

# **OBJECTIVES AND MEANS OF ACTION WITHIN THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF THE TOURISM IN SOUTH MUNTENIA REGION**

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**Abstract:** : In order to cope with the tourism competition both at the national and international level it is necessary the modernization, relaunching and the development of the tourism in South Muntenia region and also the creation of modern tourism products that would be competitive on the tourism market. It is thus required, in addition to the modernization of the tourism structures, tourist resorts, the creation of new tourism products, resorts, original, attractive and genuine programmes that could, by means of a sustained promotion on the market, direct significant tourist flows to the region.

**JEL classification: O1, O11, O21**

**Key words: tourism, structure, development, strategy, region**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of building the strategy is to create a concept about the future, which having real bases, brings value to the life of the inhabitants. The tourism development strategy adapted to the national strategy can contribute to the improvement of living standards. The implementation of the strategy aims at the general economic development of the region, environmental protection and last but not least improving the well-being.

The fundamental objective of the fundamental strategy within this chapter consists in affirming the regional identity, enhancing spatial cohesion, developing competitiveness and sustainable development, and the general objective is described in detail into three major strategic objectives with impact in developing the tourism in South Muntenia region:

1. Connection to the European network of development poles and corridors.
2. Consolidation and development of inter-regional links.
3. Protection, development and exploitation of the natural and cultural heritage.

At present, it is vital that the regional tourism development plan to be integrated with the environmental management system and vice versa. Similarly, the conservation of cultural heritage could go hand in hand with tourism development. In both cases, a careful monitoring is needed in order to ensure the maintenance of high standards of conservation.

In addition, if tourism and travels are to be a tool for the rural development, it is therefore vital the involvement of these communities in this domain. The

connections between different sectors and the local producers should be promoted and the involvement and communication of the factors involved should be prioritized.

The present strategy brings an original contribution by integrating economic and social aspects that manifest within the space of South Muntenia region, in the context of the challenges that the current transformation process induced by the European Union enlargement entails.

The attention has focused on tourism, given the natural and anthropogenic potential, as well as on the particularities of this sector of economic activity to create opportunities for attracting foreign investments and developing private sector in tourism. It has been given a particular emphasis on the development potential of mountain tourism in all its forms, of balneary tourism in its new international vision - SPA, cultural tourism, rural tourism - routes development (wine / monasteries, gastronomy, traditions, customs and festivals promotion), MICE - business tourism, being presented in detail the aspects regarding the action programmes for the development of tourist facilities, implementation, providing human resources, local community involvement, marketing and promotion. Carrying out some nature protection projects that contribute to restore some valuable ecosystems not only scientifically, but also in terms of their potential for practicing some new, genuine forms of tourism, for which there is a growing demand from the largest emitters of tourists, has constituted a new argument for analyzing the impact of tourism development.

## **2. PRINCIPLES OF THE STRATEGY**

The tourism strategy of South Muntenia region should be based on a number of principles, according to which should be then carried out a series of actions that will precede arrangement decisions adoption. Observing the following strategic principles of territory arrangement is decisive for the implementation of the territory *planning*:

*The principle of harmonious integration of the built structures in South Muntenia area with the environmental conditions*, the services structure and the infrastructure. The tourist arrangement is usually done within a territory with "a material load" made up in time by developing industrial and economic activities, agricultural activities etc. Therefore, the tourist buildings that will be grafted on the existing material structure must be "interspersed" among the economic activities and the social organization of the territory. For the use of the tourism industry, the territory must respond as well to certain aesthetic requirements for the fulfilment of which it is necessary that the built elements to integrate themselves both quantitatively and qualitatively into the natural conditions and the structures already existing on the territory in question. The integration includes both natural, historical as well as economic activities, the infrastructure and the superstructure of the territory, in a balanced and harmonious synthesis. The synthetic indicator expressing the tourist quality of a territory being represented by its attractiveness, the integration of all the territory components must meet the most demanding aesthetic requirements. At the observance of this principle should contribute various professional groups: architects, geographers, historians, plastic artists, economists who, forming a working group, can adopt the most appropriate solutions and directions of action.

*Flexibility or evolutionary structures principle*, according to which South Muntenia Region has to be arranged in a multifunctional system, that can be adapted to the evolution and structural changes of tourism demand. Complying with this principle is meant to alleviate the stiffness of the tourist offer, mentioned during its approach and, at the same time, to increase the efficiency of the valorisation and development of the tourism offer.

