

ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA UNIVERSITY OF IAȘI
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
FIELD: ECONOMICS AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

PhD THESIS ABSTRACT

Scientific coordinator,

Prof. Univ. Dr.

Gabriela Carmen Pascariu

PhD fellow,

Ursache Mara

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Tourism and sustainable regional development in the European Union

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I. The conceptual framework on tourism and regional development	11
1.1 Tourism – integral part of the contemporary society and economy	11
1.3 Tourism – vector of sustainable regional development	21
1.4 Models of tourism development in a regional context.....	26
CHAPTER II. The importance of the tourism industry in the European economy	49
2.1 The European context of tourism industry.....	49
2.2 Impact of financial crisis on the tourism industry	58
2.3 The importance of tourism in the economic development of EU	63
2.4 Tourism and employment	72
CHAPTER III. A center-periphery approach of the European tourism industry	80
3.1 Dualistic structure of the economic and spatial development in EU	80
3.2 Comparative analysis of the tourism sector in EU Member States	83
3.2.1 Comparative analysis of the economic impact of the tourism industry in EU Member States	84
3.2.2 Comparative analysis of the social impact of the tourism industry in EU Member States	92
3.2.3 Comparative analysis of the environmental impact of the tourism industry in EU Member States	105
3.3 The economic geography of the European tourism industry	117
CHAPTER IV. Tourism and regional development in Romania	138
4.1 Romania's tourism resources	138
4.2 Tourist travelling in Romania	142
4.3 Social and economic impact of tourism in Romania	150
4.4 Comparative analysis of the tourism industry in the development regions of Romania ..	162
CONCLUSIONS	180
REFERENCES	187

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of the proposed research topic

Each country, region, district or city has its own unique geographical, physical, natural, social, cultural and economic features. Regardless of the level to which we turn our attention, one of the fundamental characteristics of matter is the trend of uneven spread in space and time as a result of the "game" between the centripetal forces of attraction and concentration, and the centrifugal forces, of dispersion. The territorial structure appears as an asymmetric system, often defined by a variety of terms: rich - poor, developed countries vs. developing countries, "North vs. South" and "West vs. East", "dominator" vs. "dominated", "center" vs. "periphery". Furthermore, the complexity and dynamics of contemporary society confronts individuals and communities with important challenges. The volatile political and socio-economic context, globalization, fierce competition for gaining profit fast require moving attention towards a pressing issue encountered in any society: sustainable development in all sectors. From this point of view, tourism has gained special interest because, as noted in the literature, it is a very flexible and dynamic sector, with a strong resilience capacity in time of crisis if its means of operation are implemented correctly: stimulating tourist demand by providing qualitative services; providing proper infrastructure; supporting tourism offer by providing optimum accommodation structures and diversified products; adaptation to forms of tourism etc.

Tourism is generally regarded as a means of development at all levels: micro, meso and macro. Tourism means added value, investments, continuous flow of goods (inside and outside the region), employment, diversifying the economy, strengthening and revitalizing territories, highlighting their specificity and identity, as well as the beauty of natural and cultural heritage, tourism being the only economic activity that can not be influenced by relocation. Tourism manages to link the major tourist centers with the most scattered points of attraction that can be considered their periphery, creating opportunities for sustainable development where none existed initially.

In the European Union (EU), tourism is one of the most important economic activities, with a significant contribution to the general dynamics of the integration process and to the strategic objectives of the Union (competitiveness, convergence, employment, promoting

European identity and citizenship, economic and social sustainability), thus recognizing tourism's capacity to promote the Union's sustainable development.

The proposed PhD thesis aims to analyze the impact of tourism on sustainable economic development of the EU Member States in general and Romania in particular. Thus, this research subscribes to the vast field of international economics.

The research approach will be carried out from an interdisciplinary perspective, as specific elements are combined from the economic field (economic development, sustainable development, the impact of tourism on society) with those from the geography field (spatiality, accessibility - related elements of the New Economic Geography).

