

THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE DESTINATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN ROMANIA: PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract: Tourism can create competitive interest for a state, thus contributing to its economic development and a proper evaluation of its products worldwide. Romania experienced the strongest development of tourism after 1989, after joining the European Union, positioning itself, step by step, as a tourist destination on the map of Europe, the membership giving it confidence. However, a few authors have indicated on the challenges facing the state in terms of sustainable tourism development and competitiveness. This study talks about issues that have affected and will continue to affect the tourism in Romania. Despite its great potential, the development of tourism in Romania remains hampered by many problems such as the image of the destination, the development of infrastructure, training and education of the workforce. In this study we offer a series of arguments for the benefit of its tourism potential, underlining the perspectives, opportunities and risks connected with its global integration.

JEL classification: Z32, 052, L83, O10

Key words: tourist competitiveness; tourist destination; Romania; sustainable development of tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the economic industry that has sustainable development prospects. This can be a mode to protect, but also to stimulate the potential of a country. The tourism sector contributes positively to a country's economic development through various channels, including the fact that it is a for-profit sector that encourages the accumulation of physical and human capital and uses technology an innovation. However, tourism directly and indirectly promotes other economic industries, for example transport, hospitality or retail.

In the light of tourism, globalization denotes dramatic increases in the middle of destinations and also the distances between them. The evolution of new products and tourist destinations is one of the manifestations of the tourism industry that is moving towards an boosted productivity. International tourism conditions have changed considerably and it has become essential to address these challenges in order to remain competitive in the tourism market (Fadeeva, 2003). "Travel restrictions imposed by the

COVID-19 pandemic have suppressed the tourism sector, a key player in the economy" (Stoicea, 2021).

The Romanian economy has registered changes in the last two decades in the step of adaptation and integration in the European Union, resulting both the macroeconomic and entrepreneurial sectors (Pîrvu, 2011). In order for tourism to grow, it is required to solve all the problems related to the access infrastructure for the tourist objectives. The objectives established by this field are: emphasizing the importance of tourism and culture as a factor that can stimulate regional economic growth, respecting the provisions of the principles of sustainable development and environmental protection.

"The modern tourism is closely related to the expansion and includes an increasing number of new destinations" (Stoicea, 2020). In Romania, the modernization, relaunch and development of Romanian tourism, "as well as the creation of modern and competitive tourist products on the tourist market can be financed by European funds" (Gruescu, 2009). Tourism creates opportunities for local and regional economy growth and contributes to the creation of new jobs by capitalizing on the natural and cultural heritage specific to each of the eight development regions, including from an economic point of view and socially disadvantaged marginal areas (Cooper et al., 2009). Although tourism creates new jobs, critics say that tourism employment offers, in particular, low-paid and poorly qualified jobs (Choy, 1995).

The destination is right in the center of the travel and tourism system. The variety of products that make up the destination product, the complexity of the relationship between them and the "strengthening of this complexity due to the tendency for a large number of different stakeholders must be involved so that the destination is widely recognized as one of the most difficult products to manage and sell" (Gruescu et al., 2009). The efficiency of the destination depends on its capacity to create value, meaning the utilization of a resource to exploit outward circumstances, in order to generate revenue or to neutralize external situations susceptible to impede the flow of revenue.

The objective of this research is to determine the level of competitiveness of Romania in relation to other countries, to identify the advantages of Romania as a touristic destination and the existing problems in tourism in Romania.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Competitiveness is one of the main concerns of the economic policies, because the long-term life standard of living of each nation and region depends on the national and area economy ability to achieve and maintain a high level of productivity in those branches that are competitive in the international markets (Porter, 1993). OECD (The World Competitiveness Report, 1994) describes competitiveness as "the ability of a country or a company to generate a proportionately higher competitive income than its competitors on the world wide market". According to Kotler's opinion (2001), competitiveness is a challenge applied to all the regions and cities/resorts world wide.

Moreover, competitiveness in tourism can be seen as an indicator of the capacity to offer touristic products, in the place, in the form and at the moment when they are sought after the buyers, at prices as good or better than other bidders, in order for the consumers to obtain at least the opportunity cost of the incomes obtained from involved resources (Freebairn, 1986). Ritchie and Crouch (2003) said that the "european tourism competitiveness is closely linked tot sustainability, as the quality of touristic destination is

strongly influenced by the natural and cultural environment and the way in which it is integrated into the local community". Thus, numerous researchers have pointed out that sustainable development is a condition precedent for competitiveness: "without sustainability, competitiveness is just an illusion" (Ritchie, Crouch, 2003).

