

THE GROWTH AND PROMOTION OF THE TOURISM IN SOUTH-WEST OLTENIA REGION

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Abstract: The paper analyze different facilities and services that have to exist when wanting to build a strategy in the field of tourism, with an application in the South-West Oltenia, focusing on the need of implementation of the quality in achieving touristic products. Also, it draws attention upon the importance of a touristic destination continuously, passing through all the stages of the development process in order for the destination to be revisited and for touristic products to remain valid and attractive.

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Introduction

Romania has represented an important touristic destination for the zonal market, promoting especially the summer and spa resorts, the cultural programmes and the monasteries in the North of Moldavia and Bucovina. The Romanian touristic offer has not much changed, becoming during the years uncompetitive in comparison with the exigencies of touristic demand and with the similar touristic products on the international market. Romania has been a desired destination for foreign tourists and has had a developed internal tourism functioning on a legal basis(The Tourism Law) since the period between the Great Wars. In the first half of the 60's our country has known a great growth of the tourism accommodation capacities in the Black Sea summer resorts. At the beginning of the 70's Romania was already known on the market of the main European countries-generators of tourists, especially Germany, Great Britain, The Scandinavian countries, France, Italy, Austria, Belgium etc. Starting with the 80's our country has lived a strong decrease of foreign tourists arrivals, a tendency which has been maintained, under attenuated form, in the 90's too. The main cause is the lack of investment funds directed to the development, modernization and reactivation of specific infrastructures, as a consequence of the slow and complicated process of privatization, the appliance of an inadequate fiscal policy, the absence of some facilities in the domain of banking credits etc.

From a financial point of view, the state hasn't done much to stimulate the growth of quality and the attraction of investors in the tourism domain. Comparatively Greece and Turkey have created a proper climate for the investors who want to develop business in tourism. The credits are reasonable and the conditions are excellent, not to

remind of the support the state offers through the generous sums destined to advertising. The main branches of the specific industry that Romania can count on are, according to World Travel & Tourism Council – WTTC, the spa, cultural, rural and business tourism. The increase of contributions to GDP from travels and tourism should raise from 4,8% to 5,8% in the next 10 years. Presently the tourism cumulated contribution both direct and indirect to GDP is estimated to 4,8%. Currently the Romanian tourism is still affected by the excessive taxation, lack of real facilities illogical measures and an excessive bureaucracy (aspect highlighted by the WTTC study).

Nationally despite the struggle with the obvious hardship generated by the growth of international competition in the touristic sector and the reduced capacities of adapting the touristic structures to the national and international market growing exigencies, a long period of time the Romanian national organisms have not been preoccupied by a professional approach to the theme proposed, proving an irresponsible attitude to the way in which these must be evaluated and managed.

The strategies of development of the tourist sector in Romania have proved to be weak and unperformant. The studies elaborated within OMT based on the market information and analysis realized in the European countries- great generators of touristic fluxes, and also the investigations done on foreign tourists who visit Romania, describe the Romanian touristic offer as such:

- All types of programmes offered by Romania meet a great competition on West-European markets;
- The Romania offer is relatively limited to a few resorts, and within these ones, only to some hotels;
- The offers are inferior to those on competition destinations as Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece or Cyprus;
- Recreation/leisure/hiking/traveling does not raise to the level of other destinations offers;
- The techno-road infrastructure is improper
- The absence of superior comfort hotels in the big cities and in the resorts of international appeal;
- From the point of view of the rapport quality-price Romania has stopped being an attractive touristic market

To stand up for these there is the unjustified ample list of the weak points of the tourist sector at national level: the reduce standards of the substructure in tourism, the poor quality of accommodation and of the other services connected to it, the basic undeveloped substructure, the missing of sport tourism capacity, the insufficient promotion of the tourist products, nationally and internationally, as much as at regional level: reduce number of tour-operators, low number of tourist and cultural events, a too much weight between the ways of tourism of the social tourism coming from the state.

