

Tourism Sustainable Development in Romania: South-West Development Region Oltenia

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Abstract: The aim of the present research paper is to improve the competitiveness of the service sector and in particular the tourism-oriented sector in the South-West Development Region Oltenia and to demonstrate the capacity of sustainable development of the tourism in the above mentioned area. Taking into account the European Agenda 21 the sustainable tourism involves three stages: social sustainment, ecologic sustainment, economic sustainment. All three stages are discussed based on the literature review and based on the realities of the region taken into consideration. A SWOT analysis is realized and some recommendations and conclusions are made in order to synthesize the main debated aspects and proposed action lines.

Key-Words: sustainable development, sustainable tourism, Romania, ecological label, social sustainment, climate change

1 Introduction

The aim of the present research paper is to improve the competitiveness of the service sector and in particular the tourism-oriented sector in the South-West Development Region Oltenia and to demonstrate the capacity of sustainable development of the tourism in the above mentioned area. A comprehensive analysis based on the bibliographic information of the potential of the area is made and important recommendations are given regarding its development. We also discussed the need to be in accordance to the innovation trends for energy technologies in order to respond to present and future energy needs of tourism companies in order to obtain high standards of environmental performance.

According to a European report “in the short term, better material and waste recovery technologies, advanced materials, cleaner coal technologies and energy substitution technologies will help keep existing energy supplies affordable and available” [7]. Also, different alternatives to transport, renewable fuels and the use of innovative

technologies for hotel building should be considered.

Regarding policies and initiatives, the European Commission has a new tourism policy, its main aim being to improve the competitiveness of the European tourism industry and to create more jobs through the sustainable growth of tourism. According to Gun with Var (2002) cited by Hall (2008) “if tourism is to reach toward better economic impact, it must be planned as well towards goals of enhanced visitor satisfaction, community integration, and above all, greater resource protection” [3].

According to the Communication From The Comission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee Of The Regions Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination – a new political framework for tourism in Europe from 2010 will take into consideration the following objectives in order to stimulate European tourism's competitiveness:

1. Promoting diversification of the supply of tourist services

2. Developing innovation in the tourism industry
3. Improving professional skills
4. Encouraging an extension of the tourist season
5. Consolidating the socioeconomic knowledge base for tourism

Tourism is considered by Goeldner and Brent Richie (2006) “a complex phenomenon— the composite of activities, policies, services, and industries involving many players that deliver the travel experience” [2]. Regarding tourism policies, they had to be adapted in accordance to social and economic changes faced by society. According to Goeldner and Brent Richie (2006) all tourism destinations must face the growing competition from both established and emerging destinations and the pressure to maintain the ecological integrity of regions affected by tourism. Therefore, the need to build tourist destinations that is both competitive and sustainable. The impact of the earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan in 2011 shows the importance of formulating effective policies. We must also take into consideration the interdependence between tourism policy and national and local policies, such as airline security, emergency health procedures.

2 Sustainable development in tourism

2.1 Climate change and its impact on tourism

Viner and Agnew (1999) analyze two types of climate impacts: direct and indirect. While the direct impacts influence tourism via the decision-making process, the indirect impact appears as a result of the climate change impact on the environment of a certain touristic location [11].

2.2 Sustainable development in South-West Development Region Oltenia. Is it possible?

According to The International Institute for Sustainable Development, citing the Brundtland Report the sustainable development has been defined as: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of **needs**, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of **limitations** imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the

environment's ability to meet present and future needs” [4].

Hall (2008) considers that “sustainable tourism only refers to the application of sustainability concepts at the level of tourism industry and consequent social, environment and economic effects, whereas sustainable development operates at a broader scale that incorporates all aspects of human interaction with the Earth’s environment” [3].

The components of a successful strategy for tourism in the context of Tourism and Local Agenda 21. The Role of Local Authorities in Sustainable Tourism are as follows:

- “Establishing effective structures for multi-stakeholder participation, both in setting the direction for tourism in the community and in working together to develop and manage it.
- Identifying a strategy for sustainable tourism within the context of a wider sustainable development strategy that reflects stakeholder’s views and that allows tourism management to be integrated with other management functions in the destination.
- Identifying and implementing a set of actions, in line with the strategy, that address the economic, social and environmental sustainability of tourism in the area”. [10]

Taking into account the European Agenda 21 the sustainable tourism involves three stages: social sustainment, ecologic sustainment, economic sustainment. [10]

1. Social sustainment

The social sustainability manifests through the influence of tourism on the traditional way of life and on the better future both spiritual and professional for the inhabitants of a certain area.

The social impact has also some negative side, such as the perturbancy and distroyal of the traditional way of life, the acceptance of the local population of the new influences. The positive impact regards the development of new cultural and religious traditions, diversification of artisan forms, increase in maintaining and preserving touristic objectives.

