Regional competitiveness and Romanian tourism in the European context

Mihaela Neculita, Daniela Ancuta Sarpe, Vasile Mazilescu, Irina Susanu

Abstract — Before 1990 Romania was an important tourist destination for the Eastern European market, mainly promoting the seaside tourism products, balneoclimaterical resorts, cultural programs and the famous monasteries located in the Northern Moldavia and Bukovina. Romania's exceptional tourism potential is characterized by two essential components: natural component, represented by spectacular scenery, diverse relief combinations, favorable climatic conditions, therapeutic value and abundance of natural treatment factors, represented by the remains of civilizations that have succeeded on Romanian territory since time immemorial, monuments and religious artifacts or secular, elements of ethnography and folklore of great beauty and originality. The Romanian tourist offer has not changed significantly over time. However it became uncompetitive in relation with the requirements of tourism demand and with similar tourism products available on international markets. The purpose of this paper is to present and assess the current situation of Romanian tourism and its prospects in the context of international competition in tourism and European integration.

Keywords — tourism, tourism potential, tourism structures, competitiveness, tourist supply.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Romanian tourist industry "engines" are actually some segments which are well functioning: agro tourism, mountain and spa tourism, events and tours tourism. More than one third of all European mineral water can be found in Romania [1]. Thus, due to the Herculane Spa, attested since the 2nd century A.D., Romania may be considered one of the founder countries of spa tourism.

The accommodation capacity (number of places) by Regions indicates important differences. The South-East Region has the largest accommodation capacity (47%), being hardly followed by Centre Region (12.5%) and North-West Region (9.2%). It can be estimated that in the next period, the distribution of accommodation capacity on regions of development will be balanced, due to the interest displayed by the entities involved in tourism, but also by the support provided by the local authorities. However, the coastal tourism of Black Sea and Danube Delta and Carpathians and

Carpathian areas are expected to continue to develop in the next period of time.

In Romania, the accommodation capacity is significant (280,000 beds) [2], compared with other countries that recorded outstanding achievements in tourism such as Czech Republic, Croatia, Poland, Hungary etc. However, because of the mass tourism, a lower category of accommodation establishments (the weight of 1-2 star hotels on the Romanian coast exceeds 80%) has been predominant.

The number of housing units has increased over the past decade by about 25%, especially due to the emergence of new forms of accommodation (rural, urban and agro hotels, youth hostels). However, places of accommodation on all types of units and categories has decreased by almost 7% in the last decade, due to the restitution of nationalized properties (including tourism villas) and a change of destination structures.

Tourist reception structures and particularly the recreational offer are outdated, uncompetitive, the tourism services and tourism programs being accomplished stereotypically and are characterized by a modest quality and the quality-price ratio is inconclusive. Therefore, a steady decline of foreign tourism demand for Romania has been recorded in the last 20 years.

Thus the upgrading, re-launching and development of Romanian tourism and the creation of new modern and competitive tourism products are necessary on the tourist market. Therefore the main purpose is to develop the recreational and animation offer which displays in general high attractiveness, by creating entertainment and theme parks, water parks, offers that are present in the world countries having tourist tradition. The main key tourism indicators reflect discrepancies on the regional level, both in terms of number of tourists as well as the capacity of employing facilities.

II. COMPETITIVENESS OF ROMANIAN TOURISM

Regarding the total number of tourists that have been accommodated in the registered accommodation structures, a positive development can be noticed by improving the tourism sector's contribution to gross domestic product (GDP).

Regarding the total number of tourists on development areas, the most important increase has been recorded in the Bucharest area, displaying an increase of 76.54% [3]. The other examined areas, such as the coastal resorts or the ones from the mountain area or the balnear resorts have recorded modest increases or even they have entered the regression, an instance in point being the Danube Delta area.
The number of foreign tourists fluctuations acted in the same way as the total number of tourists described above. Thus, the most significant increase has been recorded in the county seat and in Bucharest, whereas the Danube Delta or the coastal resorts, excluding Constanta, have recorded negative trends.

The extremely low percentage of tourists who chose the Danube Delta can be noticed, approximately 1% of total domestic tourists, representing a paradoxical situation in terms of tourist potential of the area, a potential that unfortunately cannot be taken advantage of due to the lack of proper facilities and poor condition of infrastructure.

According to the analysis of tourism competitiveness, based on the development indicators 8 countries were considered as competing countries in tourism against Romania: Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine. The project strategy for the period 2007-2013 of the National Tourism Authority (NTA) Romania is overtaken by Hungary, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland and Slovakia in the tourism industry's competitiveness index.

Compared with these countries, Romania has an average tourism competitiveness index of 58.91, which is lower than the values recorded in Hungary (78.44), Czech Republic (74.47), Bulgaria (68.57), Croatia (68.04), Poland (66.03) and Slovakia (62.84). However this index is superior to the one recorded in Ukraine and Serbia - Montenegro. Romania is more competitive in prices, environment, openness to trade and tourism and social and less in technology, human resources and infrastructure.
Compared with Bulgaria, Romania is more competitive in pricing (concerning the hotel room tariffs; PPP index, level of taxation in tourism), infrastructure (only concerning the roads and the railway – displaying indices that are superior to Bulgaria), environment (carbon dioxide emissions are less than those in Bulgaria but having a higher population density), technology (only concerning the high-tech exports), social (regarding the index of newspapers and television).

