Analysis of the Main Romanian Cultural Tourism Products

ADINA NEGRUSA, SMARANDA COSMA, OANA GICA
Faculty of Business,
Babes-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca
Str.Horea 7, 400174 Cluj-Napoca
ROMANIA
adina.negrusa@tbs.ubbcluj.ro

Abstract: In the last decade the cultural tourism has become an important business. All over the world local communities and national organizations have developed particular cultural and heritage tourism products that attract increasing tourists’ visitation each year. About Romania as a cultural tourism destination we can argue that it has an important heritage potential, our country being the single one where a traveler can find out in just 24 hours a Byzantine church, a roman basilica, a gothic cathedral, a Turkish mosque, a Greek fortress, a cubist building or a 1900 style building. In the European market there is a high interest for the following areas in Romania: Transylvania (medieval cities and ancient castles), Bucovina (painted monasteries and traditional artefacts) and Maramures (rural tourism and cultural heritage). As a rural tourism destination Romania disposes of an important potential to be found both in mountain and hill areas and in the Black Sea Cost and Danube Delta zone. Each products could determine the foreign tourists’ interest if they will be consolidated together and promoted as a whole.

Key-Words: cultural tourism, heritage patrimony, cultural event, rural tourism

1 Introduction

Cultural tourism is a form of tourism motivated by interest in historical, artistic, scientific or heritage offering of a community, region, group or institution [6]. It can be considered an independent segment of the tourism industry as well as a complement to mainstream tourism, in conjunction with other forms of attraction.

It can be argued that all tourism is cultural; people consistently travel to locations that are unlike their own[6]. But in the past decade tourism industry has created a distinct travel product. All over the world local communities and national organizations have developed particular cultural and heritage tourism products that attract increasing tourists’ visitation each year. In the last decade the cultural tourism became a big business. According to experts, cultural tourism would represent from 8 to 20% of the shares of the tourists market. According to a study conducted by the European Commission, 20% of tourists visit Europe responds to cultural motivations, while 60% of European tourists are interested in cultural discoveries during their trips [4].

In order to investigate the stage of development of cultural tourism in Romania we wanted to establish a definition framework for this complex tourism product. This involved a review of definitions included in the culture and tourism literature, as well as a discussion on this topic.

First of all, cultural tourism is a general term referring to leisure travel motivated by one or more aspects of the culture of a particular area (Dictionary of Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Terms, 1996).

From his point of view, Richards G. [10] considered that the term of cultural tourism has been used to describe the consumption of art, heritage, folklore and whole range of other cultural manifestations by tourists. We found out that cultural tourism also includes tourism in urban areas, particularly historic or large cities and their cultural facilities such as museums and theatres. It can also, less often, include tourism to rural areas for outdoors festivals, the houses of famous writers & artists, sculpture parks and landscapes made famous in literature.

So when speaking about cultural tourism we include different categories of touryst experiences involved in that. World Tourism Organization defines cultural tourism as the movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations, which includes study tours, performing arts, cultural tours, travel to festivals, visits to historic sites and monuments, folklore [12].

Stebbins defines cultural tourism as a style of special interest tourism based on the search for and participation in new and deep cultural experiences, whether aesthetic, intellectual, emotional or psychological [11]. In a review of the terms for cultural tourism Bonkik identified two major approaches of this phenomenon [2]. One is concentrated on describing the type of attractions, like monuments or historical sites, which is clearly related
to a product-based definition of culture. This part is useful for quantitative research due to the possibility to identify, count and interview visitors to cultural attractions. The other is conceptual approach which describes the motives and meanings attached to cultural tourism activity. The second part is focused on why and how people engage in cultural tourism and therefore is it more process-based.

In conclusion the cultural tourism refers to a wide range of activities that enables the traveler to learn about the history, heritage and lifestyles of other areas, incorporating museums, festivals, architecture, historic sites, artistic performances as well as any experience that brings one culture in contact with another for the specific purpose in a touring situation.