From the point of view of the rapport quality-price Romania has stopped being an attractive touristic market

In this context a reorientation of the strategies of touristic structures amelioration on the basis of a socio-economical analysis at the national level and the identification of the major tendencies of the sector are to be realized. It is also obvious that besides the development and modernization of a rich and competitive touristic offer we need measures of improvement and development of market and advertising

activity, of integration in the global tourism, of ensuring a proper legal code and a stimulating and stable financial-fiscal area.

Developing a regional tourism policy. South West Oltenia Region

Factor conditions form the basis for creating or enhancing the competitive position of a destination. They comprise 'inherited, endowed or basic' factors as well as 'advanced factors' such as that created by investment. These factors are important where the relative abundance of natural, and cultural resources, capital and infrastructure resources and human resources compared to other competitive destinations are crucial to tourism success.

The factor conditions then in turn lead to an assessment of market size and structure and an assessment of the demand conditions the destination is experiencing. Consumer sophistication not only improves the demand conditions, but positively influences advanced factors, and firm strategies.

Firm strategy and the degree of rivalry between regional companies also play important roles in the development of regional competitive advantage. Cost leadership, differentiation and focused cost or differentiation in market segments are the generic strategies used by firms. Porter has been strongly criticized for a lack of attention to the dynamics within the firm, a 'resource based view' critique. Assessing the goals and strategies required to conduct a business depends upon leadership and the internal structure of the organization concerned. Assessment of the degree of rivalry assists in determining whether a competitive or a cooperative culture exists between firms in the industry value chain. The nature and existence of regional champions, whether the region's industries are competitive or monopolistic and the rate of formation and failure of new business enterprises, along with the government's attitude to intra-regional, inter-regional and international competition are all significant features of this Diamond attribute.

Increased levels of quality from demanding tourists, along with the location of **related and supportive industries** such as hotels, restaurants and the entertainment sector (food, fashion, culture, sport, banks, personal services) lead to the destination improving its competitive positioning. It seems to be this attribute that has most to offer our research. All four attributes contribute to a destination's level of competitiveness and help to provide an overview on the nature of competitive advantage in regional tourism. To supply a facility or a quality service for tourists is a fundamental part of a product development, especially when dealing with smaller and less accessible market fields. In these circumstances, the more the touristic products is of better quality, the more satisfied the tourist is of his experience during the holiday and the more possible it is for him to stay longer, to come back and tell others about this area and be concerned with local inheritance.

In order to be effective, the quality has to be provided for the entire touristic chain, from the first marketing messages, to supply, accommodation, food, orientation, town planning, etc. Each of these products can partly contribute to the visitor's general satisfaction. Consequently, if a product is of less quality, the tourist's level of satisfaction will decrease. This proves the need for a well organized and coordinated touristic strategy, for encouraging all the partners to work together for increasing the general quality of touristic destination and for making sure that this quality is maintained and if the case, increased while tourism is developed.

Every strategy should have an objective for the tourism kind it wants – who wants to draw, who has benefits on local plan, how will it interact with the other economic fields and natural and cultural resources. This should be decided after the dialogue and potential groups of trustees in order to make sure that the objective is both achievable and operational. Obviously, for an area intending to use its cultural and natural resources for tourism development, should be based on the „three” pillars of sustainment.

Sustained tourism:

(according to the European Agenda 21)

Economic sustainment:

- Competitive enterprises and tourism
- Manpower availability and necessary production resources
- Economic cohesion and welfare
- Annual income

Ecologic sustainment:

- Production patterns and favourable consumption for the surrounding environment, along the entire touristic chain;
- Sustained management and natural resources preservation as a basis for installing tourism and its activities;

Social and moral sustainment:

- New jobs (number, quality, competence and equal opportunities);
- Social cohesion and justice;
- Tourism for everybody
- Quality tourism; money value and respecting tourists' interests
- Contribution and humanity development (peace, knowledge and education)
- Ethical respect and behaviour regarding population and individuals confronted with tourism

One of the keys for developing a tourism policy is finding an adequate balance between the tourists number for this area and its absorption capacity. If the number of tourists is too low, the profit can be too small in comparison with the necessary investment, if the number of tourists is too high, the tourism will end-up by destroying the thing that has drawn visitors from the beginning. Overcrowded places lead to the destruction of the surrounding environment, dismemberment of local communities, reducing the visitors' satisfaction and maybe low profits.