Despite the extensive literature on competitiveness, there is no clear definition or a model has not yet been developed to discuss the competitiveness of the tourist destination. There is a elementary difference between the type of the tourism product and traditional products and services. An example of competitiveness that focuses in private, on the tourism sector, that is established on the nature of the offered product that, from a perspective destination "can be seen as an amalgam of individual products and experience opportunities that combine to form a total experience of the visited area" (Murphy et al., 2000). Omerzel (2006) said that "the competitiveness of the destination appears to be linked to the destination's ability to deliver goods and services that perform better than other destinations". A large number of parameters are related to the concept of destination competitiveness. These can be "quantitative, such as the number of visitors, market share, tourism expenditure, employment, value added in the tourism industry or qualitative variables, measured such as the richness of culture and heritage, the quality of tourist services" (Omerzel, 2006).

Poon (1993) suggested four key destinations "that tourist destinations must pursue in order to be competitive: to put the environment first, to make tourism a leading sector, to strengthen distribution channels on the market and to build a dynamic private sector".

The competitiveness of a tourist destination is, on the one side, a fairly broad notion, and in contrast, an indicator quite difficult to quantify. Therefore, in 2001, The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2001) "has published the first Global Travel Competitiveness Monitor, comprising a set of indicators and indices that indicate the extent to which there is a competitive environment for tourism development in a state" (Popescu et al., 2015). This Monitor was established on a set of economic and social information, which allowed contrasts to be made between countries, these data being pooled into eight categories:

- *Price competitiveness* – the indicator for price competitiveness in tourism indicates the prices in each state, being estimated on the basis of hotel price indices and acquisition power parity;
- *Development of human capital in tourism* – the economic impact of demand, consumption, exports, imports, economic balance, total of business trips, count of arrivals and departures;
- *Infrastructure* –the rank of infrastructure progress, taking into account the particularity of the road network, sewerage and drinking water reserve infrastructure;
- *Human resource* – starting from life waiting at birth, illiteracy rate, education system, employed population, gender structure, skills and training; this indicator displays competitiveness of the human resource quality in every state;
- *Environment* –awareness of the importance of environmental protection issues by governments taking into account population density, carbon dioxide emissions and ratification of international conventions on environmental protection;
- *Opening* – visa requirements, the extent to which a country is open to international tourism, the opening of trade relations and taxes for international trade;

- *Technology* – the advance of the technical system and infrastructure with reference to the main fixed and mobile telephony lines, exports of high technology;
- *Social development* – data about newspapers, personal computers, TV-s and number of committed crimes (Popescu et al., 2015)

In order to understand the competitiveness of tourist destinations, we should consider both the basic elements of the comparative advantage and the more advanced elements that constitute a competitive advantage (Omerzel, 2006). Where comparative advantage is the resources available to a destination, competitive advantage means the ability of a destination to use those resources efficiently in the long run. The destination with a multitude of resources can sometimes be as competitive as a destination with no resources (Omerzel, 2006).

In the opinion of Popescu and his collaborators (2015), "the main resources and attractions represent one of the 5 pillars of the sustainable competitive destination model, including the primary elements that ensure the attractiveness of the destination, these factors motivating tourists to visit that destination". These resources are grouped into 7 categories: landscape and climate, culture and history, market links, mix of activities, special events, spending time and specific tourism infrastructure (Popescu et al., 2015)

Therefore, the design of the tourist product is not just about combining the multiple variants of the two types of elements: tourist resources and services, but requires a certain concept about the product.

3. METHODOLOGY TOURISM IN ROMANIA

3.1. THE ADVANTAGES OF ROMANIA AS A TOURISTIC DESTINATION

Romania has a very rich touristic potential, which entitles us to explore the potential as an inherent element of the general strategy of domestic economic development. Romania has a great variety of natural resources, such as the Black Sea which stretches on a coast of 245 km, the Danube river that crosses our territory on a length of 1075 km from 2860 km.

Tourism creates regional and local economy, growth opportunities and contributes to "creating new jobs by capitalizing on the natural cultural heritage specific to each of the eight development regions, including economically and socially disadvantaged marginal areas" (Gruescu et al., 2010).

