

THE SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE TOURISM DESTINATION – CONCEPTUAL–METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS. CASE STUDY: THE NORTHERN OLTENIA OR OLTENIA BENEATH THE MOUNTAIN

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Abstract: The SWOT analysis may be used for a tourism destination in order to turn into good account its tourism potential, as well as for the tourism enterprise and product.

Due to this fact, after different SWOT analysis were finished concerning the tourism regions / areas in Romania, there were detected along the time some aspects which may have negative implications upon the next stage in the marketing of any destination.

Starting from these observations, a conceptual-methodological approach of one destination represents a hard work which must have as its starting point the concept itself of “destination”.

In the assessment of the destination of Oltenia de Sub Munte, for a better understanding of such analyses, there will be mainly considered the tourism product, respectively the „cultural tourism” (or the "cultural resource / artificial component „within the destination), without stipulating a certain market; and certain actions / generic activities, as strong points / weak points / opportunities / threats, valid for any type of tourism or tourism product.

The accomplishment of a SWOT analysis will have no strategic results before being completed with the elements of attractiveness of a destination which confer identity to it and before settling a marketing objective.

Tool of the strategic management / marketing with practical valances and strategic results, the SWOT analysis represents in tourism as well a way to understand the enterprise and environment. It may be used also for a tourism destination in order to turn into good account its tourism potential, by potential being understood “the totality of the natural and anthropical resources and infrastructure which may be general (water, sewerage system, roads) and specific (systems of accommodation etc).

Because the so-called analysis is “just a link of a witting strategic process” and technical approaches are numerous, there must be made all the steps:

- assignation of the profile of the firm (type of activity, geographical area, state of the competition environment, management orientation);
- identification and appreciation of the environment factors;

- elaboration of an anticipation;
- appreciation of the forces / weaknesses in finances, marketing, production, organization etc. of the enterprise;
- enunciation of the strategic solutions;
- selection of the strategies;
- preparation of the implementation plans.

Due to this fact, on the one hand, and complexity and specific features of the tourism activity, on the other hand, with regard to a destination (region, area, country) the SWOT analysis must be done also for the tourism enterprise and product by considering some elements (see table 1). So, in the analysis of the tourism product and destination, an important role play the tourism resources and conditions with which the region is “endowed” to which there are added firstly the creativity of the one who forms the tourism services package while the important role in the SWOT analysis of the tourism enterprise / organisation is represented by marketer’s skills to know to choose the target market / with its needs and necessities according to these resources emphasized in the first place due to the emotional factors.

Accordingly, after different SWOT analysis were finished concerning the tourism regions / areas in Romania, there were detected along the time some aspects which may have negative implications upon the next stage in the marketing of any destination, naming:

e) In most of the cases, the emphasis was not put on those representative elements which may determine positive changes but all the possible and impossible aspects were enumerated and so being accomplished an exhaustive analysis;

f) Due to the confusion (or lack in gravity) regarding the tourism concepts and terminology (way of tourism / tourism product / tourism destination), the elements were repeated resulting a shallow analysis – for many times just a simple list (enumeration) with elements / insignificant aspects for a “quality model” (example: emphasis of the natural potential and, in the same time, national parks, flora and fauna as if these were not included into the Natural potential!);

g) Repeated confusions between the Strong points and Opportunities or between the Weak points and Threats;

h) In all the SWOT analysis, there are present two elements (both in the “weak points” and “threats”) namely the “money” and “infrastructure”.

Starting from these observations, a conceptual-methodological approach of one destination represents a hard work which must have as its starting point the concept itself of “destination” which is a complex concept and represents “one or several products and in the same time a place with natural, anthropical and socio-cultural resources (human beings with their traditions, customs, culture etc.), infrastructure and tourism accommodation structures”.

Obviously, the Northern Oltenia or Oltenia Beneath the Mountain represents an important tourism destination for Romania. Even if it does not present that competitional advantage of Bucovina (were the brand of the region is given by the churches or monasteries with churches with exterior frescos), or of Southern Transylvania (where the Transylvanian Saxon culture left its un-confoundable mark especially in the architecture of the churches and so determining a brand of this region) or of Maramures (where the non-connoisseurs believe that the brand comes from the wooden church but in fact they are failing to remember that the harmonious joint of the cultural material and immaterial, respectively natural patrimony represents the oneness

element of the region), Oltenia might become “an excellent destination” among the tourism destination in Romania only if there would be better pointed out the elements specific to the brand. All these become in a SWOT analysis the Strong aspects and must be placed in the centre of both the product policy (creation of new products and/or development of the existing ones) and destination marketing activity and “be able to assure the expected success to the provider of the respective products (services)”.

