

DEVELOPMENT OF ROMANIAN SEASIDE TOURISM IN THE FRAME OF SUSTAINABLE EUROPEAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT: *Sustainable development can be achieved only in the frame of a sustainable society. In the context of Romania's integration into the Great Society of the European Union, tourism activity should be developed, respecting sustainable tourism principles promoted by the Union. This paper presents statistical analysis of the Romanian seaside tourism and the results of a statistical survey conducted in the summer of 2007 to find out possible means to increase the quality of tourism services on the Romanian seaside. Also, the paper proposes solutions for sustainable tourism development in the Romanian Black Sea area.*

KEY WORDS: *development; seaside tourism; sustainability; sustainable tourism; tourists; environment*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *C83, L83, Q01*

1. INTRODUCTION

Black Sea is one of the most important touristic areas in Romania, established itself through very attractive elements of natural and human created tourism potential, such as: beach, sea water, bio-climate, mineralized water, therapeutic mud, nature reserves, archaeological remains, museums, old castles, historical and religious architectural monuments and more. Natural and human created resources in the Black Sea largely satisfy a wide range of tourist motivations leading to the practice of several forms of tourism: rest tourism, leisure tourism, health tourism, ecological tourism, cultural tourism, cruise tourism, tourism touring and others.

Unfortunately, this rich potential of our country that can compete successfully with the seaside offer of any other country has not been harnessed rationally. The privatization process started later and still not over, given that Romania has already

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integrated into European structures. In this context, we can not talk just about tourism development in the Black Sea, we must talk about its sustainable development.

2. TOURISM-SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT RELATION

Generally, achieving sustainable development requires a balance between economic sustainability, social sustainability and environmental sustainability. Sustainable development aims at continuous improvement of life quality on Earth for both present and future generations.

In the light of the contribution to sustainable development, tourism occupies a special place. Tourism development without concern for the sustainability prejudices society and environment. Tourism is sustainable only if it respects the principles of sustainable development.

By the mid-1990s, the sustainable development of tourism has become a priority for the EU institutions, being developed many documents that highlight the important role of tourism in the fulfilment of sustainable development objectives. The moving towards sustainability in all sectors of the economy is promoted in the European Sustainable Development Strategy.

Under the National Development Plan 2007-2013 of Romania, which focuses on reducing the existing gaps as quickly as possible towards the EU, special attention is given to the sustainable dimension of tourism development, through inter-regional cooperation and cross-development investment in tourism adapting to network utility investments to provide general services, namely those related to wastewater management and household garbage, pollution, landscape restoration, the introduction of the protected areas in tourist circuit, the conservation of natural resources and their rehabilitation, the protection of coastal areas, the regulation of rivers and lakes, the protection of beaches, elements that are the foundation of sustainable development of tourism.

2.1. Protecting the environment - the goal of sustainable tourism development

Sustainable tourism involves social responsibility and a strong commitment to environmental protection. The problem of protecting the environment causes both challenges and opportunities.

Since 1970 the European Union began to be concerned with all environmental issues and had established a set of tools and measures to protect the environment. The Sixth Environment Action Program - "Our future, our choice", adopted by the European Commission identified four priorities for action: addressing climate change, protect nature and wildlife, tackling the environment and health problems, natural resource conservation and waste management .

In order to help Member States to implement EU environmental legislation and for the environmental improvements, the Union provides funding. Romania is in the process of adjustment to EU standards in the field of environmental policy, it's integration into sectoral policies and strategies representing an essential condition for this process.

3. REHABILITATION MEANS OF THE ROMANIAN BLACK SEA COAST

Romanian Black Sea coast plays an important role in the environmental policy of Romania, aiming at the rehabilitation and protection of coastal and marine area associated with our country, restoration and conservation of coastal and lakes with therapeutic qualities, protecting the coastline from erosion. There are also a number of legal regulations concerning the conservation of biodiversity, the type of building allowed to be located on the beach, the use of Black Sea beaches, in order to preserve them and to protect tourists.