Social sustainability signifies the involvement of the local population, tourism being intensive in services, therefore a positive aspect: new jobs. The workforce in Oltenia region is under qualified, therefore professional reconversion can be made, women inclusion in the workforce can be made.

The people that work in the tourism industry are very important in delivering the touristic service. Tourism provides many part-time jobs, even for the

less-prepared, but also involves positions that require technical skills, managerial training.

According to the data centralized at the end of July 2010 by The Regional Direction of Statistics Dolj the unemployment rate in Oltenia region is three percent above the national average, one third of the unemployment being in Dolj county. The unemployment number at the level of South-West Development Region South-West Oltenia in July 2010 represented 8,3% from the national level, the employee number was 384673, with 30966 persons less than in 2009.

In Dolj and Valcea counties were concentrated 52,4% from the total employee number of the region. From the total number of employees, 54,9% work in the services industry, 43,2% in building and industry and only 1,9% in agriculture, fishing, hunting, etc.

The unemployment rate in South-West Development Region Oltenia – 10,2% - is situated above the national unemployment rate, of 7,4%. From the total regional number of 93687 persons, only 39202 were women. The unemployment rate was in Dolj county of 33,9%, followed by Valcea county with 18,9%, Gorj county with 16,5%, Mehedinti county with 15,8% and Olt county with 14,9%. The biggest figures of unemployed women were in Dolj county (33,6%) and the smallest in Olt county (13,2%).

According to the data released by The Regional Direction of Statistics Dolj at the end of July 2010, the unemployment rate of 10,2% was differentiated by sex (58,6% men and 41,4% women), according to the active population, giving an unemployment rate of 11% for men and 9,2% for women.

Social sustainment of tourism involves also social cohesion, respecting tourist's interests, respect regarding the local population.

2. Ecologic sustainment

Involves ecologic development, interest for the natural resources, consumption favorable to the environment along the entire touristic chain.

The green tourism is according to the definition of The International Ecotourism Society "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" [9]. The following ecotourism principles should be considered, according to TIES [9]:

- Minimize impact.
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.

- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate.

European Commission Decision no. 287/2003/CE regarding the establishment of ecologic criteria applicable for the assignment of ecologic label for community tourist housing services, published in the Official Journal of the European Communities (JOCE) no., L102/2003 is also a step forward in the process of obtaining ecologic sustainment.

The criteria that tourist accommodation service should comply by in order to receive the ecological label, according to European Commission Decision no. 287/2003/CE regarding the establishment of ecologic criteria applicable for the assignment of ecologic label for community tourist housing services "aim to limit the main environmental impacts from the three phases of the service's life cycle (purchasing, provision of the service, waste). In particular they aim to: limit energy consumption, water consumption, waste production, favor the use of renewable resources and of substances which are less hazardous to the environment, promote environmental communication and education". [1]

3. Economic sustainment

The economic sustainment involves economical development of the region (infrastructure, suprastructure, foreign direct investments, creating new jobs), therefore results a positive impact of the tourism for the region. Competitive enterprises that use the available manpower and local resources generate economic welfare and an increase in inhabitants income.

3 Sustainable development strategy for South-West Development Region Oltenia

According to The World Economic Forum 12 pillars of economic competitiveness can be adopted in the tourism industry: institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic stability, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency.

The strategy for sustainable tourism should be integrated into the overall sustainable development strategy and should be based on a comprehensive analysis, which should include, according to Local Agenda 21:

- "An assessment of the area's socio-economic and environmental circumstances and needs and of how tourism can relate to these;

- An audit of resources and facilities for tourism (including natural and cultural resources, infrastructure, etc.) and an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses;

- An analysis of existing and potential future markets;

An assessment of existing and potential problems and opportunities brought by tourism, including the environmental performance of tourism businesses;

- A long term vision of tourism in the destination at some future point;

- A set of strategic objectives;

- A set of measurable targets and indicators;

- An action plan, including an indication of resources and responsible players; and

- An identified process for monitoring and review” [10].

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Oltenia Region is located in the Southwestern part of Romania and covers 29.212 km², including Dolj, Olt, Valcea, Mehedinti and Gorj County.
- Very good potential as touristic destination as Oltenia has after Moldova the second number of monasteries in Romania (eg. Horezu, Tismana, Polovragi, Bucovăț, Argeș).
- Good road infrastructure.
- The presence of the Danube, that can be integrated into new types of touristic packages.
- The presence of many touristic objectives: Defileul Jiului, Defileul Oltului, Defileul Dunării, Cheile Oltului – flower natural reservation, Poștile de Fier, Cheile Sohodului, Topolnița Cave, Ocnele Mari.
- Possibility for cultural tourism, as Poarta Sărutului, Masa tăcerii and Coloana fără sfârșit by Brâncuși are in Târgu Jiu, balneoturism: Olănești, Călimănești Căciulata.
- Southwestern Oltenia covers 201.302 ha of protected areas (14% from the total protected areas in Romania).