Table 1

Determining elements in the SWOT analysis for the tourism product, destination and enterprise

Tourism product	Tourism destination (city, region, country)	Tourism enterprise / organisation
1) preponderant form of tourism specific to the tourism product	1) type / form of practiced tourism / practiced, position / geographical conditions	1) the profile (type / form of tourism), region and geographical conditions
2) identification and appreciation of the factors of differentiation / oneness of the product on the target market	2) identification of the allurements factors by which the destination may be positioned	2) identification of the specific factors which distinguish the enterprise from the competitors
3) identification of the main factors (rational and/or emotional) which determine the product position towards the competitors	3) identification and appreciation of the factors which stimulate / impede the destination development (political, economical, socio-cultural, technological etc.)	3) identification and appreciation of the exterior factors (political, economical, socio-cultural, technological etc.)

For a better understanding of such analyses in the assessment of the destination of Oltenia de Sub Munte, there will be mainly considered the touristic product, respectively the „cultural tourism” (or the "cultural resource / artificial component „within the destination), without stipulating a certain market; and certain actions / generic activities, as strong points / weak points / opportunities / threats, valid for any type of tourism or touristic product will be underlined in the "organization / enterprise" chapter, at the region level.

Strong points - S

A first strong point is the fact that Oltenia means Brâncuși! Oltenia means the place from where the one who changes the art of sculpture (and who is considered by many as French!) started. Perhaps it is the only geographic region of the world where the work of Brâncuși is present outdoors, in the fortress – at Târgu Jiu – or in the space dedicated to the great artists - within the museum of Craiova and, where the memorial home dedicated to this great artist is located! However, you do not "feel" and "see" Brâncuși!

In comparison to other touristic destinations in România, the two-words based characterization of Oltenia destination is much easier achieved; it can be considered a "region of contrasts" since, although it is Brâncuși's country, excepting the punctual elements, nothing from Târgu Jiu or Craiova makes you think about him (only on the national road, a announciator board in a quite deteriorated condition, pointing to the direction that has to be followed in order to reach Brâncuși's village, or to reach Târgu Jiu City, or the museum of Craiova - and thus you can see „Brâncuși”).

The second strong point can be found in architecture: Oltenia gives to Țării Românești (The Romanian County) “the oldest patterns of religious tricorne-level buildings” owed to the constructions' campaign initiated by „the scholar monk Nicodim and his monks – Coșuștea - Crivelnic, Vodița, (both in Mehedinți county), Tismana (Gorj county) are kept today only as archeological evidences.”

The third strong point is represented by the "cule" (there are also in The Western Muntenia). This model of construction, which represents a „fortified civil building - a tower residence”, has been provided by the bell-tower of the church of Strehaia, raised by de Matei Basarab, or the bell-tower, even stronger, from Cerneți. In other words, a laical - religious, residence-fortress combination, that makes you think to the fortified churches located in the South part of Transilvania!.

Another strong point of the destination is the fact that Oltenia is a native land of „Călușar” (n.t. a native Romanian folk dance)! The dance is included on the list of UNESCO worldwide patrimony (the non-material cultural patrimony).

Other strong points, that may be considered generic for the entire forms of tourism or the touristic products for this destination, are the following:

1) an appropriate geographical location (the shortest way to the core of the country - from Muntenia to Sibiu - or from Bulgaria through Romania to The Western part of Europe, crosses the territory of this region). In spite of this fact (and also, in spite of a potential good national road network - a grid of national roads of the E-V axis respectively on N-S axis which does not appear in many regions of the country- to which we may add the bridge from Calafat), Oltenia is not a tourism destination for the main markets that provide visitors for Romania.

2) the scenery of the Oltenia's village which proves to be much more „accurate (authentic, „untouched” by urbanism) in comparison to other regions of the country (it is similar to the South of Transilvania, dominated by the fortified churches). For example, the rural scenery between Polovragi and Baia de Fier, Novaci and Crasna „un-attacked” yet by the garish colours of other regions, by the residences "enriched" by little towers or by palaces with stone lions laid on marble slabs, or by the villages lost among the hills of the Northern Mehedinți Region. In these areas, the rural museums (such as those from Curțișoara or Măldărăști) can represent real engines for an appropriate preservation of the village, in the attempt to create and develop a new identity.