Romanian seaside rehabilitation must be carried in accordance with the requirements of modern tourist resorts and must include the development of new resorts and new recreational areas, taking into account the fact that entertainment has started to become a priority for holiday organizers.

To rehabilitate the Romanian seaside and to achieve sustainable development of tourism in this region, continued efforts are needed by all policy makers and the population in the area. Certification schemes of environmental quality are the most important indicators of respect for the environment of a destination and for tourists. Tourists want a high quality environment in a destination, preferred accommodation services Ecolabel and would like to see certified products in tour operators catalogs. Quality and environment are interrelated: Ecolabel products provide good quality, only if the environment is respected.

Quality certification is specific to coastal beaches and tourist ports under the "Blue Flag". Distinction "Blue Flag" is awarded annually to tourist beaches and harbors which satisfy a number of essential criteria that address issues related to water quality, environmental education and information, environmental management, security and services on the beach. The programme "Blue Flag" is an important tool for facilitating the implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management, whose long term goal is to achieve a balance between environmental objectives, economic, cultural and recreational activities, respecting the limits set by natural dynamics. Romanian seaside has the fewest distinctions "Blue Flag", which oblige us to follow the example of country experiences with the best performance in this area and to realize all the benefits that Romanian seaside can obtain.

Another aspect that can revive tourism in the Black Sea refers to the tourism supply. Romanian seaside has almost all kind of accommodation structures, but hotels have the highest share of all. Even though more than half the hotels on the coast are totally privatized or included in large international hotel chains, remain many old hotels, unmodernised, classified in one or two stars. In recent years, there is the downward trend of seaside accommodation capacity, due to activities that give the accommodation structures the possibility to obtain a high level of comfort. Growth rates for tourist services in relation to their poor quality, reducing living standards of population, lack of programs to promote tourism, loss of traditional markets have decreased the use of accommodation capacity in the period 1994-2007 (see table 1).

Table 1. Indices of net using the capacity in function in Romania and on the Romanian seaside, in period 1994-2007

Year	Romania	Seaside
1994	43,7	52,3
1995	45,0	56,9
1996	40,7	51,8
1997	37,7	47,6
1998	36,1	49,0
1999	34,5	45,9
2000	35,2	51,1
2001	34,9	46,8
2002	34,0	41,3
2003	34,6	39,9
2004	34,3	41,8
2005	33,4	40,6
2006	33,6	39,8
2007	36,0	45,7

Source: ASR 2008, ASR 2004, ASR 2005, ASR 1990-2003

Another essential element of the coastal tourism offer is labour. As tourism products mean a set of services, they can not exist without human resources. In the Romanian seaside accommodation structures the majority of employees are women (75.78%). Structure of employment according to age groups shows the large share that people aged 35-49 year hold and those aged 15-24 year as well. In terms of level of instruction, is remarkable the predominance of staff with only 10 classes and those with secondary education, having little training in tourism. Also, the seasonal nature of tourism determines fixed-term employment, only 25.76% of total personnel in the accommodation being employed permanently. This fact, the poor preparation and the lack of permanent training of human resources involved in tourism activity on the coast have negative effects on quality of services provided.

To adapt the tourism offer to the demand needs, we have to know the development trends in the future. Regarding the Romanian seaside tourism demand, can be made a series of observations, based on the rigorous statistical methods. Analysis of the evolution over time of the Romanian and foreign tourists flows indicates their number decreases, more pronounced for foreign tourists.

The main motivation of Romanian tourists who choose Romanian seaside is rest, recreation and entertainment. They prefer 4-7 overnight stays or 8-14 overnight stays, but it is observed the increasing orientation for weekend tourism. Most Romanian tourists organize their trip on their own and use as means of transport, especially their car and the train. As a way of accommodation, they choose mainly the hotels and in terms of comfort category, they prefer two stars structures accommodation. Unlike the Romanian tourists, foreigners want lodging in hotels of three and four stars.