Among the most representative tourist areas of Romania, there are some with special characteristics (Turismul României 2018-2020. Breviar statistic, 2021/ Romania's Tourism 2018-2020. Statistical Abstract, 2021):

- ✓ Bucharest – the capital of Romania, the largest political, industrial, administrative and cultural center of Romania;
- ✓ The Carpathian Mountains, by their extent, the originality and beauty of the mountain landscapes, the richness of the mineral waters, etc ;
- ✓ The Romanian Black Sea coast;
- ✓ Danube Delta –the richest wildlife park in Europe with over 300 species of birds, 60 species of fish;
- ✓ Bucovina, internationally famous for its monastiers and churches;

- ✓ Maramureş -Oaş, one of the most original historical-ethnographic areas of the country;
- ✓ Oltenia, an important touristic area, located between the Southern Carpathians and Danube;
- ✓ Transylvania, known since the Roman conquest;
- ✓ Central Moldova;
- ✓ Danube;
- ✓ Banat, ancient heart of living and Romanian culture.

One of Romania's major objectives is to promote the touristic potential and create the necessary infrastructure to "improve the country's image as a tourist destination and, therefore, its starting point is the premise that Romania has a very diverse, harmonious and symmetrical potential that offers the possibility to practice the full range of forms of tourism throughout the year" (Gruescu, Pîrvu, Nanu, 2010).

3.2. TOURISM IN ROMANIA IN THE POST-COMMUNIST PERIOD – ADVANTAGES AND OPPORTUNITIES.

After 1990, Romania's outbound tourism increased significantly due to the opening of borders and the desire of Romanians to travel abroad. Tourist trips were made, in particular, to the countries of Western Europe which, until then, represented not only the forbidden fruit, but also the mirage of general well-being. The number of Romanians who were able to travel abroad after 1990 was not high enough for several reasons: difficulties in obtaining transit visas and / or residence permits, difficulties in earning a living, lack of financial means, etc.

Moreover, the number of tourists who visited Romania in the early 1990s was relatively small, because there was no integrated strategy to promote Romania as a brand or as a tourist destination. Among the factors that have contributed to this include "the deterioration of transport infrastructure, the difficult access of tourists to various tourist destinations, the poor quality of services and last but not least, the increasing competition from neighboring countries and / or touristic destinations" (Greece, Bulgaria , Turkey, Croatia, etc.) compared to the poor supply of Romanian hotels in the first years after the fall of communism (Postelnicu, 2018).

Table no. 1 Arrivals of foreign tourists in touristic reception structures

Nr crt	2019	%	2020	%
1.	Germany	11	Germany	15
2.	Israel	9	Italy	9
3.	Italy	8	Hungary	5
4.	USA	6	United Kingdom	5
5.	Hungary	6	Poland	5
	The rest of the world	60	The rest of the world	61

Source: WTTC, 2021 www.wttc.org

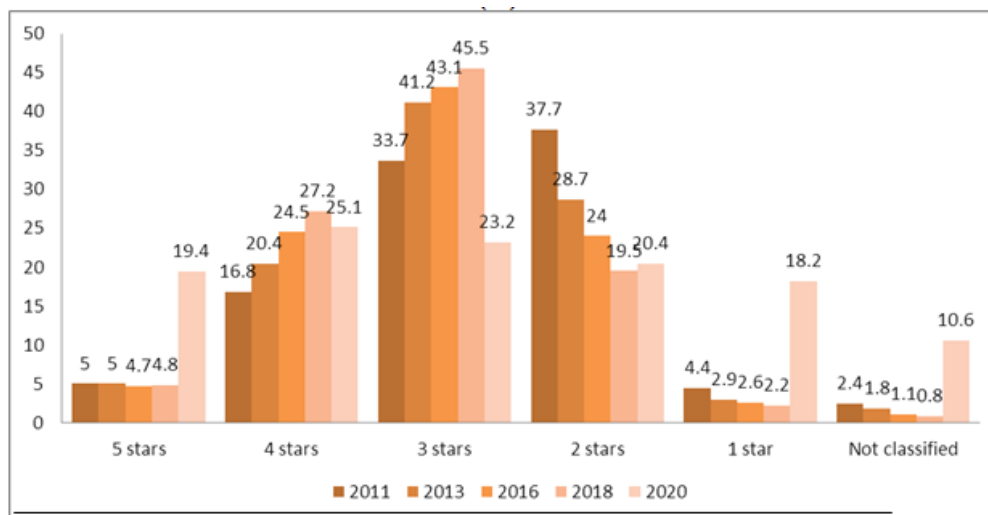
Romania's ability to attract tourists is important, especially since they come from countries where economic conditions are better. According to the Annual Research Report prepared by the World Tourism Organization in 2021, 11% of all foreign tourists who have visited Romania in 2019 were from Germany, in 2020 reaching 15% of their total. A percentage of 9% represented the tourists from Israel in 2019, from Italy in 2020 and tourists from Hungary, United Kingdom and Poland chose to travel to Romania, each country representing a percentage of 5% of the total of foreign tourists.