3) The touristic traffic which is quite low (the reduced interest for this region can become a strong point, since it does not stimulate the chaotic development, characteristic for the Bran area, for example)*.

Another strong point for this destination, but which mainly refers to the enterprise / organization / association is represented by the existence of certain initiatives of cooperation of the communes located in the North part of Oltenia in order to set up a communal association of promotion, being thus able to prove that the tourism in this area can be an „opportunity” for the entire region (other examples are those from the

area of Gorj county – for the adventure tourism, or the public local authorities of Vâlcea, with much more projects in tourism, or Oltenia Tourism Association, the editor of one of the most beautiful touristic promotion materials about this region).

Considering all the strong points above, we can state that the destination „Oltenia de sub Munte” is actually a “multi-destination”, based on two main characteristics (the fair combination between the natural potential and the cultural one and the forms of tourism that can be practiced without great efforts, related to the financial or temporal perspectives) and also in compliance with two valuable natural resources (on the one hand, the Danube - which, excepting the region of the Danube's Delta, provides here a unique scenery: Cazanele - and, on the other hand, at the opposite pole, the mountain heights - especially the Parâng), by means of which we can "pack" several touristic products, from the cruise tourism to the mountain tourism, from the active tourism to the viticulture tourism, harmoniously combined with the cultural patrimony!

The weak points - W

The first weak point of this destination is the lack of an identity, of a regional brand.

Although this destination includes many components/ attributes that can make up a whole image (for example, the churches or the monasteries – Oltenia being the second region according to the number of religious monuments - the "cule"-s, the ceramic - from Horezu up to Oboga, the spa resorts etc.) and which, in certain conjunctures, become dominant, they cannot be naturally regarded as a brand of his region. The lack of the identity of this region is even worsened by the particular traditional holidays which keep on reducing their old significance, and the best example, in this case being the „Cocoșul de Horezu” ("Horezu Cock") (although almost 40 editions were celebrated, the event - an image of the traditional culture of Oltenia is being transformed more and more in an "opportunity" when, at the same time, there can be seen and even traded genuine or fake ceramics of Horezu, old or newer clothes, different objects for household, etc.).

The second weak point is represented by the unbalance between / from this region / counties from the point of view of the touristic potential. If near the road that connects Râmnicu Vâlcea City and Târgu Jiu City (with small deviations up to 20 km), there is a richness of monuments / touristic attractions, in the south part of the same area the situation is completely different. Actually, the regions, from this point of view, is limited to two micro-regions: The northern part of Oltenia, and respectively, the Danube Couloir

The third weak point is the attitude or the lack of interest of the local “decisional factors”.

Crossing the region from East to West or from North to South, the immediate impression is that the tourism does not represent / cannot represent a solution for the local economic development, since there is a great discrepancy between the natural and cultural potential of this region and its specific infrastructure (structures of touristic accommodation) or general infrastructure, a discrepancy which is completed by a state of "pending" of the solutions from the exterior of the region, that characterize the decisional and execution levels.

Other weaknesses of the destination Oltenia refer in fact to the lack or bad marketing activity especially the one of promotion and partnership, namely:

- the absence of the tourism information centres in net points such as Râmnicu Vâlcea, Târgu Jiu, Craiova, Orșova, Drobeta Turnu Severin and in the rest of the region

also (excepting the Vâlcea County where there are visible preoccupations of this kind and also limited efforts regarding the active tourism of the Mountain Rescue Team from Târgu Jiu who assures the tourism information to the visitors and protect the parks from the region in the purpose of the protected areas);

- the absence of a panel system (the panels, indicators etc. for monuments along the national roads are very important to the “non-connoisseurs” transiting this region);

- the absence of the promotional materials (for example, in the Târgu Jiu park, the Silent Table and Kiss Gate present no material about Brâncuși or his work!) or the bad quality of the materials (the information do not succeed to “hit” the market, the text is way too much complicated and involve a great effort to be understood due to the multitude of the details etc.)

- the lack of the public-public and public-private partnerships or the poor representation of the international partnerships (cross-border programmes) regarding objectives which aims the infrastructure, human resources (excepting the collaboration between the local authorities and private sector in Horezu in the purpose of holding a course with the participation of the international specialists), financial resources or marketing (few exception is the booklet edited by the Oltenia Tourism Association in collaboration with an Italian region).