The capacity of absorption has influences upon several levels: ecological, social and even psychological. Sometimes, these different elements influence each other – a degraded area, for example, will create the impression of overcrowdings. Still, inevitably, we have to take different subjective decisions since it is almost impossible to draw-up a pure objective, taking into consideration all the complex interrelations. This is valid especially for the social and psychological absorption capacities, which can be substantially different in accordance with the persons involved.

Still, there are some general guidelines for certain fields. For example, in the case of *environment capacity* of a new destination, we have to take into consideration the following:

- the size of the tourism area (for example: 100 ha of the 10.000 ha from the total available).
- environment sensibility

- distribution patterns for the savage fauna (far away or in a low extension specific area for reproducing or feeding himself?)
- behavior sensibility of target animal species (low or high tolerance to human presence)
- traffic rushing estimated levels along access routes.
The capacity of the area to face floods and pollution.

The social and psychological factors include:

- acceptable visualization patterns (an uniformous distribution or concentration is acceptable)
- choice visualization (there will be few places to visit or will we have the opportunity to choose the places to visit?)
- visitors' satisfaction levels (visitors' opinion about the respective touristic objective)
- tourists' motivations
- landscape topography
- the report between the tourists and the number of inhabitants at that time.

Once estimated the possible number of tourists and the maximum absorption capacity, it should now be possible to establish a target regarding the number of tourists as a whole. Its purpose is to guide those involved in tourism business towards the target they should establish and give them an indication for measuring performances. While destination develops it will be necessary to make a continuous revision and adaptation of the objective.

The general objective will help us establish the type of services and facilities. During the situation analysis, we have to clarify what is convenient and where, what exists, and which aspects are in the category « what we need », rather than in the category « what is nice to have ». The first category should be considered a priority since it is « the main engine » of the touristic product. It would be ideal that these priorities be established and constantly assessed so that everybody focus on the same purpose. Then it will depend on the individual trustees to decide which options are more attractive for them and which require a commune effort.

The following elements regard the different facilities and services to be analyzed when wanting to build a strategy in the field of tourism:

The main attractions: the main attractions are those drawing people to that area from the beginning and make their holiday pleasant once they are established there. Thus, they are a vital component of the touristic product in general. It is important to make sure that, in general terms, there is enough diversity, but also a critical point of available attractions. This will not only influence the people's decision to visit the area, but will keep the tourists busy for as long as possible, will intensify their experience and hopefully will encourage them to come back. This means offering them both minor and major attractions. The major ones are a clue point of the area (for example a national park), but require a higher investment, which will later helps us diversify the offer, and its maintenance will be less costly. The South-West regions of Oltenia has numerous elements which can be considered attractions:

- the high diversity of the touristic offer: forests and national parks with various flora and fauna, mountains, caves, uncontaminated rural areas, mineral waters, thermal resorts, fishing and hunting, cultural attractions
- folklore and traditions, local natural products based gastronomy

- the second region in Romania from the point of view of old monasteries (ecumenical tourism)
- the region is rich in mineral waters (balneal tourism)
- agro-touristic board houses
- cultural and historical vestiges on the territory of the region
- the existence of a big number of natural parks
- with all these advantages, there is also a considerable difference between the touristic potential of the counties in the south and north of the region.

Accommodation and other adequate facilities: Once more, the analyzed situation and market studies, will help us highlight different services and facilities that have to accompany main attractions. This will help the private field in establishing the facilities that have to be developed and increased, be it a hotel, a campus, holiday village or restaurant, bar, souvenirs store, etc. regarding the existence of facilities, there are difficulties in the area of Oltenia due to a limited culture in the tourism services and social tourism preponderance (for elderly people) subventioned from the state budget. We also see an insufficient promotion of manually manufactured products (including: low distribution, weak visibility for students).

Infrastructure: It is often necessary to improve the general infrastructure of roads, bikers route, direction indicators, facilities for commune transport in order to make sure access to different attractions, and in the entire area is adequate. This is the local authorities' responsibilities but it would be useful to discuss with trustees and local population, because access routes have a multipurpose which is equally important for the entire local community. Oltenia tourism infrastructure has low standards, low accommodation and underdeveloped basis infrastructure. Important problems come from delays in privatizing the tourism utilities and the lack of sport tourism capacities.