*The principle of the main activity and the secondary reception* reveals the specific character of the tourist consumption, which is stimulated by the attractive material elements of the offer, designed to meet the consumption motivation - considered as main activity. The functional elements of the offer, in which is comprised the reception (accommodation + meals), contribute to the achievement of consumption, but it is not its purpose. Therefore, in the tourist territory arrangement it shall be started from sizing the capabilities to provide main tourist services in relation to the consumption motivation and possibilities to satisfy it, then it will take place the adaptation of the functional capabilities that will complete the tourist offer.

*The principle of interdependent networks* aims at integrating the tourism network, composed of the material basis, tourist services, labour and consumers (tourists) in the socio-economic structure of South Muntenia region. Observing this principle will prevent the emergence of contradictions that may frieze the conflict state between the tourist and the resident population. A contribution to the adoption of the most suitable solutions can be brought in by sociologists and psychologists that should study the behaviour, aspirations, and social structures of the resident population, choosing different ways to establish contacts between the two categories of population.<sup>92</sup>

The process of strategy foundation and development should be based on taking into consideration the following specific and important aspects of the South Muntenia region:

- the existence of certain areas characterized by a suitable environment, which contribute to its attractiveness for residents and tourists and to its competitiveness given the business location.
- the nature and the diversity of the region that requires specific measures and activities;
- the existence of polycentric settlements, including major growth poles offering good conditions for productive investment concentration;
- the fact that a significant percentage of the population lives in small towns, communes and villages, characterized by modest growth and that require interventions to support the economic development and diversification;
- the predominant agricultural character of the south area and the problems caused thereof;
- road networks with poor quality for the public transport and goods.

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<sup>92</sup> Cristureanu C. *Strategies and transactions in the international tourism*, CH Beck Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p. 235.

### 3. SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE SOUTH MUNTENIA REGION

Based on the conclusions of the socio-economic analysis, on the comparative advantages of the region, its strengths and opportunities, the politics, through its structure and content, it will pursue the balanced economic development of the Region, while developing its capacity to adapt and to respond to the key economic changes.

Important sector of the regional economy, the tourism provides new and alternative opportunities for the development and competitiveness of the region. Tourism makes an important contribution in terms of economic regeneration of the economic areas in decline, creating jobs and indirectly supporting other sectors. Diverse and fragmented, tourism is generally characterized by a large number of small and medium businesses and their relatively slow adaptation to the market changing conditions, to new technologies and efficient management practices. Increasing the competitiveness of the region and its attractiveness as a tourist destination depends on providing quality tourism, in terms of accommodation and services.

#### SWOT Analysis of the South Muntenia Region

| STRENGTHS  | WEAKNESSES  |
|--|---|
| The existence of the Pan-European transport corridors: 5 European roads (E574, E81, E70, E85 and E60) and the highways A1 (Bucharest-Pitești) and A2 (Bucharest - Constanta, partially exploited), Danube river  | Poor technical conditions of local roads, the highest rates of modernized public roads being recorded in the southern counties: Teleorman, Ialomița, each with over 33%.                    |
| The existence within the region of the airports Bucharest-Otopeni and Bucharest - Băneasa  | Low use of the ports on the Danube, low traffic generating profile activities decline.  |
| Diversified economic profile of the region: the northern part of the Region (Argeș, Dâmbovița and Prahova counties) is characterized by a high degree of industrialization (Prahova holds the 1 <sup>st</sup> place in the country in the industrial production); the southern part has a very high agricultural potential (71.1% of the entire area represented by agricultural areas, of which 80.2% arable land). | The decline of the traditional industry, currently undergoing the severe impact of the transition process towards the market economy, by closing down most representative industrial units. |
| The variety of natural resources (oil, natural gas, coal, salt, mineral water, arable land, forests)   | Low share of modern technologies used in industry and agriculture.  |
| Diversified tourism resources: the mountain resorts in the Prahova Valley - Bucegi massive, tourist localities and natural parks located in Bucegi Mountains and Pietra Craiului Mountains, the balneary resorts of Subcarpathians.  | Outdated tourism infrastructure, most accommodation structures of two and three stars as well as the leisure structures were built in the 1980s.  |
| The existence of certain representative private companies with foreign or mixed capital. In the region have been made significant foreign direct investments: Renault - Pitești, Holcim -  | The existence of many monoindustrial areas: Mizil, Plopeni, Urlați, Valea Călugărească and Câmpulung Muscel - in the northern counties, but some in the                                     |