The general purpose and research objectives

Given the wide range that this line of research offers, our study will focus mainly on analyzing tourism potential to be a factor for supporting the process of regional development taking into consideration the principles of sustainable development.

Main objective: conducting a comprehensive study reflecting the impact of tourism on regional development in EU member states from the perspective of the sustainability model and center-periphery relations.

Secondary objectives:

O₁: Identifying the main models of tourism development in the context of regional development.

O₂: To highlight the role of the tourism industry in the European economy.

O₃: Spatial analysis of tourism and highlighting the center-periphery development type with the evaluation of the significance for sustainable regional development in the EU.

O₄: Comparative analysis of the tourism industry in the development regions of Romania.

Research hypothesis:

I₁: Tourism contributes to regional development;

I₂: Tourism is concentrated in the countries/regions characterized by a good geographical and economic accessibility rather than in the peripheral countries/regions.

Methodological approach

Achieving the proposed objectives is conditioned by setting, from the beginning, the whole methodological support to be used in the analysis, choosing the methods – understood as an abstract category designating the appropriate way which reason must follow in order to further awareness reality, by determining procedures (techniques) - as components or support for the methods and indentifying the means for research - as concrete tools for action, indispensable to any scientific approach.

The scientific approach involves both a qualitative approach (using the main concepts and theories of literature in order to identify the specific analytical tools that allow us to define and analyze the impact of tourism on regional development), and a quantitative approach (applying the most appropriate methods of measurement for analyzing the relationship between tourism and regional development, both at EU Member States level and regional level), the two complementing each other.

The qualitative approach aims to analyze the relationship between tourism and sustainable regional development, both from a economic and spatial perspective, in order to identify the main theories of literature that address this issue. A central concern in this approach is to identify and analyze the main characteristics and effects of the center-periphery model which are applicable in the tourism industry: economies of agglomeration, transport costs, accessibility.

The quantitative approach aims essentially the economic side of the analysis of the relationship between tourism and sustainable regional development, however, in interpreting the results, our analysis will also consider the main issues defining the spatial phenomenon. Therefore, the scientific approach will correlate the spatial aspects with the economic ones in order to offer a complete interpretation, while also highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of the research.

Mainly, the quantative approach will involve two central approaches:

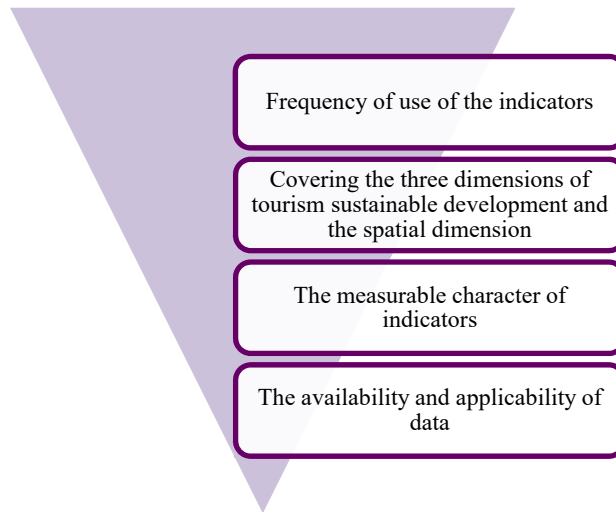
1. *Comparative analysis of the relationship between tourism and sustainable regional development at the EU Member States level by using specific indicators (divided according to the three dimensions of sustainable development and the spatial dimension).*
2. *Comparative analysis of the relationship between tourism and sustainable regional development at the development regions of Romania level through the use of tourism indicators.*

In the literature, especially in the field of economics, which aims to investigate the impact of tourism on sustainable regional development, there are a number of studies that developed quantitative methods for estimating the impact of tourism on the three plans (economic, social and ecological). Concerns for quantitative estimations of tourism effects arose from experts interest to determine the multidimensionality of this sector. In general, the methods proposed in the literature involve the use of specific indicators to compare the tourism potential of the states/regions. The existing approaches on this topic have focused on exploring and measuring the impact of tourism, arguing that the tourism is a complex, dynamic sector that can have both negative and positive effects on development. The research directions mainly show that, despite the use of sophisticated methods of collecting and processing data, the lack of consensus in the literature persists (Tanguay et al. 2013).