Information and interpretation: Access to different types of services should be completely provided. Tourists have to know what tourists facilities and services include and be given the opportunity to learn more about the area characteristics and traditions. This involves two communication forms:

The first one provides main characteristics, easy accessible ones, precise and easy to use for the consumer, to help visitors to orient themselves and tell them about the attractions in that area. Every individual facility should take into consideration some forms of information on the attractions in that area. Every facility should take into consideration some information forms like „small butterflies”, internet websites, for advertising itself, but it is also useful to have a brochure or a touristic guide with an abstract of different attractions, events and facilities offered by that destination. In order to be attractive, they should provide more than a list of addresses and schedules for different attractions. Well presented brochures, which give a charm to the area and different attractions are chosen and used (and even taken home) and consequently the financial investment is worth it.

The way to obtain these information by tourists is also important, sometimes it is more adequate to have a central place with a physical existence, like for example a touristic information centre or kiosk, where brochures, maps, touristic guides can be purchased and additional guidance is provided. Thus, it is possible for different touristic attractions to behave as an information centre. Anyway, it is important to make sure that tourists are given all the facilities to get this information.

The second communication instrument is based on interpretation, opposed to information. The adequate interpretation helps visitors explore and better understand

the places they visit. In this way, tourists have more experience so that their visitation becomes more than a simple trip to see the landscape. The interpretation can be made in several ways. The clearest is made through exhibitions, parades and individual interpretation elements. Generally, the more interpretation is personalized, the more efficient it is. Still, there are more often discussions with a guide.

Regarding information in the area **Oltenia** is characterized through an insufficient promotion of tourism in comparison with the other regions in the country and the existence of very few operators. A problem is also the insufficiency of education units specialized in tourism in the area. Efforts have also to be made for establishing regional touristic information points.

Legislation: Finally we have to take into consideration that it is necessary for an additional legislation to reinforce certain aspects connected to tourism development. For example, environment legislation is essential for defending natural resources against negative impact, from tourism or other activities. It is important to be an adequate legislation for constructions which are not in accordance with the whole image of that place. It will assure us that other used fields are sensitive at the tourism requirements.

Another key-component of any tourism strategy should be **marketing and touristic products promotion**, and destination as a whole. Even the most impressive attraction will fail without an adequate promotion, valid especially for those institutions proposing to draw specialized markets. Because marketing is such a complex subject, it is almost worth it a personal strategy for helping planning, coordinating and investing in different necessary activities. Only then it will be able to work at the level of industrial touristic facilities, and at the level of the destination.

Tourism already addresses to special market segments, which means that the marketing strategy should be directed to these tourists types. Market studies create a profile of visitors interested in visiting that area and useful for identifying the best communication channels with tourists and guiding towards an adequate image of the destination. Because the most part of tourism is passing, like expectations, experiences, feelings, emotions, it is important to focus on developing an adequate image for the area, which will help us encapsulate some of these senses and therefore increase the general attraction of the destination.

Studies can be included in promotional materials, which can bring practical information to possible visitors. That is why it is very important to make sure that the material is precise, well drawn-up (without too many superlatives) and fixed at the adequate level for making them attractive for the audience. This will assure us that people will not arrive with expectations that cannot be met, and will most probably be disappointed by the experience. The best reputation is that built by being orally transmitted, recommended by marketing managers.

We have also remember that a reputation is not built over night, five years may pass until the marketing strategy begins to bring profit. Consequently, the strategy has to be seen as a long term activity in order to be revised and updated constantly in compliance with the changing needs of the visitors' feedback market. This also means that a considerable merit belongs also to the establishment of a tourism strategy that would aim for the tourists, even after they left the place. This helps to accumulate faithful clients and encourage repeated visits.

Promotional techniques. There are different distribution channels to explore for promoting touristic destination.

Websites are more and more known nowadays and are ideal for reaching an international audience, especially for the newest, smallest and furthest destinations which do not have the necessary budget (or even a market) for promotional campaigns. They can be used both at individual business level and at the level of destination, but require a certain expertise to make sure that it is often updated.