Compared with Croatia, Romania is more competitive in pricing (only regarding the tourism tax), environment (carbon dioxide emissions being less than in Croatia but a higher population density), international openness (concerning the level of taxation in international trade) and social (the index of newspapers and television).

As far as Hungary is concerned, Romania is more competitive only in pricing (regarding the tariffs charged on hotels room and the level of tourism tax) and social (only the TV index), according to the data provided in the document.

Romania is also more competitive but only in pricing compared with Slovakia (regarding the tariffs charged on hotels room), human tourism (only concerning the number of people involved in tourism), environment, technology (only in high-tech exports), international openness (regarding the visas) and social (the index of newspapers and television).

Compared with the Czech Republic, Romania is more competitive only in pricing (regarding the tariffs charged on hotels room and the tourism tax) and social (regarding the index of newspapers and television).

To Poland, Romania is only competitive in pricing (regarding the tariffs charged on hotels room and tourism tax), human tourism (concerning only the economic impact of tourism), technology (only in high-tech exports), international openness (the tourism openness index and trade openness index) and social (only the index of newspapers and television).

Compared with Ukraine, Romania is more competitive in pricing (regarding the tariffs charged on hotels room, purchasing power parity and level of taxation in tourism), human tourism (only concerning the population involvement in biosphere reserves, natural monuments, protected areas, cultural heritage values of national interest, balnear resources, museums and memorial houses and areas with high tourism potential (34% of the country), including at least one of the following categories: reserves and natural monuments of national interest, cultural heritage values of national interest, resources spas, museums and memorial houses [4].

In addition to these areas, there are many tourist attractions, natural and anthropic, which provide opportunities for tourism development, even if they have a lower density [5].

A 3.6% increase of tourist structure capacity of accommodation (from 283,701 places to 295,898 places) was recorded in 2009, the largest increase of 4215 places being recorded in urban and rural hostels.

This phenomenon can be explained due to the lower volume of financial effort required by the investments in boarding houses and also to the increase of interest in this form of tourism. However it is noteworthy the investment effort shown in the developing and modernizing the upper class tourist [5] structures, the increase pace of these categories capacity being of 17.8% for 5 stars, 38% for 4 stars and 3.5% for 3 stars.

The year 2009 displayed a tendency of reducing the average length of stay in hotel structures, brought about by the increased tourist traffic in weekends and also by the fractionation trend of holidays, a phenomenon which has become more obvious in our country. Therefore the figures provided by the travel agencies are below those recorded in 2008 concerning the national tourism actions. A decrease can also be noticed regarding the number of days spent by tourists in such accommodation structures, this decrease being of 8.7% compared with the data recorded in the previous year.

Regarding the foreign [6] travel statistics shoe an unexpected development, which is mainly due to the reduction of their costs that was generated by the global economic crisis. The explanation of foreign travel increasing is the strengthening of the middle class and their wish to travel abroad and to make contact with other cultures and civilizations, high quality tourism services as well as freedom to travel in Europe.
In 2009, the profit made from the international tourism earnings was of EUR 4.5 billion, while the GDP tourism contribution is still low [7] (only 3.5% of GDP contribution from tourism activities for 2008); the number of tourism work places is quite significant - 105 thousand jobs (1.2% of total employment).

Tourist reception structures and particularly the recreational offer are outdated, uncompetitive, the tourism services and tourism programs being accomplished stereotypically and are characterized by a modest quality and the quality-price ratio is inconclusive. Therefore, a steady decline of foreign tourism demand for Romania has been recorded in the last 20 years.

Thus the upgrading, re-launching and development of Romanian tourism and the creation of new modern and competitive tourism products are necessary on the tourist market. Therefore the main purpose is to develop the recreational and animation offer which displays in general high attractiveness, by creating entertainment and theme parks, water parks, offers that are present in the world countries having tourist tradition. The main key tourism indicators reflect discrepancies on the regional level, both in terms of number of tourists as well as the capacity of employing facilities.

Concerning the tourism sector support [8], by investments in tourist attractions, accommodation and infrastructure services, it is expected that these positive trends characterizing this particular field to continue in the next period of time as well. This optimistic forecast is also based on the analysis of the development of the tourism sector on the world level.

Among the most significant issues the following ones may be mentioned: increased number of tourists, increased number of people interested in ethnic tourism (visits to native places), increasing demand for new destinations, increased attendance at health resorts and spas (due to increasing concern for body maintenance, beauty, gymnastics, fitness, etc.), increasing number of older people who are more active and willing to travel, tourists become more experienced, they expect quality attractions, facilities and services ensured by the tariffs/prices which are adequate to the quality of their traveling facilities; business environment development or for congresses, conferences, meetings, etc., increased number of tourists concerned with preserving and protecting the natural environment, tourism uses to an increasing extent the modern technology in fields like online booking services and marketing; in recent years, the Internet has become an increasingly important means of information and marketing.

These expectations may indicate a growing demand for tourism in Romania, especially as the accommodation facilities and tourist attractions will adapt to the market requirements, achieving a quality and a capacity which are significantly higher to the current ones. The National Association of Travel Agencies from Romania hopes that in 2010 the Romanian tourism will recover from 2009 and record a slight increase of at least 5%.

### References

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### Table II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>217,965</td>
<td>194,350</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>184,515</td>
<td>171,718</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>473,431</td>
<td>485,890</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>104,507</td>
<td>110,236</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>397,592</td>
<td>397,705</td>
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<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>79,334</td>
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<td>Poland</td>
<td>191,022</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>121,596</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
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<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>818,009</td>
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Source: EUROSTAT