Table no. 2 Departures of Romanian tourists

Nr crt	2019	%	2020	%
1.	Hungary	14	Bulgaria	20
2.	Greece	12	Hungary	13
3.	Italy	12	Italy	12
4.	Bulgaria	10	United Kingdom	8
5.	Spain	8	Greece	7
	The rest of the world	44	The rest of the world	40

Source: WTTC, 2021 www.wttc.org

In 2019, Romanians chose to spend their holidays in Hungary, representing 14% of all Romanian tourists, 12% of all the Romanian tourists traveled to Greece and 12% in Italy. In 2020, Bulgaria was in the top of Romanians' preferences, about 20% of all the Romanian tourists choosing this destination for the holiday, 13% of all of Romanian tourists chose Hungary as a holiday destination and Italy ranked third, with a percentage of 12%.



Source: <https://insse.ro/cms/ro/tags/anuarul-statistic-al-romaniei>

Figure no.1 Indices of net use of accommodation capacity in terms of comfort categories, (%)

According to the National Institute of Statistics, in Romania, „the touristic reception structures with accommodation functions are classified by comfort categories, 10.6% not being classified, in 2020 being the highest percentage from 2011-2020, and 19.4 % of them having 5 stars, also reported in the same period ”. In 2011, 37.7% of the accommodation units in operation by comfort categories were the 2-star ones, followed by the 3-star ones, with a percentage of 33.7%, and the highest percentage of the accommodation units of 3 stars was reached in 2018, with a percentage of 45.5%. At the level of 2020, the most accommodation units in operation by comfort categories were the 4-star ones, representing 25.1% of the total accommodation units. Romania still has a relatively small number of tourists in the accommodation units belonging to the superior comfort category.

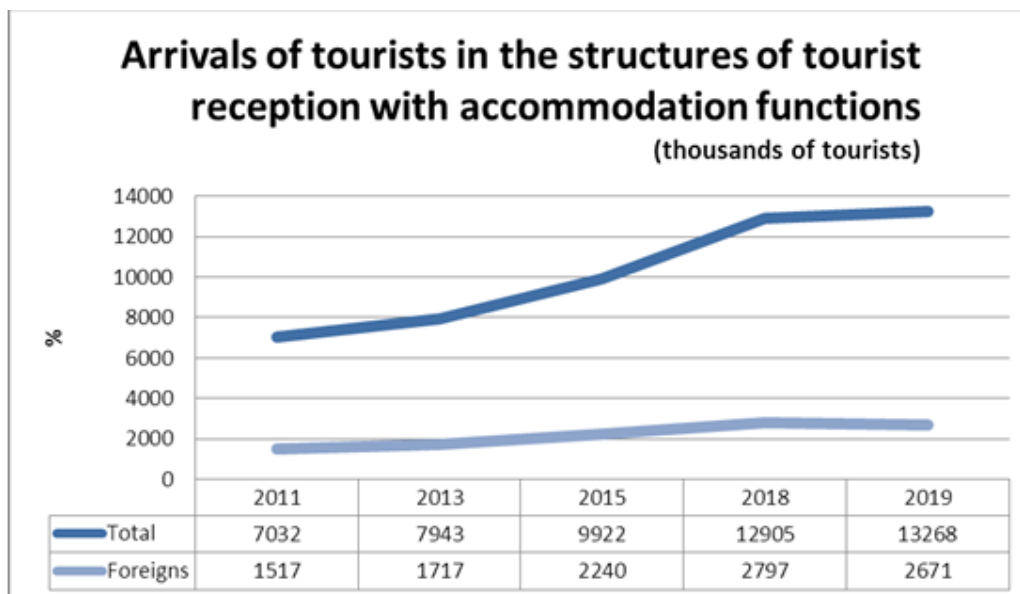
Table no. 3 Touristic reception structures with touristic accommodation functions