The perception concerning the impact of the tourism sector oscillates, not only in theory but also in existing empirical studies in the literature. Over time, tourism has been measured and interpreted either as a sector that contributes to economic welfare (Cortes Jimenez and Pulin 2010 Eeckels et al. 2012; Massida and Mattan 2013) or as a source generating negative effects, especially from the social and natural environment point of view (Chen 2011; Logar 2010; Dickinson and Robbins 2008).

Using indicators means determining the internal and external factors affecting the tourism industry structure. The indicators chosen may also reflect the benefits and impact that tourism has on territories and can help in analyzed and identifying priority actions that could be applied (WTO, 2004).

Following the suggestions and indicators proposed by the World Tourism Organization and Macarena et al 2012 study, the selection of variables was based on four specific criteria:



Source: own representation

Thus, we have considered the following indicators:

➤ For the **economic dimension**

- The contribution of tourism to GDP, given the relevance of tourism for stimulating and modernizing of the economy;
- Receipts;
- Density of tourism infrastructure, calculated as the ratio between the number of tourist overnight stays and number of bed places;

This indicator reveals the availability of accommodation places and the occupancy rate. The tourism infrastructure has an impact in the decision of choice of destinations.

- The average length of stay, calculated as a ratio between the number of tourist overnight stays and the number of tourist arrivals;

Length of stay is a key element for tourist destinations as it can suggest the type of holiday concerned, the degree of loyalty to a particular tourist destination, the expenditure structure, time of journey, type of chosen accommodation, mode of transport used, practiced form of tourism, capacity of a destination to attract and retain tourism revenues.

➤ For the **social dimension**

- The contribution of tourism to employment, taking into account the capacity of the tourism sector to create jobs;

Tourists need accommodation, food, transport and entertainment. Most of these activities are labor-intensive and therefore increasing their development means employment and income for the local community.

- Density of tourist traffic, calculated as the ratio between the number of tourist arrivals and the number of residents of the destination. *This indicator quantifies the economic importance of tourism for a territory, including aspects regarding its sustainability (social carrying capacity of the destination);*

➤ For the **ecological dimension**

- Tourism intensity, calculated as the ratio between the number of overnight stays and the surface of the destination. *This indicator captures the ecological carrying capacity;*

The development of tourist resorts should take into account the vulnerability of the natural heritage of the receiving environment. Resources are assigned value through tourism, but surpassing the ecological threshold is likely to create pressure or even destroy the natural attractiveness of the original stock. Thus, the portfolio of tourism products must follow tourists preferences but also the constraints imposed by the sustainable development of tourism at the destination.

- CO₂ emissions. The proposed index is based on the Macarena et al 2012 study and is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{CO}_2 \text{ emissions} = \frac{\text{CO}_2 \text{ emissions}}{(\text{nr. of persons employed in the tourism sector} \times 365 + \text{overnight stays}) / 365}$$

Described in the literature as the greatest market failure, climate changes are a serious problem of modern society and are determined in large part by greenhouse gases. As the main component of greenhouse gases and the greenhouse gas with the longest life cycle, carbon dioxide (CO₂) has become the focus of numerous research fields, including tourism. Developing a tourist area means numerous facilities whose activities generate large amounts of CO₂ with negative effects not only on the attractiveness of the destinations but also on the welfare of consumers (tourists) and the local community. In addition, tourism is heavily dependent on transport - a major consumer of fossil fuels that generates CO₂ emissions. Thus, by determining and calculating an index that measures the CO₂ emissions generated by the tourism sector one can determine the environmental impact of tourism, and based on the results seek solutions for an alternative model of planning, management and development of tourism activities.