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|---|--|
| Câmpulung Muscel, Samsung COS - Târgoviște and others.  | southern counties: Turnu Măgurele, Zimnicea, Alexandria, Videle, Giurgiu, Oltenița, Călărași, Slobozia and Fetești.  |
| Flexible, cheap and qualified labour force, in the fields of petrochemical, mechanical engineering, manufacturing industry.   | The decrease in the active and employed population. The active population represents 38.2% of the region population, while the employed population represents 35.4%. On activity domains, 39.4% is employed in agriculture, 29.5% in industry and 31.1% in other services. |
| Settlements network developed in a balanced manner: 43 cities (including 16 municipalities), 488 communes and 2,030 villages.   | Degraded public utilities: high degree of degradation / under dimensioning of water pipes, low density of gas supply network.  |
| The existence of numerous industrial parks: (25% of the industrial parks in Romania)  | The increase of emigration rate, especially among the young population   |
| High share of SMEs in services domain (75.8%)   | Population ageing accentuated process  |
| <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>  | <b>THREATS</b>   |
| High potential for tourism development, due to the rich natural and cultural resources, and due to increasing demand in the field of mountain, ecologic, cultural, balneary and climatic tourism. | Location of investors in certain areas, while neglecting others. Deepening the disparities between the developed areas in the north and the undeveloped areas from the southern part.  |
| Increase of foreign investments number  | Lack of capital to sustain the economy investments.  |
| Entrepreneurship development  | Deepening the lack of balance between supply and demand on the labour market   |
| The extension / modernization of road transport network   | Insufficient financial funds for infrastructure development  |
| Development of the cooperation with bordering Danube countries  | Negative demographic trend   |

In the context of sustained investments oriented to the development and diversification of tourism products and the supporting infrastructure, the region can significantly improve its attractiveness and external perception. Therefore,

The tourism strategy of the South Muntenia region must aim at enhancing the competitiveness in the domestic and international tourism by increasing the attractiveness of the region as a tourist destination, by developing the accessibility, by means of continuing and modernizing the infrastructure, by creating a multimodal transportation system; it is also particularly important to take into account to create an innovative accessibility system capable of providing fast and efficient links with international markets, capitalizing the particular geo-strategic position of the region.

In this respect we consider that the tourism strategy objectives in the South Muntenia region must be closely correlated with the overall objectives of economic and social development in the region:

- Creating favourable conditions for the location of new tourism investments (and not only) and strengthening the potential of the existing ones by developing the utilities and quality services system designed for tourists and tourism providing

companies, through the simplification, the transparency and acceleration of the administrative procedures and for obtaining the permits and creating conditions to increase productivity of the tourism enterprises by using innovative products and processes;

- Creating the conditions for a flexible labour market in which job offer to become able to continuously adapt to the requirements of employers and the changing demands of tourists, by promoting entrepreneurship, informational society and new services, in the context of accelerated dynamics of integrating the tourism activities in the European and international area;

- Creating new opportunities for sustainable economic growth and increasing quality of life through the development of tourist heritage and promotion of environmental politics; it will be taken into consideration the development of the management and control system of environmental factors already implemented in the South Muntenia region<sup>93</sup> (including removing the negative effects on the environment in cases of natural disasters, general improvement of the environment factors by protecting biodiversity, preserving forested areas, parks and green spaces in urban areas);

- Development of social and health tourism services by improving the infrastructure and equipment, by means of applying an effective management and increasing people's access to these services, especially of those in rural and isolated areas;

- Education sector development by improving infrastructure and equipment, by increasing the quality of education services in tourism and especially by diversifying the specializations offered by the regional education sector in tourism, the development of continuing education centres for adults, establishing school networks, the development of partnership between the educational establishments and tourism business environment, universities and public administration and supporting the research-innovation;

- Modernization of the agricultural sector and diversifying economic activities, other than agriculture, by exploiting the environmental, natural resources (fishery heritage, forestry, biodiversity), the cultural heritage (traditions and gained professional experiences) through tourism;

- Increasing the attractiveness of urban areas for investment and implicitly for the urban and business tourism, by improving standards of living (urban infrastructure, transportation and population mobility), valorisation of architectural, artistic and monumental heritage, by promoting cohesion and social inclusion through the development of urban services.

Only through consultation with the target groups of regional development the strategies can be modified in order to meet local communities needs that need to be strengthened. In terms of financing opportunities, on the agency site, at the address [www.adrmuntenia.ro](http://www.adrmuntenia.ro), is implemented a database of opportunities available for the current period. This database is easily accessible and can effectively respond to any type of requests. At the same time, any potential investor can address the agency, in order to obtain information or advice.

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<sup>93</sup> *Regional waste management plan in Region 3 South-Muntenia, 2007.*

Access to international, interregional and intraregional transport networks is considered an important development priority for improving access roads to economic zones of the South Muntenia region and strengthening the link between the economic poles in the region and European transport corridors. It is necessary to establish a balance between rail transport and road transport and to increase the role of air and naval transport (by sea and inland waterways).