The future development of cultural tourism is argued by WTO due to some complex factors among which:

⇒ A more sophisticated tourist, in search of different cultural backgrounds and expressions;
⇒ A growing number of local authorities looking at tourism as a source of income and employment opportunities;
⇒ A growing awareness among conservation, cultural and natural heritage authorities about the possibility offered by tourism to generate financial resources.

In general the number of international tourists has increased in the last years together with cultural tourism. Why is that? Because it should be done a distinction between those people visiting especially for cultural purposes and the ones that are incidentally taking in culture in their visits. For this reason a clear counting of cultural tourists for a country could not be done properly in practice. In fact it is considered that only a small proportion of international visitors could be motivated by a single cultural attraction.

2 Cultural Tourism in Romania

As we decided in the above lines the cultural tourism with its different special forms is a touristic product fated for exports. In the last few years for countries like Czech Republic and Hungary cultural tourism has become an important source of tourism revenues. In Romania the cultural tourism remains in a born stage due to the incapacies to construct an infrastructure for developing strong heritage tourism [2].

The heritage potential exists and is remarkable in the entire country. Between 2004 and 2005 the National Authority for Tourism in Romania (NAT) tried to find out how Romania is perceived as a tourist destination. Considering a list of countries for interviewed tourists, NAT, generally, took into consideration those countries that can provide an increased number of tourists, like Hungary, Germany, Czech Republic, Russia, Italy, Poland and France. These people expressed their interest for: cultural and heritage tourism in regions like Transylvania and Bucovina, including medieval towns; for mountain resorts located in Prahova Valley and for Danube Delta. The same source interrogated tourists from USA, UK, Ireland, Netherlands, Austria, Spain etc. regarding their interest in various types of tourism and again cultural tourism and cultural tours were on the top of foreign tourist preferences.

In the report from 2006 WTTC recommended, as their research results indicated, that Romania should concentrate on spa wellness tourism and cultural tourism instead of the development of ski tourism and sea side tourism, especially concerning foreign tourists [13].

Starting with 2007 when Sibiu had been the Cultural Capital of Europe, our country has the opportunity to promote and develop several potential products under the umbrella of cultural and heritage tourism. [3]

In general the cultural tourism in Romania is centered on four locations: the painted monasteries of the Bucovina region, the wooden churches and houses in the Maramures region and the paintings of Transylvania and the art galleries and historical and contemporary sites in cities such as Bucharest, Brasov, and Sighisoara. The main cultural points of interest in Romania are represented by monasteries and church, which attract most of the foreign tourists who want to learn some of our traditions and history.[6] Transylvania is famous for its rich multiethnic heritage as a mix of Germans, Hungarians and Romanians. Numerous ancient sites with medieval fortresses and castles can be found in Transylvania region. Some of the sites that attract the most tourists are the Bran Castle (known as Dracula’s Castle), the citadel of Sighisoara or the medieval towns of Brasov and Sibiu.

In the international tourism market Romania could not develop competitive tourist products until now. Comparing with the neighbour countries, based on the foreign tourist arrivals in 2005, Romania came in the 5th position, after Poland, Hungary, Croatia and Czech Republic.[9] It is interesting to note that 95% of the foreign tourists came from European countries. In the top of the European Union countries which represent the lager tourism market for Romania we can identify: Germany with a market share of 13.49%, Italy with 12.63%, France having a rise of the market share up to 8% and United Kingdom with about 5.6% market share.
The most important issues related to the capacity of Romanian tourism in the international market in the last 6 years are the growth trend of the foreign tourists’ arrivals and the high rate of increasing foreigners in the rural tourism, the annual average being around 34%. In this context we can make a correlation between this trend and the results of a set of studies conducted by our tourism ministry in order to analyse the international market potential. Based on them we concluded that in general in the European market there is a high interest for the following areas in Romania: Transylvania coming first for the medieval cities and ancient castles; Bucovina is in the second position, being interesting for the painted monasteries and traditional artefacts; Maramures was in the 3rd position due to the rural tourism and cultural heritage.