➤ *For the spatial dimension*

- Road density, calculated as the ratio between the total length of the road network and the surface of the destination (km/100km²);
- Air transport of passengers (total passengers arrivals and departures).

The tourism potential – as the amount of natural and antopic elements - does not benefit a territory if it not correlated with efficient transport infrastructure, well adapted to provide high accessibility and visibility.

At the previously presented indicators we will add one of the most important macroeconomic indicators, namely GDP per capita in order to correlate tourism development with the economic development of the analyzed actors.

Among the research methods used in this study are found: the basic scientific research (in order to provide the theoretical basis of ideas and arguments proposed for research), qualitative and quantitative analysis, deductive method (moving from general to particular), comparative analysis and multiple regression analysis and correlation (ANOVA).

Jenks's calculation method was used based on the second working hypothesis according to which in the relationship between tourism and regional development, the countries located in the economic decision-making center of Europe are advantaged to the detriment of peripheral states. Jenks's algorithm involves a method of grouping data to determine the best arrangement of values in different groups (classes). The algorithm consists of minimizing the standard deviation of each group of the median while maximizing deviation of each group against other groups medians. In other words, the method seeks to reduce the variance within classes and maximizes the variance between classes (Jenks 1967, pp. 186-190).

Especially helpful was the cartographic method which involved the graphic representation in a simplified manner and scale, of the similarities and differences between the studied actors, the basic instrument being used being maps. As graphic methods for illustrating the results the analysis included charts and cartograms, effective in quantitative and qualitative analysis of statistical data. The plots were made with the support of Microsoft Excel, PhilCarto or applications included within ArcGIS software. Although these are common processes for other sciences, statistical evidence and the statistical processing of data proved useful in trying to better understand the center – periphery relationship.

Most of the data that allowed calculation of the indicators came from the statistical office of the European Union (EUROSTAT). However, the informations provided by this organization are incomplete for many of the countries considered in the study. Therefore, the information was supplemented with data collected from official statistics and reports belonging to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the World Tourism Organization and ESPON. Data used for indicator development in the regions of Romania come from the database of the National Institute of Statistics.

Thesis structure

Chapter I entitled *The conceptual framework on tourism and regional development* contains the main theoretical landmarks on which the research is based by evaluating the main theories and directions found in the literature in order to identify the analytical tools needed to be analyzed in our scientific approach. Given the bivalent nature of the tourism sector, we presented theories

which highlight that tourism stimulates the development of disadvantaged areas and those according to which tourism generates dependence on foreign capital.

There is no universally valid model concerning the development of tourist destinations, current trends leading to approach the theories mentioned above from the angle of their possible complementarity, taking into account both the historical background, geographical space, the state of things in different countries/regions, the favorable conditions for a further progress.

It is imperative that the change be directed towards sustainable development and valued as a formula that generates support for modernization. Thus, it requires a dynamic approach of the tourism - regional development relationship to provide a balance between the economic, social and environmental aspects.

Chapter II entitled *The importance of the tourism industry in the European economy* addresses the role of tourism in the EU - seen as a whole, and focuses on the contribution of tourism to the economic development of the Union, to create jobs especially for vulnerable groups and tourism resilience capacity in times of economic downturn.

Chapter III A center – periphery approach of the European tourism industry is a natural continuation of the previous chapter, focusing on a more complex analysis, both in terms of the analyzed subjects, and on how to address the relationship tourism - sustainable regional development. Thus, regarding the analyzed subjects, the analysis will focus on the 28 EU Member States. In doing so, the impact of tourism on sustainable development of the Member States will be the main analytical tool through the unequal distribution of benefits (center-periphery structure). In this sense, the scientific approach will focus on the comparative analysis of the tourism industry in the Member States, using indicators that define the impact of tourism considering the sustainable development model. Given that the geographical location of the Member States differs in terms of proximity to the center of the EU, we also included in the analysis indicators that reveal the spatial structure – the accessibility potential.