Developing the transport infrastructure represents a necessary condition for the successful implementation of the other development priorities of the region, contributing to increase the mobility of people and goods, the integration of regional growth poles with the trans-European transport network, to fight isolation of the underdeveloped areas and not least, the development of regional and local transport infrastructure with obvious beneficial implications on tourist traffic. The roads network of the South Muntenia region is not adapted to the European traffic requirements in terms of comfort and transport capacities.

The railway network and the railway means of transport is inefficient and requires significant investments for rehabilitation and development in order to achieve the required standards enabling efficient transportation. The highways are an important element in ensuring the communication between economic centres / urban areas, allow labour mobility, tourism business development and create the adequate environment enabling the rapid development of enterprises in this sector. In order to stimulate tourist traffic and the entire tourism sector of the South Muntenia region we consider absolutely necessary:

- The development of existing terminal points and creating new terminal points of the transport networks, for the transport of goods / people, as well as the modernization of the services thereof, in compliance with the safety and environmental protection standards; ensuring the inter-modality by creating logistics centres for intermodal transport rail-road, rail-inland waterways, rail-sea, road-inland waterways, road-sea, road-air;
- Developing the links between terminals and urban centres with national and international transport systems (including ring roads), by developing different means of transport to reduce transport time in the total time allocated for tourist movement and increase traffic safety, maintaining and protecting environmental factors.
- modernizing and ensuring the access in rural areas in order to improve the living conditions in rural areas and to support economic and tourism activities.
- modernizing county and local roads networks.
- increasing mobility in urban areas, through the modernization of the urban public transport and development of the multimodal transport, in order to increase the comfort and safety degree of tourists and residents and encourage the development of tourism forms in urban areas of the South Muntenia region.

SMEs are the main source of job creation in the tourism sector of the South Muntenia region. Regional development should focus not only on the creation of new SMEs in tourism but also on the development of the existing ones. The main objective is strengthening the SMEs by developing the entrepreneurship of tourist providers, of the enterprise culture and labour force that will support the development of this sector.

Although their number in the region is relatively high, the analysis of this sector showed that most SMEs in the tourism domain are micro enterprises. This leads to a limited and reduced contribution to the regional GDP, but at the same time a great capacity to absorb the labour force and a greater flexibility to changes in the economy of the region.

Increasing the economic power of SMEs will be made by means of identifying and developing the tourism sectors with economic growth potential. The tourism businesses have to be supported in order to have access to training services in order to improve management and marketing skills in these companies.

In order to support the already existing SMEs as well as new private initiatives, it is necessary to extend the network of consulting centres in the field. These consulting centres will support tourism businesses in preparing and implementing business plans, will provide services for the business, marketing, management, consulting and assistance initiation for the organization of the informational system, extremely important for the dynamics of displaying the tourism products.

The practice of the crediting policy with high interest rates in recent years and the unfavourable socio-economic circumstance lead to a reduced access of companies to different forms of tourism and financing sources. Therefore, it is necessary to support this sector by creating and developing some attractive financial mechanisms.

In order to enter the international market it is required to equip the tourism companies and those sectors establishing a relationship with the tourism, thus being able to become the suppliers of important parts of the tourism product, with high technologies, the introduction of international systems of quality certification, their participation in international trade fairs and exhibitions, investments in innovative technologies in order to protect natural resources. We also consider that the following measures may enhance the development of the tourism sector of the South Muntenia region:

- create, extend, modernize the infrastructure of incubators and other business centres (dedicated to the sector);
- establishing some centres of standardization / certification of tourism units and tourism products;
- create some multi specialized theoretical and practical training centres, the tourist sector mobilizing a major proportion of the active labour force and requiring a wide range of specializations of the staff working in the sector;
- support given to the tourism companies for the development, promotion and internationalization of tourist activities;
- support for the creation of branded products and for compliance with the international quality standards;
- support given to tourism companies for the purchase of equipment and modern technologies for sector specific activities, services, including internet access;
- promotion and diversification of tourist offer (quality standards and services except for hotels);
- create online booking networks;
- improving the tourism infrastructure of local / regional interest;



- support for strengthening and modernizing the productive sector by tangible and intangible investments;
- support for purchasing professional services in order to implement European standards;
- support for the access to new markets and internationalization, in order to create regional brand and to promote the image of the South Muntenia destination;
- support for the integration of tourism enterprises in the international chains and networks;
- carrying out R&D projects in the field of tourism in partnerships with universities / research institutes and enterprises and complex research projects that enable the participation of high-level international specialists;
- support for the new tourist micro-enterprises and high technology spin-offs.