Weaknesses

- The contribution of tourism sector to Oltenia’s GDP is very low 2-3%.
- Not so diversified touristic offer (not all tourist groups are targeted).
- Almost inexistent marketing strategy for the local tourism, or sustainable tourism.
- The Romanian brand is not well known at the international level.

- Inadequate touristic infrastructure (restaurants, hotels) and lack of additional recreational, cultural events for the tourists.

- Insufficient funds for the regional tourism from the local authorities.

Opportunities

- Promotion of Romanian tourism at the international level due to the integration in the European Union, therefore European tourists can visit our country without a visa.

- The development of new touristic types, such as ecotourism at the international level.

- Possibility of reducing the seasonality of demand, through developing more creative offers (such as cruises on the Danube) and reducing the number of seasonal employment.

- Increased contribution to the welfare of the local population.

- Due to the economic crisis new forms of touristic packages are created, new or complementary consumer segments being targeted (eg. ecotourism).

- The still present crisis can be an opportunity to transform the Romanian tourists that use to choose foreign destination into tourists that visit our region.

- The development of sustainable tourism through the European Funds.

Threats

- The economic crisis is putting additional pressure on the vacation budget, limiting the external tourism.

- Powerful competition from the neighbor countries, such as Bulgaria, Serbia and from the other regions from Romania (internal competition).

- Insufficient training and education for the personnel that works in tourism.

- The apparently ongoing change of the Romanian brand, which can only lead to uncertainty.

Based on the SWOT Analysis we propose the Maxi –Max strategy, acknowledging therefore the Strengths of the analyzed region and using them in order to take advantage of the present Opportunities of the Romanian environment.

4 Conclusion

We consider based on the analysis that the sustainable development of the tourism in South-West Development Region Oltenia can be realised,

with the increased use of the eco-technologies, premises for the increase use of the European REGIO funds.

Another recommendation is the reduction of the seasonality of demand, through developing creative offers and reducing the number of seasonal employment.

Taking into consideration the fact that we are analysing the possibility of sustainable tourism in the region, addressing the impact of tourism transport should also be considered by all the actors involved in the touristic industry.

Improving the quality of tourism jobs through career training must also be a high priority, with the improvement of the entire touristic infrastructure.

Conserving the natural heritage is also of great importance, a first step, without it the tourism itself being threatened to disappear.

Using tourism as a tool in global sustainable development is also a recommendation.

Promoting destinations of excellence according to Nostrefano (2007) is also a valuable solution - "European Destinations of Excellence" (EDEN) pilot project, promotes emerging European destinations and offers support to those where the development in tourism is being pursued in such a way as to ensure social, cultural and environmental sustainability" [6].

Taking into consideration that our country joined the European Union as a full member state in 2007, Romania can profit from the support of the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, European Social Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, the European Fisheries Fund, and from programmes such as the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development, the "Leonardo da Vinci" or the proposed "Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme". It is expected that the implementation of REGIO, Priority Axis 5: Sustainable development and tourism promotion priority axis, through the improvement both of tourist areas infrastructure and of services related to the accommodation and recreation facilities, to lead to a qualitative growth, according to European standards, of the entire tourism industry, with a direct impact on growth of tourist demand for Romania, as an European tourist destination. This priority axis aims is to maintain the cultural heritage and sustainable use of natural resources with tourism potential, and to improve the quality of accommodation and leisure tourist infrastructure to increase attractiveness, develop the local economies

and create new jobs. Eligible applicants for Axis 5 are: local authorities and public institutions, SMEs in tourism, Non-profit organisation working in tourism, Specialized Divisions within MIMMCTPL. The following indicative operations can be financed through REGIO: restoration, protection and conservation objectives as part of UNESCO and the modernization of related infrastructure; restoring, protecting and preserving national cultural heritage and modernization of related infrastructure; restoration, protection and conservation of cultural heritage in urban areas; development of tourism based on natural tourist resources (mountain tourism, health tourism, seaside tourism, eco-tourism, etc.); modernization and expansion of accommodation and associated utilities; creation / rehabilitation / modernization / expansion of recreational tourism infrastructure and related utilities; create a positive image of Romania as a tourist destination by defining and promoting the national tourism brand, attract investors and other strategic partners to develop the tourist industry and increasing its attractiveness; develop and strengthen domestic tourism by supporting tourism specific products and specific marketing activities; investments in the establishment of Information Centres and Tourism Development (CIPT), implementing a national database with information of interest; establish a national system integrated with online access, collection and distribution of travel information.

The valorisation of tourist attractions existing in different areas of the country, mainly by encouraging the creation and development of local enterprises, will contribute to economic growth in deprived urban areas or peripheral rural areas and convert areas with low economic competitiveness into attractive areas for investors.

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