activities and (3) the creation of centers for information and touristic promotion and their required faculties.

To conclude, the Ministry of Tourism once specified that the online promotion was zero when the strategic and operational marketing plan for tourism was presented between 2011-16. The officials also specified that a ranking comprising the top 20 destinations in Romania should be created, and these destinations should be aggressively promoted in the following period. This should have been the starting point for an online promotion plan. In the end, in the fight against illegal tourism, the Ministry enforced a politics of raising the penalties to enormous costs, without discernment. These politics include structures such as rented rooms and pensions, and they also address non-compliance with certain criteria, even if this means an incomplete number of clothes hangers in a closet (Iorio M, 2010).

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