Analysis of foreign tourist's flow on the main countries of origin of tourists shows that Germany has the highest share of total foreign tourists accommodated on the coast. It is followed by France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Russian Federation,

USA, Ukraine, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, United Kingdom. In recent years there is a dramatic decrease in the number of tourists from northern countries, but also those of other countries. It is required an aggressive policy to promote the Romanian seaside, modernization of material base from each seaside resort, completing the privatization of coastline, continuous training of the workforce employed in tourism and raising the quality of tourism services for traditional and international tourist markets regaining and in order to attract large flows of foreign tourists.

4. CASE STUDY: STATISTICAL SURVEY ON RAISING THE QUALITY OF TOURIST SERVICES ON THE ROMANIAN SEASIDE

In order to find solutions of raising the quality of tourist services and improving the attractiveness of tourist offer of the Romanian seaside, I have realised a statistical survey in the summer of 2007, by interviewing 267 Romanian tourists in Saturn and Mamaia resorts.

Analysis of survey results emphasized the following issues:

- Most of Romanian tourists have visited the Romanian seaside once in the last three years;
- Duration of stay of Romanian tourists is usually 18 days in Saturn resort (balneomedical resort) and less than 7 days in Mamaia resort (entertainment resort);
- Romanian tourists prefer to travel with family, especially using their own car;
- Depending on the profile of the resort (spa or leisure) tourists choose balneomedical treatment or recreation in parks, aqua-parks, watching entertainment shows, practice sports on the beach;
- Tourists consider necessary the diversification of tourism offer, expressing their desire to practice water sports, horse racing, to conduct tours, to visit nature reserves, protected areas and religious places in the region, trips in the Danube Delta, in Constanta city, programs for children, boating and other recreational activities;
- Regarding the accommodation structures, tourists are dissatisfied with the condition of furniture, the report price/quality, but satisfied with the receptionist kindness, the functioning sanitary facilities and electricity, cleaning of the room or campsite perimeter;
- The tourists are very dissatisfied with the services provided in accommodation structures' restaurants, particularly in terms of quantity, variety and quality of the menu;
- The ratings given by the tourist to beach-related services (cleaning, facilities, quality of bathing water) are weak;
- Romanian tourists are willing to allocate an increased sum of money for a higher quality standard on the Romanian seaside;
- Romanian tourist profile is analyzed by resort, namely in Mamaia prevail tourists aged 21-40 years and higher education. Saturn tourists aged between 31 and 50 years. Monthly incomes of Romanian tourists arrived on the seaside have values between 500 and 2.000 lei.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN THE ROMANIAN BLACK SEA AREA

Taking into account that tourists are becoming more demanding on coastal tourism offer and having in view the results of statistical research in those two Romanian resorts, we can make a series of proposals in developing romanian seaside tourism:

- It is necessary to inventory all accommodation structures to ascertain their physical condition and to identify actual structures which need modernization in order to move towards a higher degree of comfort;
- Many hotels have to be integrated in internationally recognized hotel chains to attract large flows of foreign tourists;
- Coastline public infrastructure must be better maintained and upgraded;
- Initiation of intensive programs to promote Black Sea to regain lost foreign markets (the Nordic countries, Germany, Britain and others), but also to boost confidence of the Romanian tourists in the Romanian seaside holidays;
- The development of business tourism, congresses, meetings, scientific meetings and exhibits in the Romanian seaside is necessary, as it brings great benefits to the organizers by reducing seasonality. Many people who participate in such actions are holiday travellers, too, who want to know the coast area. An opportunity in this respect would be to establish a big business and conference centre in Constanta, and thus, to develop accommodation structures that can operate the entire year;
- Ensure optimal conditions for accommodation in hotels: cleaning inside and outside the hotels, flawless functioning health facilities, adapting the kitchen to the preferences of customers, offering additional hotel services (booking tickets, car rental, laundry, other services) ;
- Initiation of information and awareness campaigns for tourists, especially Romanian tourists, about the environment of the Black Sea area and the negative impacts they can generate with their inappropriate behaviour;
- Integration of quality management in each accommodation and catering structure to meet the tourists demands which are more experienced and more sophisticated and to obtain bigger benefits;
- Access European Union's Structural Funds to improve the quality of tourism activity and to carry out actions to obtain quality certificates. This depends very much on Romania's capacity to achieve sustainable tourism projects;
- Improve the activity of human resources employed in tourism activity on the coast. Seasonal nature of activity and low level of wages rise employment of a low trained staff, during the summer season. To provide high quality services on the Romanian seaside, it is required trained personnel employed for an indefinite period of time. To this end, it is recommended organizing courses at the end of season both for managers and for employees on the following areas: customer service, communication, information technology, foreign languages, marketing, human resources management, finance, accounting. Support for these courses must be made by specialists in these areas of study;

