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Thesis summary

THE MANAGEMENT OF A TOURIST DESTINATION AT THE CROSSROADS OF REAL AND IMAGINARY

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Table of Contents

Abstract	9
Chapter 1 Literature review	13
1.1. Introduction to the study of image and of the imaginary	14
1.2. Basics of tourist imaginary: the image and the perception	17
1.2.1. The image and its formation	17
1.2.2. The difference between the image and the perception of a tourist destination	18
1.2.3. The summary of the most important tourist destination image definitions	19
1.3. From image to imaginary	21
1.4. The tourist imaginaries as a part of social imaginaries	25
1.5. Scientific approaches in studying the tourist imaginaries	29
1.5.1. Destination identity and tourist satisfaction – key elements in tourist imaginaries creation	29
1.5.2. Research approaches for studying the imaginaries	31
Chapter 2 Research Methodology	34
2.1. Goal and research objectives	34
2.2. Methodological scenarios	35
2.3. Research hypothesis and instruments	40
Chapter 3 Romania as a tourist destination positioning at the European level.	
An econometric analysis based on TDD	42
3.1. Travel Destination Dominance (TDD)	42
3.2. Romania as a tourist destination positioning based on TDD	44
3.3. An econometrics model estimation for Romania	54
Chapter 4 The management of Romania as a tourist destination at public and private level between reality and imaginary	61
4.1. The central administration imaginary. The efforts-results analysis for promoting the travel destination Romania	61
4.2. The imaginary of the private tourism sector. Benchmarking the Romanian and foreign tour-operators offers.	76
4.3. Public imaginaries of Romanian and foreigners related to Romania as a tourist destination. A dominant images analysis.	108
Conclusions, limits, future research and personal contributions	138
Bibliography	145

The current work is fundamented in the field of management but it is also based on other areas of science in terms of concepts, interpretations and research instruments. Such areas include: cross-cultural studies, historiography, psychology, sociology, visual arts and media studies. The most relevant findings of this research lie however in the management area since it validates or invalides hypothesis meant to be useful primarily in the decision making process of both public and private actors in the field of tourism and secondarily in the hospiality industry.

As a personal motivation I have been constantly intrigued by the reasons behind the stagnation of Romanian tourism, the fact that this promising sector has not become a solid contributor to the GDP and it has rather remained a distant dream. I have looked for explanations in various areas, I have studied empirically the real attractions versus the myths, the foreign visitors' images and perceptions over Romania as well as comparing through benchmarking techniques the state of various components of the industry such as the infrastructure, the hospitality industry. As a synthesis, I have endured a constant quest for finding the reasons behind and finally as part of the PhD reasearch the moment has come to sistemacally and methodologically take the next stept from empirical to scientific in the effort to obtain some answers to all these dilemmas.

The main goal of the current reasearch was to evaluate the extent to which Romania as a tourist destination is efficiently managed at a public and at a private level at the confluence between reality and imaginary. The approach is based on comparing the imaginaries related to Romania as a tourist destination in order to identify the real at the crossroads of this imaginaries.

The research objectives were the following: (i) positioning Romania a tourist destination at an European level including comparing it to its regional competition, (ii)

identifying the public administration positioning between real and imaginary in regard to their promotion efforts on the most relevant tourist markets; (iii) comparing the offers of Romanian tour-operators with those of the foreign one in order to overpose their imaginaries; (iv) comparing the imaginaries of Romanian residents with those of foreign prospective tourists in regard to Romania as a tourist destination.

The image and the perception in the field of tourism combined with the cultural convictions represent an interesting research topic since they not only influence but also determine the main actions undertaken in this sector irrespective if you consider the public authorities, the private actors or the tourism consumers. In the current work we have demonstrated how the objectivism remains limited to each group or individual's imaginary, finally being a myth. The way somebody refers to a tourist destination is influenced by the imaginary space this person, group or community belongs to.

The objectives of the current research had been associated with 4 main hypothesis. The management of a tourism destination being a vast area, we have reduced our research to: (i) positioning Romania as a tourist destination at the European level in respect to their TDD, interpreting the sets of data gathered and estimating an econometric model, (ii) studying the imaginaries corresponding to 3 realities, namely the public authorities' imaginary, the private sector's imaginary and the public's imaginary. In this research we used concepts, instruments and software largely employed in sociology (content analysis, atlas.ti software), psychology (the contributions to defining the emotions associated to perception), geography (splitting the studies territory in regions) but also the visual arts (coding the images according to their components).

The results of the research have been meanwhile foreseeable and unforeseeable. As we had expected, when analysing the positioning of Romania as a tourist destination in regard to its TDD, we found a very low level of this indicator not only when compared to the European Union average but when compared to regional competitors too. Moreover, the Romania public defines imaginarily their country as a tourist destination as a space featuring fabulous natural

landscapes, being inhabited by interesting people while the foreign public has this destination projected in its imaginary as a space based on concrete reference points such as the Palace of Parliament in Buchares, the castles Peles and Bran, the rural life but also the poverty and lack of sanitation. Those were the results we have expected but the unexpected ones came when analysing the promotion efforts of the public authorities which we found to be closer to the imaginary of the tourists visting the country. In other words, the strong and very strong correlations between the promotion efforts and the results indicate a public destination management inclined rather to the reality, considering that the reality occurs when the two imaginaries are similar. Since, generally, the state is an administrator less efficient than the private sector's representatives we believed the latter policies would follow closer the imaginaries of the foreign private tourism sector when it comes to Romania as a tourist destination. However, this hypothesis was invalidated, meaning that the Romanian tour-operators' offers are significantly different than the foreign tour operators' offers for the same destination, Romania.

From a methodological point of view we used a series of instruments such as: content analysis specific for sociology, the Principal Component Analysis, the Multidimensional Analysis, the correlations study through Pearson coefficient. As a software support we used atlas.ti, SPSS, eViews and Google Fusion Tables.

Some contributions of the current work for the field of research could be considered the following: (i) it is a pioneering research for the benchmarking type of studies of subdestinations of a certain tourist destination as offered as part of tourist products developped by incoming tour-operators, respectively outgoing tour-operators for the same destination. (ii) it approaches the study of the imaginary on 3 axis: public authorities, tour-operators and public, most of the similar studies focusing on only one of these, (iii) it is a novelty the process of coding followed by comparing the frequencies of certain tourist destination image attributes as they are perceived in the imaginary of the residents and of the prospective tourists. A similar research focused on a questionnaire rather coding each of the 1000 images available on the

internet for the tourist destination concerned.

A certain number of future directions of study would be: (i) extending the analysis of the images selected according to time series, the database for 2008, 2010, 2012 being created already. This would allow us to notice how the imaginary evolved on certain tourist markets over a certain period of time, (ii) centralizing certain myths specific for a destination (for example for Romania we know some widespread myths such as it being the the only country with a full geographical variety, having the narrowest street in Europe, the oldest inhabited fortress or the only volcanic lake) and the analysis of the extent to which this imaginary formed by myths, perceptions, images and cultural convictions influence the creation of tourist products, (iii) expanding the analysis towards the conotative spaces, those being the spaces towards which the tourists travel in order to collect emotions, in this case it would be very interesting to determine which attributes of the destination generate equivalent attributes in the imaginary.

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