Specialty newspapers and magazines are also ideal for reaching different markets – their leaders already aim towards those types of tourists that the area wants to draw, although they are more receptive for commercials about a destination they are interested in. Encouraging entries towards independent guides is also useful. Finally, if the touristic product is well specialized, it can be proven that the investment to invite journalists to these newspapers to write articles on their experience is worth it.

Commercial fairs are the most classical forms of promotion. Anyway, for many destinations their use can be limited in comparison with the necessary time and investment. Commercial fairs are useful only for drawing intermediaries, like tourism operators, etc. Only a small percentage of the final consumers (tourists) have their decision based on information at a commercial fair. Still, for international fairs it is probably more efficiently to see whether they want to included destinations in their exhibition. In this way it is therefore convenient to look for more specialized fairs than the ones focused on national or regional audience. Here, the audience is more concentrated and limited and therefore, more probable to be receptive to a new touristic or more specialized destination.

Finally we have to talk about the cyclic nature of tourism. A touristic product does not follow the standard, linear route of a product development, from the concept, development to the market exit. There is a continuous need to form, adjust and adapt different products and make sure that tourism is maintained dynamically and well adapted to the other economic fields.

With a 54,7% rural population and an agricultural area of 1818878 ha of 2921169, Oltenia has to give a special interest to promoting tourism for generating jobs, and thus contributing to improve the region economic performances. The South-West Region of Oltenia has a valuable and rich natural potential, which, if capitalized, could make the region more competitive on the market of internal and European tourism.

It is therefore revealed the need and opportunity it include the regional strategy for tourism which could develop:

- identifying all the touristic objectives;
- assessing or reassessing touristic objectives based on real value considerations;
- hierachyzing them as an economic support opportunity and protection;
- recommendations for promoting or improving actual promotion;
- appreciating economic influences in the adequate organized capitalization through tourism;
- the number of people in tourism and their education level.

The touristic product quality is influenced to the highest extent by the level of education and professional training of the personnel engaged in tourism, which establishes the quality level of direct services.

From the suppliers agreement and careful analyses upon the level of quality evolution of tourism services, it is established that the evolution is very slow, generally as a privatization measure. Until the patrimony aspects are modified, in the sense of

turning the property balance in favor of the private one, we can rely only on real quality regulations and control actions organized especially at regional level.

Conclusion

The regional development strategy, especially for the regions including real value touristic objectives, has to take into consideration the fact that the increase of touristic flow, of any origin, positively influences regional economy:

- directly, through the cash come from touristic consumption (house, meals, taxes, shopping);
- indirectly, through the local bilateral cultural contact and influences, by knowing local economical values and possible business opportunities, services employment, creating a favorable image, civilizing infrastructure.

It is possible for an already established destination to want to focus on a natural and cultural tourism or on those areas that have declining for the past few years. Market studies and SWOT analyses are just as relevant in this stage just like in the beginning, as long as they help creating a clear image about the area tourism and any possible problems. Only then it is possible to find solutions or ideas for change, extension, consolidation. Touristic destination management is a continuous process requiring that all the development process stages, for the destination be revisited and touristic products be reliable and attractive.

The regional tourism from Romania will benefit in the next period from almost 500 million Euros, through the European Regional Development Fund. The following accommodation structures will be able to benefit from these structural funds: hotels, motels, tourism pensions, camping places, huts, and hotels for young people. Exception from the funds makes the restaurants, bars, discos and casinos which are outside the accommodation places. The maximum period for implementing a project is 23 months. In the case of the accommodation structures the total cost of a project has to be between 200.000 Euros and five million Euros, and for tourism leisure structures the costs of the project have to be between 200.000 Euros and 20 million Euros.

The current problem from this field is the limited access to the funding programs because of the insufficient promotion of these programs in the different environments from where the possible applicant may pick up information. One can also add to this a lack of interest on a national level regarding the development strategy of the tourism and of using these funds. And this thing happens under the circumstances where experience shows us that rural tourism may be profitable, if we take into consideration the fact that almost 20 million Euros were drawn by the enterprisers that build pensions for agro tourism with the help of SAPARD.

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