- Since the complaints of tourists are very high in terms of services offered by catering structures on the coast, it is recommended hiring a well trained staff in these structures' kitchens, but also improve their standing in the culinary arts;
- It should be given special attention to young personnel, which has to be motivated in terms of income, be educated, trained and perfected in tourism, since young people are more receptive and dynamic;
- Mentality worker in tourism should be amended so that he would be able to understand the needs of domestic tourists and especially those of foreign tourists, this way seeking to faithful the customers. Satisfied and motivated employees will respond much better to the needs of tourists. This is extremely important, because usually a guest dissatisfaction will be sent to ten people, and rewards only to three people;
- Develop education and research in tourism, according to labour market needs. It requires setting up a training centre in the Romanian seaside tourism;
- Arranging and equipping the coastal beaches in order to be fulfilled the criteria of "Blue Flag", a symbol of respect for the coastal environment at the highest level;
- It is indicated that beaches are managed by the owners of accommodation structures in which law is to avoid conflicts between beaches concessionaires and places of accommodation providers and to provide full services to tourists of such accommodation structures;
- Involvement of the local and national authorities and of the community in this area in intense action to protect the coastal zone of the Black Sea against the negative impacts (beach erosion, pollution, contamination of bathing water, others) caused by different economic sectors;
- Simultaneous with the conduct of future surveys on the Romanian seacoast, it is appropriate to carry out a campaign to inform and educate tourists on sustainable development and environmental protection - the main component of sustainable development of tourism on the coast. Tour operators, entertainment service providers, transport service providers, with the tourism ministry support have to promote such a campaign for environmental education (through brochures, guides, maps, information provided by guides, videos of interest shown in television and the Internet). This campaign should be targeted especially to young people, who share a dynamic, flexible, open to change;
- Romanian government must be actively engaged in supporting seaside tourism through marketing activities, information services, education and other ways, through public-private partnerships;
- Romanian tour operators have to make dynamic marketing policy, to promote programs of leisure with low environmental impact and eco-labelled products and services. They should actively embrace the principles of sustainability in design stage tours, the stage of selecting suppliers, working with local communities and tourist information. The local tour operators have to include environmental information in catalogs about the Black Sea area and instructions for responsible behaviour of tourists towards it. Also, tour

operators must take care of training and continuous improvement of tourism industry personnel on general and specific environmental problems of coastline;

- It is necessary to promote ways and means of transport to ensure environmental protection. To reduce environmental pollution due to transport, it is required balanced use of all modes of transport to make trips of interest. The negative effects of transport on the environment may be removed by tourists by increasing the duration of stay and the use of public transport to travel along the coast;
- The resident population of Romanian seaside area and tourists should be aware and help to preserve and protect sensitive natural resources (beach, sea, specific flora and fauna). They can help the environment by minimizing the negative effects of recreation, by avoiding the purchase souvenirs which are made from animals and plants. Sustainable behaviour of tourists is the key of sustainable tourism;
- Seaside tourism must increasingly use modern technology in areas such as booking services or marketing services, as the Internet has become an increasingly important means of information and an indispensable tool of marketing.

The development of tourism infrastructure, computerization, raising the quality level of service, respect for the environment, extensive programs to promote the objectives of coastline tourism on domestic and international level are premises for sustainable development of Romanian Black Sea tourism.

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