The gradual transition to the market economy has brought dramatic changes in some sectors and created changes in the structure of labour force, being registered the de-industrialization phenomenon, together with the migration of labour force unfortunately dismissed more to the agriculture and not to the region tertiary. The existing industrial structure which is not adapted to the new demands of the market in the region counties can permanently supply unemployment. For this reason the development of tourism sector is necessary, allowing the creation of viable employment alternatives. It is important that the educational and training system to be adapted to the regional labour market requirements, not only in terms of research and development activities that will support productivity and competitiveness of the local economy, but also in terms of providing new skills necessary for the labour force involved in the tourism sector. The training programmes must be adapted to the labour market requirements, have to be introduced programmes to meet the needs of the employed and the unemployed.

Creating, expanding and strengthening social partnerships at regional level will contribute to the transfer of expertise and validation of the identification process and capitalizing of new integration opportunities on the labour market. In order to increase the adaptability of the labour force support must be given, in order to develop and maintain human resources in order to ensure competitiveness in the process of changing economic and technological conditions required for tourism development by:

- application of the selective professional training, oriented to the tourism sectors with high growth potential
- identification of activation / reactivation opportunities on the labour market in the tourism sector of people in search of work, especially young people
- correlation of training with labour market demand
- providing training courses that meet the current working environment in tourism (IT, management, marketing, foreign languages)
- training courses for developing management techniques, entrepreneurship, tourism, quality management, services sector support
- development and implementation of professional distance training courses
- training to increase activity productivity and tourist attractiveness of the South Muntenia region

- development of entrepreneurial culture within curricular and extracurricular activities in preuniversity and university education in partnership with the business environment
- development of continuous training techniques
- development of education offers for secondary education, university / post university for professions in the tourism sector

One of the competitive advantages of which benefits the South-East Region, compared to other regions of the country, is the preservation and conservation of the natural environment, unaffected by human presence and activities. Thus, within the natural reserves, there are no few species of plants and animals declared as endemic or natural monuments. Moreover, forest and fish reserves conservation in the region is a top priority as long as they offer significant opportunities for economic development through rational exploitation (exploitation in accordance with the resilience capacity of those reserves).

The priority lines of intervention aiming at waste management will cover the expansion and modernization of collection, treatment and disposal system of wastewater, currently available in cities and towns. It should be noted that in the county capital cities such facilities are available, but some of them have trouble functioning, maintenance, have little capacity or are unfinished. Moreover, industrial wastewater treatment and modernization of filtration systems of pollutants emitted by industrial units have a significant importance for the region. There are already sustained the processes of consultation and introduction of new technologies and techniques in waste management.<sup>94</sup>

Special attention must as well be paid to public awareness through information campaigns on environmental issues and protection of unique natural resources and biodiversity in the region. Given the proximity of the region to countries facing similar environmental problems (industrial pollution, erosion, massive deforestations, etc.) there can be developed a series of cross-border cooperation projects between South Muntenia Development Region and the neighbouring regions. Taking into consideration the frequent events that caused significant floods and landslides, with implications for public safety and tourist activity a special attention is required and a reconsideration of the entire policy of preservation and conservation of the natural environment in correlation with the policy of prevention and intervention in case of natural disasters, by means of:

- the expansion and modernization of water and wastewater infrastructure systems;
- rehabilitation of areas affected by uncontrolled disposal of industrial waste;
- recreation of stability and safety conditions of the areas exposed to erosion, natural disasters and deforestation phenomena;
- promoting the use of unconventional energy and making more efficient the distribution and consumption systems;
- creation of the management and control system of environmental factors (monitoring units and regional intervention units);

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<sup>94</sup> Regional Waste Management Plan - Region 3 - South Muntenia.

- valorisation of protected natural areas, their expansion and identification of new natural areas and development of management plans for the areas belonging to Natura 2000 network;

An old problem of Romanian tourism in general but also of the South Muntenia region is the health system and the way the perception of tourists in terms of quality of medical services provided influences the purchasing decisions of travel packages. In this respect are required investments in the health infrastructure through rehabilitation, modernization and equipping of the buildings housing first aid centres, hospitals and emergency medical services and technology, in order to create a modern and functional health system, based on increasing the capacity and quality of medical services provided, so that in the strategy of tourism and economic development of the South Muntenia development region have to be included:

- creation, expansion, modernization and increase of the capacity of health centres in urban and rural areas, to cover local / regional needs and to create a favourable image of the region as a tourist destination safe from this point of view;
- construction, rehabilitation, modernization, restoration of buildings for multifunctional services and residential buildings and providing them with adequate equipment;
- construction / rehabilitation / modernization of hospitals buildings and ambulatory and specialty hospitals buildings;
- providing specialized medical equipment and utilities for health centres, hospitals and ambulatory buildings;
- development of SMURD integrated services, at local and regional level;
- the agricultural sector is characterized by a lack of modern equipment and techniques, which has a negative impact on productivity in the sector and quality / competitiveness of tourism products.