Opportunities – O

The main opportunities of the destination Oltenia are the ones referring especially to the socio-cultural environment, namely:

- 1) the supersaturation of the classic destination for the people from Bucuresti (Valea Prahovei - Braşov-Bran). The distance between Bucureşti-Braşov is almost the same to the one between Bucureşti - Râmnicu Vâlcea and only after 45 km, in Horezu, you may say that you are in the middle of Oltenia Beneath the Mountain!

- 2) the more and more obvious trend in Europe to turn to good account the cultural patrimony of the nations from this region (the year 2008 declared “The year of the intercultural dialogue” is propitious for Romania who has a strategy and program coordinator in this purpose. This region, so rich in its material and immaterial cultural patrimony, may promote itself due to the well-known art of Brâncuși where, beside specific elements to the folk Romanian art there may be identified traditional elements of the African art!).

- 3) the tendency to change continuously the perception about Romania in the tourism international press, starting with 2007, the year Romania became full member of the European Union.

The increase of the trust level in Romania, fact which occurred after our country adhered to the Euro-Atlantic structures, influenced in a positive manner firstly the business tourism. Also, the cultural tourism – strong point of the destination Oltenia, grew during the last year.

- 4) the development of some new forms of the balneary tourism. In the last years, the market of the balneary tourism suffered a dramatic transformation from healing to preventing! If this change takes place in almost every classic balneary destination and in the absence of some natural healing factors, in Oltenia the change may be supported firstly by the value of the healing natural factors!

- 5) the tendency to transform some spaces from the precincts of the monuments into spaces for tourism.

In many countries, the monuments of architecture were preserved by changing their destination, developing in their precincts small museums, tourism information centres,

accommodation structures etc. (for example, “pousada” from Portugal or „parador” from Spain). The possibility to transform the historical houses into accommodation places (in a region where almost every bigger monastery has guest rooms!) into cultural centres (for example Călnic from the Alba County), to open tourism information centres (monuments from Sibiu County) or hold some cultural events are as much opportunities to attract the tourists and develop the destination.

Threats – T

The main threats, as the opportunities for destination Oltenia, refer to the socio-cultural environment:

1) while in Europe there is more and more expressed the tendency to turn into good account the cultural patrimony of the European nations, in Romania, during the last period of time, there could be noticed a decrease of the interest for the cultural and natural patrimony of the community even of the members of that respective community. Unfortunately, we are not proud of our history and symbols and abandon them for what we import from the Occident and the passive attitude towards the natural patrimony which is attacked and/or destroyed (for example, Râncea) has irremediable effects on long term. Two examples are self-evident: Vidra – surrounded by a magnificent nature and Săcelu – the only healing source placed less than 30 km away from Târgu Jiu, both of them being now abandoned.

2) the demographic environment in continuous changing (the complete depopulation of the villages and migration towards the urban settlements or abroad) with implications upon the material or immaterial cultural patrimony. The abandonment of the village by the inhabitants and economical state which gets worst in the majority of the destinations are phenomena that create an immediate pressure upon the individual allowing no plans for the long term and lead to resignation (for example, the monastery of Crasna, of a rare beauty which hardly can be found even in the well-known monasteries is surrounded by small and shabby houses, fact that makes you “cast aside” its value fast).

3) the growth of the competitiveness of the tourism products (for example, the case of Transylvania) than enhance the urban tourism combined with the immaterial cultural patrimony from certain rural regions (Mărginimea Sibiului, Țara Moșilor etc.).

Or, the lasting administration of the destinations is essential for the tourism development, especially by planning the efficient use of the space and land, controlling the development and deciding to invest in infrastructure and services. By guaranteeing that the new tourism development is by scale and time adequate to the needs of the local community and natural environment, the lasting administration may consolidate on long term the economic performances and competition position of a destination. This requires both a supporting frame to involve all the interested parties from the regional and local level and an efficient structure to facilitate the partnership and operative leadership.

4) the impossibility to use in totality the structural funds to rehabilitate the historical monuments, protect the environment, especially the protected areas (natural and national parks, the Mehedinti Mountains Geological Park). The main problem is the lack of the training of some specialised people to elaborate projects, more precisely the lack of a broad vision about the region.

The accomplishment of a SWOT analysis that enhances the elements considered significant for a destination has practical valances but will have no strategic results before being completed with the elements of attractiveness of a destination which

confer identity to it, before settling a marketing objective (for example, to get into a market / market segment), before settling the product and pack up strategy and then, with the help from the partnership and promotional strategy, there either will be changed the negative perception that the past visitors have about the destination or the potential visitors will become aware of the value of the tourism destination.

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