3 Cultural Tourism Products
In order to have the possibility to promote and develop this type of tourism it is necessary to know which are the potential products that Romania can offer. As a result we tried furthermore to identify and analyze these main cultural tourism products.

3.1. Historic and heritage sites
The starting point in our investigation was an evaluation of the heritage patrimony. Therefore we made an analysis on the historical monuments spread on region bases. We take into account the 8 regions of development, created by the National Agency for Regional Development in order to promote a better and an appropriate development of each part of the country.

The statistical data about Romanian heritage tourism in general, in order to have a panoramic view about this sector, is hard to find out, so we concentrated our presentation on some actions which are included in this particular form of tourism.

In the last 6 years the number of tourists visiting some Romanian museums has been declining, while the number of museums increased.

Table 1. The evolution of museums in Romania and the numbers of visitors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of museums</th>
<th>Number of tourists in museums (thous)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>8818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>9594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>11114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>10446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>10488</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this analysis it results that the Romanian offer for tourists interested in museums heritage, is more concentrated on arts and culture. The diversity of styles of arts and artifacts conserved in historical sites gives us the opportunity to develop a national strategy for promoting our country for cultural tourism. The problem lies in creating a whole touristic product supported by hospitality infrastructure and other possibilities for leisure activities. Even if the number of tourists, which have visited museums, is not divided in domestic and foreign market, we can assume based on other studies that over 60% are travelers from other countries. Their decreasing tendency gives us the idea of an inappropriate promotion of the museums.

We can take also into account the activities of tour operators which offer service packages for historical areas, for almost 61000 tourists, representing only 4.2% from the total services sold by Romanian tour operators in 2004 and that have registered an important increase in 2007 due to the Project Sibiu, European Capital of Culture.

![Fig. 3 Number of tourists for tour operators](image)


### 3.2. Festivals and cultural events in urban areas

Romania can count on cultural events organized in the cities and can even develop them. There are some important festivals which became famous and attract foreign tourists like International Festivals George Enescu, TIFF Film Festivals or The Golden Stag (Cerbul de Aur). But the most important cultural project ever organized in Romania as dimension, duration and public communication impact has been Sibiu European Capital of Culture in 2007.

The cultural calendar included more than 200 actions performed in the city and around it. The Romanian Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs budget for 2005 allocated 2 million Euros for the Sibiu 2007 Program, whereas the budget for 2006 provided around 8,5 million Euros, out of which 6 million being spent on restoration of the city’s historic facades.[3]

Such a cultural event has demonstrated to have a strong impact on that specific area tourism and economy. A study conducted by a group of researchers from universities from Sibiu, during January to August 2007 on tourists participating in various cultural events in Sibiu showed that cultural activities have contributed to an increase in arrivals of 27% in the capacities of accommodation.

Based on the same study the results show that an average of 25% of the taken actions audience were foreign tourists while 37% were Romanian tourists attracted from other cities of the country. This proves once again that the program has proved to be efficient both internal, in attracting Romanian tourists and external in attracting approximately 60% tourists from Western Europe: the first 3 places were occupied by Germany 23% Netherlands 22 % and France with 13%. In preferences among participating tourists were highlighted with weights above 50% artistic products as musical performances, art festivals, visiting museums, movie show times and theater.

![Fig. 4 Spread of tourists among the actions planned inside of Program Sibiu European Capital of Culture](image)

The main motivation that led to the influx of tourists in Sibiu area was clearly the event of the European Cultural Capital, as illustrated by the analysis of the study results. Another important aspect is that 18% of those surveyed had as motivation for visiting the city cultural tourism. This result, together with the 9% who came to Sibiu to participate in festivals and
shows form a significant share of cultural tourism in Romania, for that being important to provide and to promote products of this type.