The dominance of the agricultural sector in the rural areas economy prevents the economic stimulation of the region which is an economic risk deriving from agricultural market vulnerability due to climatic conditions and demand of final consumers. Moreover, the lack of processing companies leads to the lack of added value of packaged and conserved products. Rural areas development in the region is made through diversification of the rural economy, stimulating economic sectors alternative to agriculture. In this regard it is necessary to develop new activities based on peculiarities and local resources, such as: natural resources, environmental resources and cultural heritage, tourism development and other local productive sectors (crafts, branded wines, organic products, products resulting from processing the wood, the fish, etc.) In this regard, the creation of alternative occupational opportunities can be sustained by:

- investments in tourism companies and tourism infrastructure;
- increasing the attractiveness of rural areas and villages renewal;
- maintaining natural landscape attractiveness and specificity and ethno-cultural values;
- rehabilitation, modernization and expansion of accommodation structures as well as the related facilities;

- development of agro tourist services by creating, rehabilitating and expanding the recreational infrastructure, including associated facilities such as: swimming pools, mini-golf , tennis courts etc;
- investments for companies that produce / sell typical local products, region brands;
- assistance provided for companies that promote natural / cultural heritage;
- restoration and valorisation of cultural, architectural, religious heritage in rural areas;
- creation of new structures for regional cultural heritage valorisation;

The South Muntenia region has an incredible tourist potential. Although at present this advantage is exploited in the northern part of the region, the southern part of the region is of particular interest, the development potential of the Danube bordering areas has not been sufficiently exploited yet. By means of investments, this area can become an alternative to the classic mountain tourism.

Another priority of the tourism strategy of the South Muntenia region is to sustain tourism projects in Arges and Dâmbovița counties, even if not bordering the Danube, have landscapes of a particular charm (see Annexes I and III). It would be a shame that these places, yet unknown to the general public, to remain hidden. It is particularly important that in a few years, tourism in the South Muntenia Region to no longer be restrained only to Prahova Valley.

The mountain resorts in the Prahova Valley - Bucegi massive, touristic towns and natural parks situated in Bucegi Mountains and Piatra Craiului Mountains, balneary climatic resorts - Slănic Prahova, Vălenii de Munte, Pucioasa, Câmpulung-Muscel - are heavily exploited tourist areas. In recent years, the investments made in the three northern counties - Prahova, Argeș and Dâmbovița - targeted hotel network expansion and services quality improvement. Weekend tourism, winter sports have brought great benefits to the investors in this area.

Rural tourism is also seen as a source of valorisation of the regional potential and the possibility of obtaining funding from pre-accession funds, until 2007 (SAPARD, PHARE), was used by some local partners to create tourist units, hostels, which offer the chance of countryside valorisation.

Although tourism infrastructure does not correspond - from the qualitative and quantitative point of view - to the requirements, it may be considered that there are some progresses in this domain, compared to previous years. As an alternative to mountain tourism in the north and for a comprehensive valorisation of the South Muntenia region, the investors and tourism authorities try to stimulate a greater interest for the southern part of the region by exploiting the potential of the area bordering the Danube.

Organizing various events - fairs, shows, concerts - can be an extremely important source for attracting foreign tourists. As in the case of other regions, tourism in this area needs investments in infrastructure projects, hotels network expansion, accommodation spaces and services quality improvement, and projects launching and access to European funds aim precisely these issues.

At the end of 2007, after the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing approved the eligibility criteria for Axis 5 "Sustainable development and tourism promotion", in the Regional Operational Programme, the interest of economic

agents in this field has considerably increased. The Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing has launched a series of open calls for proposals for increasing the quality of tourism services aimed at involving local authorities, NGOs, SMEs in tourism activities.

Hotel networks expansion, services quality improvement, creating specialists in the hotel industry and tourism promotion centres have become a priority for local authorities in the field. The stake represented by improving the quality of tourism services in the area is even greater as this area surrounds the capital and, thus, can stimulate the interest in Romanian tourism in general.