Touristic reception structures	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Hotels	1503	1606	1660	1685	1766	1769	1819	1636	1625	1599
Motels								231	219	214
Touristic Inns	4	3	3	5	3	3	3	4	3	3
Hostels	145	178	185	204	248	266	300	319	323	328
Touristic Villas	753	863	870	866	923	923	1093	695	709	752
Bungalows								533	557	458
Touristic chalets	147	146	152	162	196	194	225	231	222	226
Holiday villages	5	6	6	9	7	7	9	10	9	8
Campgrounds	71	84	93	105	127	120	127	58	58	61
Touristic houses								73	82	92
Camps for students and preschoolers	69	70	62	62	63	58	57	59	55	48
Touristic stops	41	39	35	35	33	38	40	47	47	43
Touristic pensions	1050	1247	1335	1323	1527	1530	1667	1709	1669	1729
Agroturistic pensions	1210	1569	1598	1665	1918	2028	2556	2821	2800	3022
Accommodations on ships	5	10	10	9	10	10	10	27	24	27
Total	5003	5821	6009	6130	6821	6946	7905	8453	8402	8610

Source: <https://insse.ro/cms/ro/tags/anuarul-statistic-al-romaniei>

In 2011, in Romania there were a number of 5003 touristic reception structures with touristic accommodation functions, this number slightly increasing every year, but reaching 8610 touristic reception structures in 2020. In 2010, hotels and motels were at the top of the ranking, with 1503 accommodation structures, and in 2020 this figure increased by 310 accommodation units. In 2020, the agroturistic pensions represented the largest number of touristic reception structures, 3022. The touristic inns are at the opposite pole of

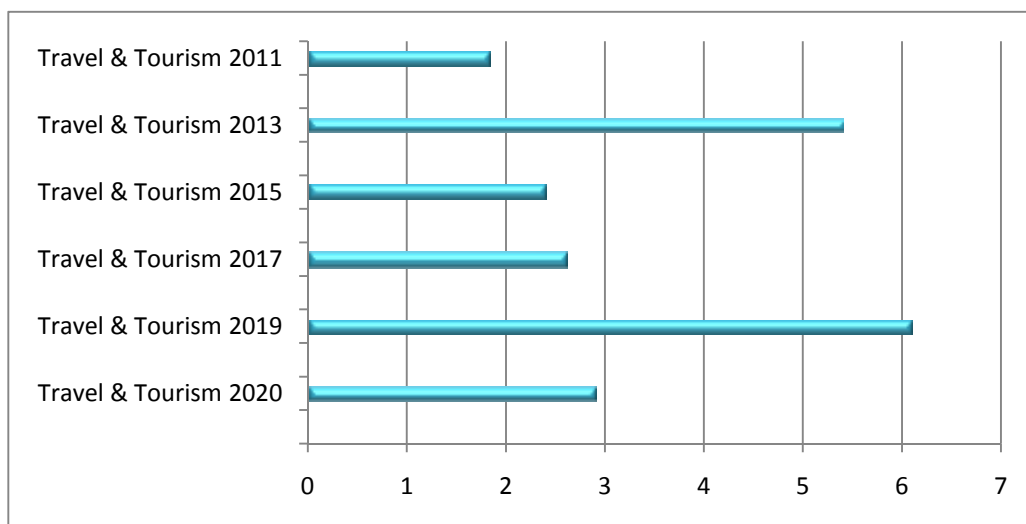
the agrotouristic pensions, there being only 4 such structures in 2010, and in 2020, remaining only 3 in the whole country.



Source: <https://insse.ro/cms/ro/tags/anuarul-statistic-al-romaniei>

Figure no. 2 Arrivals of tourists in the structures of tourist reception with accommodation functions

Foreign tourists, especially those who practice business tourism, prefer accommodation in units with a high and very high level of comfort, their number has almost doubled in the last 10 years, registering an increase from 1517 thousand tourists to 2671 thousand in the year 2020. Also, the total number of tourists staying registered the same increase of almost 100% in the same period. In 2019 it was registered a slight decrease in the number of tourists staying in touristic accommodation facilities in Romania, and in 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the travel restrictions, a very small percentage of only 16,4% of foreign tourists, compared to 2017, chose to spend stays in Romania.



Source: WTTC www.wttc.org

Figure no.3 The contribution of tourism to GDP (%)

The share of tourism revenues in the Gross Domestic Product of Romania showed a decreasing trend in the period 2015-2017, so that in 2019 a percentage of 6.1% of GDP will be registered, and in 2020, amid travel restrictions, to reach the level of 2015, with a percentage of 2.9%. In relation to the share of tourism revenues in GDP, Romania registered approximately 47% of the average of the 34 OECD member countries in 2014. The low levels achieved by our country in the tourism sector, compared to other countries with a lower potential, reflect the inability of decision makers in this sector to create sustainable policies that generate continuous development and an increase in the level of income registered in this sector.