Fig. 5. Motivations of tourists for visiting Sibiu while it was Cultural Capital

The event of Sibiu European Cultural Capital has attracted a significant number of tourists who visited for the first time this town. In comparison with other European capitals, Luxembourg, Rotterdam, Porto, Salamanca, Sibiu has attracted a significantly higher percentage of tourists motivated by the European cultural capital than others and also led to a greater degree of satisfaction of tourists regarding program quality.

3.3. Rural Tourism
The Romanian rural area disposes of reach tourist potential to be found both in mountain and hill areas and in the Black Sea Cost and Danube Delta zone. Each area presents interest from the ethnographic point of view and folklore heritage, having particularity in the traditional customs.

The National Association of Rural Ecological and Environmental Tourism founded in 1994 and a member of the European Federation of Rural Tourism - EUROGITES, is the national organization for tapping the potential of rural tourism. Now in Romania there are approximately 13 000 of rural communities which could offer settlement for accommodation. The main purpose of the ANTREC organization is to identify, develop and promote the Romanian hospitality and rural tourism.

The lodging structure for rural tourism has two main specific forms:
- rural pensions, with a maxim of 10 rooms and 30 places;
- agro-tourism pensions, being part of the inhabitants’ farm and having the production capacity to provide 30% of the ingredients for meal and food.

Furthermore we will analyze the development of rural tourism in Romania based on the number of rural pensions and their capacity. To address this issue we used statistical data about the number of rural tourism boarding houses, which is considered an important indicator of the development of this sector.

Table 2 Evolution of rural boarding houses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total number of units in tourism</th>
<th>Rural tourism boarding houses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2965</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>3049</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>5.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>3250</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>10.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3121</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>7.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>3266</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>3338</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>3569</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>20.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>3900</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>22.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It is obviously that the rural tourism became an important alternative form of tourism in Romania. From a weight of 2% in 1996 rural tourism boarding houses represent in 2004 more than 22%. The increasing demand for rural tourism positively influenced the interest of entrepreneurs and managers for this type of business.

To this favourable evolution contributes also the legislation launched by the government from 1996 to 1999, having as main objective to support this kind of businesses. For example an important action applied in 1997 was focused on: giving priority to allocation of land, to install telecommunications infrastructure, free technical assistance, free advertising in informational supports edited by Tourism Ministry, no taxes for ten years[1]. Even if these facilities were suspended in 1999, the trend has been constantly the same.

Using statistical data about the number of places offered by rural pensions, this evolution is presented in the figure 5. The annual average growth is 31%, higher than the annual average growth of the units’ number, due to the fact that the development of rural tourism concentrated on the intensive and sustainable development strategies. It can be observed that in 2003 was registered an increase of the capacity more than double, 51%, which corresponds also to the peak of units’ number growth. Analyzing the capacity per units resulted that in general a rural tourism boarding house offers an average of 10 places, which means a settlement with an average of 5 rooms. Like we stated.
before this result means the accommodations offer are at small-scale.

Fig 6 The capacity evolution of rural pensions (no. of places)

Source: Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2007

Due to the small-scale of the settlement also the number of accommodations in rural pensions is insignificant comparing with the total number of accommodations, just 1.7%. The evolution of tourist arrivals reflects that the number of foreign tourists which choose rural tourism for their accommodation increased each year, with an annual average of 28%. This means a continuous increasing interest for the Romanian rural tourism. In general the number of staying overnight in rural pensions, which is approximately 2.7 nights, remained constant without significant differences between internal and foreign tourists.[8] As a result the indicator of net using tourist accommodation capacity for rural pensions is lower, about 14.6%, comparing with hotel’s one of 40%.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that the Romanian tourism image in the international market is starting to be identifiable and is related with the elements of cultural, eco and rural tourism. Visitors will find here authentic cultural experiences as they are treated with respect, educated, and invited to participate in local traditions and lifestyles. In these circumstances we appreciate that the promotion strategy in European market should be concentrated on these elements, highlighting the connected areas.

References