A more active involvement of investors, social partners, investors in tourism activities as well as materialization of certain projects through European funds in order to make the Romanian tourism a source of economic growth are still in its infancy and have favourable premises for regional tourism potential valorisation.

Rural settlements providing the necessary infrastructure, recreational facilities and adequate spaces are necessarily development premises in tourism field. Protecting the cultural heritage through the restoration of cultural buildings, monuments or creating museums allow social and cultural activities, contribute to maintaining and improving areas identity, increasing their attractiveness and not least encourage tourism. Rural areas will be transformed in order to meet the demand for a living and attractive recreational environment. Rural areas provide an important potential for recreational activities, but it must be maintained and sometimes created or improved.

On the other hand, preserving the rural environment for its beauty, cultural and historic importance is not incompatible with the economic development. On the contrary, such protection can sustain the development - through tourism and other investments. But the natural heritage requires careful management, adapted to local conditions. Usually, this management will be conducted in close connection with agriculture, as agricultural workers play a central role in the management of rural areas.

The actions that have to be undertaken refer to global interventions, in order to preserve the traditional image of the villages, local architecture and rural heritage, while measures are fully compatible with the objectives of local tourism development. These integrated actions may relate to renewal of traditional elements of housing, protection and preservation of rural heritage traditional elements such as water mills, windmills, bridges as well as the preservation of customs and traditional rural life. Sustainability must always be borne in mind, meaning that tourism development must be carefully planned so as to be a balance between the economic, social and environmental impact.

In order to attain the development goals, the tourism strategy must be adapted to each area, depending on the data that individualize it and the priority objectives of the tourism sector. One of the most popular proactive strategy treating the issue of tourism development in terms of maximizing its positive effects on regional economic growth and on this basis the overall development, was presented in the U.S.A. in the "US Department of Commerce & Economic Development Administration".<sup>95</sup> The mentioned strategy aims at overall economic development through regional

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<sup>95</sup> James Gollub, Amy Hosier, Grace Woo, *Using Cluster-Based Economic Strategy to Minimize Tourism Leakages*, ICF Consulting Global Economic Development Practice (GEDP), San Francisco, California, 2000.

development, to which it grants a role in economic growth. The strategy premise formulated by its authors, underlines that "in global economy, value is created at the regions level, as territorial entities defined especially based on geographic criteria, not as political-administrative structures, and regional economic growth is centrally accumulated and valued in accordance with economic policy and the national legal system".<sup>96</sup>

In developing the strategy of tourism development in the South Muntenia region, in order to build the basis to implement a sustainable approach of tourism development, we have shown the need to use SWOT analysis results performed, of the statistical analysis and natural potential of the region. In this respect we consider that it needs to be made permanent for a suitable and permanent adaptation of the strategic action ways to the new realities, tracking the indicators that compare the volume, dynamics and structure of regional tourist traffic:

- Tourist flows, tourism demand, motivational factors etc;
- The number of Romanian / foreign tourists who turn to tourism services, the number of tourists visiting tourist sites;
- The share of domestic / foreign demand in total of the annual tourism demand, the rate of the change over time in domestic / external demand;
- Distribution by area of origin / country of foreign tourism demand and regional origin of domestic tourism demand, the index of foreign visitors, by countries of origin and geographical areas;
- The structure of tourist demand on the main means of transport used;
- The distribution of tourism demand on the main forms of accommodation, number of arrivals / overnight stays by types of tourist accommodation, for resident / non-resident tourists;
- Accommodation capacity - existent (places) / functional (thousand places - days), number of rooms / beds;
- Occupancy rate of the accommodation potential, net use index of accommodation places (capacity in operation), the average length of stay;
- The average length of stay for resident / non-resident tourists;
- The seasonality of tourism demand;
- The degree of tourists satisfaction;
- The number of visitors on the website, the number of online reservations;
- The investment amortization schedule;
- The tourism incomes level, the tourism incomes growth rate;
- The tourist average income per capita;
- The distribution of tourism companies in terms of turnover and number of employees;

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the performed analyses we established the following objectives, actions and recommendations for tourism development in the South Muntenia region:

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<sup>96</sup> Cristureanu C. *Strategies and Transactions in International Tourism*, CH Beck Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p.233.