Chapter IV Tourism and regional development in Romania aims to identify the strengths and challenges of tourism in Romania, analyzing both the national context compared with the major competitors in the proximity and the regional context.

CONCLUSIONS

The scientific approach of this research aimed at achieving the following objectives:

O₁: Identifying the main models of tourism development in the context of regional development.

From the perspective of the qualitative analysis and analyzing the tourism – sustainable regional development relationship it stands out that tourism is a complex and multivalent phenomenon, which, generally, highlights the complexity of destinations development over time and the conflict elements between visitors and the socio-cultural and natural receiving environments. As a result, there is no universally accepted view in the literature. The definition and perception of this relationship varies by field of study, the analyzed subjects, the cause and effect or purpose, giving therefore different perceptions over this relationship. Thus, in interpreting and defining the tourism phenomenon, some scientists focus on welfare and tourism economic benefits, while others insist on inequality and the generated costs. Identifying these different views led naturally to a new stage in our qualitative analysis, namely exploring and identifying the models and theories revolving around the tourism - regional development relationship.

Starting from the idea that the territorial structure appears as a asymmetrical system, consisting of two interdependent systems: a system that coordinates the second one but is also dependent on it and another that depends on the first system's conditionalities (center-periphery structure), tourism is often regarded as the only way to exploit peripheral regions and facilitating the contact between developed regions with the most remote areas of attraction that are considered the periphery of the first. Tourism can be considered as a tool to boost regional development in outlying areas, since elitist classes visiting the periphery causes direct revenue through expenditure at the destination, which generate further indirect and induced effects on the economy of the host community by the powerful character of consumption it generates.

The periphery shows features that disadvantage it in economic terms: the distance from the center of decision-making implies increased transport costs; the tendency to import new products to the detriment of developing them locally determines a low level of innovation; the limited capacity to anticipate and adapt to the trends of market demand undermines regional economic development; poor transport infrastructure hinders the accessibility of the destination. The perception of place is essential in creating a constant flow of visitors. The level of

knowledge regarding a destination decreases with increasing distance, due to increased consumption of time, money and energy. However, regarding tourism, the distance from the main markets can be compensated by the authenticity of the natural heritage that allows the periphery to achieve the optimum in terms of attracting tourist flows thus fostering tourism development. Tourist flows imply distribution effects (income, information, know-how) from developed centers to outlying regions and the possibility of adjusting regional disparities. The outlying regions are not doomed to remain forever a periphery as tourist destinations are dynamic, evolve and change over time through the actions of people who occupy them and assign them value.

Despite the fact that tourism has the potential to reduce spatial inequalities through the diffusion of development impulses from the developed regions to the peripheral ones, sometimes the diffusion process effects are not those expected. Developing tourism means engaging internal resources which in developing regions are insufficient and often not adapted to the requirements of external demand which comes generally from developed regions. Even for tourists who are looking for authenticity and traditionalism, a minimum of comfort, security, quality of service and facilities to standards at least comparable with those of the country of origin is a crucial condition in attracting and stabilization of tourist flows in a certain destination. Thus, often many products must be imported and most of the income generated from the tourism activity is repatriated outside the host country, reducing benefits for the local economy. Moreover, most of the times, the unskilled jobs and low paid are assigned to residents while managerial or best paid jobs are occupied by expatriates. Further, the remuneration of residents and expatriates varies greatly even when they occupy the same positions. This work structure deepens the gap between residents and expatriates in both economical and socio-cultural terms, affecting the sustainable development of the tourism sector in the long term. The dominance of foreign companies control imposes structural dependence on developing countries as a center-periphery relationship, which prevents destinations to fully benefit from the tourism sector. Tourism, now and in the future, will be a vector of regional development as long as stakeholders will find the best ways to exploit the benefits of this industry. It is important that these assets be turned into opportunities for tourists, residents, and for the economy as a whole.