Table no. 4 Romania's competitiveness indices in 2019

Index Country	Index of regulations in the sector	Index of environment	Index of safety and security	Index of health and hygiene	Index of the tourism prioritization process	Index of air transport	Index of environmental sustainability
Slovenia	4.3	4.3	6.1	6.2	5.1	2.6	5.4
Poland	4.2	4.3	5.6	6.3	4.2	3.2	4.2
Bulgaria	4.2	4.4	5.2	6.7	4.7	2.7	4.8
Hungary	4.2	4.3	5.8	6.6	5.1	3.4	4.8
Romania	4.0	4.1	6.0	6.1	4.1	2.7	4.4
Slovakia	4.3	4.4	5.6	6.2	4.3	2.0	4.7
Montenegro	3.9	4.6	5.6	5.8	5.0	3.2	4.7
Serbia	3.6	4.4	5.5	6.3	3.9	2.6	4.5
Albania	3.6	4.0	5.8	5.3	5.0	2.1	4.3
Macedonia	3.4	4.3	5.2	6.0	3.7	2.4	3.6
Moldavia	3.3	4.0	5.5	6.1	3.7	2.1	4.3
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.3	3.4	5.4	5.6	4.1	2.0	4.3
Croatia	4.5	3.8	5.9	6.3	4.9	3.6	5.1
Czech Republic	4.3	4.5	6.1	6.9	4.3	3.4	5.0
Ukraine	3.7	4.1	4.8	6.5	4.3	2.7	3.9

Source: calculated based on the information available from The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019, p52-53, World Economic Forum

<https://www.weforum.org/travel-and-tourism-competitiveness-report-2019/country-profiles/#economy=ROU>

Romania is competitive with some of its competitors in terms of prices, environment, openness to trade and less in terms of technology, human resources and infrastructure.

Compared to Bulgaria, Romania is more competitive in terms of safety and security and the environment.

Europe and Eurasia remain the most competitive region in the world in terms of tourism.

The Balkans and Eastern European countries have a lower share of GDP, in travel and tourism, than most European countries, but the countries here are most dependent on the arrival of international tourists.

Serbia has been the best in the region due to significant repairs to its active environment, T&T policies and ground and air infrastructure.

Table 5. Romania's previous performance

Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Edition	2011	2015	2017	2019
Rank	77/142	66/141	68/136	56/140
Score	4,08	3,8	3,8	4,0

Source: <https://www.weforum.org/reports>

From this table we can see the increase of Romania's competitiveness in 2019, this being on the 56th place out of 140, and the score being 4.0, compared to 2015 and 2017 when it had a score of 3.8.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Over the last two decades, international tourism has grown remarkably. Despite a lot of changes and shocks at a global level, international tourism, although vulnerable, has proven to be particularly resilient. Being a source of many opportunities, international tourism occupies a high position in the agenda of all decision makers, having priority in all national economic growth policies (Postelnicu, Dabija, 2018).

Now, achieving the sustainable development is essential for stimulating economic performance and the economic development in the contemporary societies. Moreover, this study reveals the fact that the ways of measuring competitiveness are different depending on the used concept, using specific economical indicators. The economic crisis has forced the governments to impose austerity measures that have led to decreasing living standards and has manifested itself by reducing the development rate of entrepreneurship and increasing the number of bankruptcies, affecting Romania's economy.

The major resources and attractions are one of the 5 pillars of the sustainable competitive destination example, including the primary elements that ensure the competitiveness of the destination, these factors motivating tourists to visit that destination (Popescu et al., 2015). Thus, a destination that will manage to offer visitors a unique life experience, proposing something different from the daily routine, will have a competitive advantage (Ritchie, Crouch, 2003). The management of the tourist destination is connected to the organizational structure, marketing, quality of services and experiences offered, research-information, human resources management, capital, visitor management, resource management (Popescu et al., 2015).

The competitiveness of a tourism company requires, to a large extent, market research, competitive research of the environment and competitors. Success in business depends very much on the competitive advantage over other manufacturers of travel services (Albu, 2015). Creating a competitive tourism product is one of the most important areas of action. The development of tourism products will focus not only on the integration of various elements and components of the offer (Albu, 2015), for example attractions, tourist accommodation, services, communications infrastructure, but also the development of modern infrastructure, improving the quality of existing products and investment efficiency.

Based on these findings, the future research directions will aim at determining the specific values of indicators that characterizes the Aggregate Statistical System at the level of each development region, identifying the similarities and differences between these regions of Romania.

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