- Rehabilitation and development of infrastructure by upgrading / rehabilitation of national, county and communal roads; the rehabilitation / establishment of sewerage and water supply throughout the region; realization of the infrastructure and developing an integrated waste management system in the region;
- Rehabilitation of cultural heritage through the restoration of heritage sites with tourism potential and making appropriate arrangements for valuing them; identification and appropriate arrangement of certain locations within or bordering the cultural objectives, where tourists can enjoy a snack or a drink, so that the visit to a museum to be both a training and relaxing opportunity; improving interpretation of exhibits for visitors, including additional language materials;
- Rehabilitation of accommodation places and the creation / development of recreational areas in order to rehabilitate the accommodation places at European standards; the development of business tourism by creating the facilities for business meetings in the hotel structures;
- Creation, modernization and diversification of leisure facilities by developing and diversifying the physical recreational infrastructure needed in order to achieve leisure offer (riding, skydiving, extreme sports, etc ) on the outskirts of cities and resorts; creating certain areas of tourist attractions - entertainment parks, folklore / culture parks; sustaining the entrance into the international tourism circuit of tourist resorts;
- Enhancement of tourist guest houses by setting the environment of tourist guesthouses and enhancement of: area specific gastronomy resources, the architectural style of the buildings / houses / guesthouses, crops, farms, certain processes, site-specific processes, hospitality style specific to the area, providing a menu made of natural and specific food products;
- Providing an offer for external activities: what one can visit, see, buy and the tourist attractions around the tourist unit;
- The rehabilitation of balneary resorts by: renovating the accommodation places at least of 3 or 4 star standards, installing some modern treatment facilities, installing some additional modern wellness facilities, beauty and recovery, developing some additional attractions for sightseeing reasons, such have facilities for playing sports and conference rooms, *health* product promotion and less *medical* product;
- Development of mountain areas to provide facilities and attractions to guests throughout the year, developing some sustainability plans for national and natural parks, by which we can identify opportunities for expansion of existing tourism activities and introducing new ones, especially cycling, sports water, birds and mammals watching, etc.
- Developing a system of marking tourist attractions across the region (input / output signals, boards, maps, signs on national and county roads, in train stations, bus stations, etc); installation of brown tourism signs printed with white letters and icons according to European sights for tourist objectives;
- Creation of tourist information centres in all cities and towns with tourism potential and information desks in the tourist attractions areas, providing

tourist information, accommodation bookings, shows ticket sales, tourist maps and publications sales

- Development of communication networks between information centres in the region and the national and international one and their standardized integration through interconnection directly targeting the development and improvement of the booking system, creating online booking networking for tourist services
- Promotion of the tourism potential by creating tourist circuits in the region and/or thematic tourist routes, allowing visitors to know both urban attractions and heritage objectives and rural lifestyle, introducing rural areas in the tourism circuit - ecotourism development by valuing local traditions, local crafts, traditional architecture, flora and fauna, organizing fairs, museum exhibitions, ethnographic and cultural events, floral exhibitions, festivals, actions and campaigns to entirely promote the local tourist product and supporting participation in this type of events both domestically and internationally; editing promotional publications and audio-visual materials; drawing some GPS maps of all authorized circuits, circuits detailed presentation, point by point and in the form of circuits; improving and updating web pages dedicated to tourism; expansion of local administration sites with a complex and revealing chapter on tourism; developing a complex database on tourism domain; developing a partnership between the public and private sectors with a view to develop and promote tourism in the region
- Awareness in hospitality and tourism sector
- target groups: the hotel and restaurants staff, tour guides, tourist information centres staff, local authorities, factors indirectly involved in tourism but in direct contact with visitors (taxi drivers, museum staff etc), students, suppliers of general education and professional services, the public in general
- the approaching and implementation ways are different, depending on the interest groups
- Developing some awareness applied programmes consisting of:
- organizing short period seminars, no more than a day or two days led by specially trained instructors
- publishing and distribution of publications, brochures, posters, etc., for different target groups
- awareness media campaigns (radio, television, print media, events) regularly organized
- tourism education in schools and colleges
- Identification and development of a tourism destination brand based on the main attributes of the region's own tourism resources, attractions and facilities, with the following steps: selecting the team / company to achieve the brand, target market assessment, products identification, adapting products to market, brand formulation, its presentation to the tourism factors, preparing the communication strategy and the creation and development of new products.



The regional strategy for tourism development represents the instrument in facilitating the implementation of ideas, local development projects, trying to be a compass for authorities, local communities. The main purpose of tourism development is to improve the quality of life and thus contributing to the preservation of local values. Our objective was to develop a strategy to comply with the national strategy, that takes into account the local specificities but also the international trends. Moreover a development strategy is indispensable in attracting development funds and the activities proposed to be undertaken in the field of tourism must comply with it. Our goal is to provide a permanent link between the development projects designed at the central level and the local ideas, for making the fundraising process more efficient.

The strategy successful implementation depends in great extent on the factors involved, special services and offers, services quality and last but not least the communication channels chosen to promote the region.

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