O₂: To highlight the role of the tourism industry in the European economy.

Tourism plays an essential role for the EU economy, as it imprints the dynamic of the integration process, contributes to the sustainable development of the Union and promotes the attractiveness of the European model.

The EU is the first destination in the world, explained by the fact that Member States, especially the developed ones, are countries with tradition in tourism, with a high natural and antropic potential of great attractiveness beeing supported by an intense promotion on the international tourism market, implementation of effective strategies and policies and by having developed a level of general and tourism infrastructure and by diversifying tourism products and services, adapting them to the continous changes on the market.

The tourism industry generates more than 5% of EU GDP and there are approx. 1.8 million enterprises employing around 5.2% of the total workforce (approx. 9.7 million jobs). When considered the tourism related sectors the contribution to GDP creation is higher because it indirectly generates more than 10% of EU GDP and provides about 12% of the workforce. Tourism plays an important role in terms of widening employment opportunities for vulnerable groups (youth, women, people with low qualifications, unskilled persons or immigrants) who are often underrepresented on the labor market. For example, the overall picture suggests that more than 50% of the workforce employed in the tourism sector in all Member States is represented by women.

European tourism has also demonstrated a significant and persistent resilience capacity even during the financial crisis by adapting to the changing circumstances and changing consumer behavior.

O₃: Spatial analysis of tourism and highlighting the center-periphery development type with the evaluation of the significance for sustainable regional development in the EU.

Economic integration, especially the eastward expansion, generated the concentration of economic activities in a low number of locations, thus leading to the emergence of a center-periphery development structure. EU Member States characterized by a good geographical and economic accessibility to major markets enjoy more the effects of agglomeration of economic

activities than the peripheral countries. Given these issues, we felt it is important to examine how the development of European tourism is determined by the effect of peripherality and its implications.

By applying an econometric model we took into account the differences of development of EU Member States, presented from two perspectives - economic and spatial in order to capture the links created between sustainable economic development, tourism and spatial peripherality.

The main results highlight that:

- There are significant differences in the distribution of the EU Member States as regards the degree of tourism development. Most countries in the core of the EU (France, England, Germany, Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark), as well as those situated along the Mediterranean arch tend to concentrate their economic activities between them, geographical proximity and the similar level of development being the main factors influencing this pattern;
- Tourism intensity and length of stay are influenced by geographical distance and the characteristics of neighboring locations. Despite a global process of dispersion of tourist flows to unexplored, exotic or peripheral destinations, most tourists still prefer areas of high concentration of visitors, known tourism destinations, which are usually associated with diversified activities, services and traditions, a high accessibility to numerous convenience and quality products;
- At the opposite pole are found most countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The low level of development of these countries (economic peripherality) is usually correlated with the degree of spatial peripherality (distance from the center of the EU). Poland and the Czech Republic owe their position, mostly, due to the proximity to tourist centers with high growth rates but also due to a more favorable economic environment than other countries in the region (infrastructure and quality services, business environment stability, promoting an effective tourism image, maintaining traditional values). The proximity to Western Europe supported the development of the tourism sector in Poland and the Czech Republic, as the performance of a region depends crucially on the evolution and characteristics of neighboring regions;
- Tourist traffic volume decreases as one moves away from the creative zone of goods and services – the EU core, characterized by a dense and efficient transport infrastructure. In

other words, the accessibility potential decreases towards East. Therefore the distribution of total accessibility is maintained in relation to the Union's economic core.

Complementary to the relatively low potential accessibility compared to the states situated in Eu's core, eastern periphery countries also face other challenges that hinder tourism development: insufficient diversified and adapted offer to the consumer demand compared to the western one, lack of distinctiveness of tourism brand, low level of tourist information and promotion of tourist materials, reduced competitiveness of domestic tourist offer compared to the external one.

In this context the following question arises: are the countries of eastern periphery able to compete and to win a prestigious position on the international tourism market? Although at first glance this seems an ambitious goal it can be achieved. What are the steps needed to achieve this objective? The answer seems simple: a general and well developed tourist infrastructure, services and tourist activities in standards at least comparable with those of the West, a clean environment, a competitive business and investment climate. All this must be combined in a detailed and feasible strategic plan. On the tourism market the competitive advantage translates into the combination of demand and innovation and is created by offering new, flexible qualitative but affordable products. Such products must provide customers what they are looking for, what they want and what they expect to achieve through their journeys.

It is also imperative that the formula of tourism development be oriented towards sustainability, so that this will become an impetus for political decisions, economic actions, tourists and the local community in order to promote the implementation of socio-economic patterns, cultural and environmental sustainability. We believe that the most important measures that should be taken in this direction concern: use of local resources and predominant involvement of local actors; creating a stimulating, transparent business environment; reconsideration of the decision-making process for the equitable distribution of benefits between local and foreign actors; increasing tourism contribution to social cohesion; strengthening the interaction between various actors at destinations and supporting partnerships to disseminate best practices; rational use of tourism resources, so their operating rate is not higher than the rate of recycling and regeneration, and for the tourism intensity not to exceed the carrying capacity of the destination; developing those markets for goods and services that contribute to the preservation of local cultural heritage; social responsibility of the tourism industry; planning and organizing

appropriate activities and tourist facilities; stimulating environmental awareness among both tourists and residents and instilling an attitude of respect and responsibility towards the environment.

O₄: Comparative analysis of the tourism industry in the development regions of Romania.

The Romanian reality stresses that the tourism activity is dominated by the banal phrase "Romania has a great tourism potential (both diverse and complex)." The high position occupied by countries with a more limited natural or cultural potential compared to that of Romania, in the ranking of the most attractive tourist destinations (with significant revenue generated) prove that tourism potential is not a given but is created/innovated. Tourism was often treated in a passive way, as a bonus of the past, an asset that will remain forever, a gift given and inherited, ensuring a safe path to the future.

Fierce competition between the products offered on the tourist market, the constantly changing consumer demand and preferences, the degradation of resources that support the tourism sector, externalities and costs were absent from the agendas of interested parties.

To strengthen and improve the development of Romanian tourism from the perspective of sustainable development model it is essential that attention be focused on the problems of the present (the poor quality of services, a low skilled level correlated with low income from tourism, the lack of effective involvement of state regarding the promoting of the tourist image of Romania on international markets, the lack of a effective public-private partnership in order to generate synergies for attracting more dynamic markets, the poor quality of transport infrastructure and accommodation, and especially the lack of a strategy for tourism development function) to rethink future strategies (coordination of infrastructure development which support travel and tourism capital development necessary for the sustainable growth of tourism, strategic planning, creating a competitive business environment that encourages investment, promotion on international markets).

At the regional level, it is found that less developed regions have an important tourism potential that can and must be capitalized in order to reduce the development gaps between them and the developed regions. The result depends on the adoption of a strategy in a dynamic and integrated conception, able to ensure a dynamic balance between economic feasibility, environmental vulnerability and socio-cultural acceptability.

In this regard, an essential role plays the development of multifunctional products based on a strategic vision and on the perception of derived benefits for different target groups: the local, national and foreign tourists. Offering unique products, plurioriented, based on winter-summer complementarity in order to reduce the degree of seasonality, with a strong footprint of local resources will generate added value and will draw differences on a highly competitive market such as the tourism market. It is important to avoid the identification of a particular region with the image of a single product (eg. northern Moldova is associated with religious tourism). Particular attention should be directed on the corroborating between tourism development with proper management of general and tourist infrastructure, adopting specific marketing policies, strengthening the public-private partnership, integrating tourism in a unitary territorial planning and regional development strategy.

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