

ANALYSIS THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF TOURIST DESTINATION INFLUENCE ON THE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE. CASE STUDY: ROMANIA

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Abstract:

In an ever changing and competitive environment, the tourism industry of each country must be developed in a sustainable manner, able to generate substantial economic benefits for key stakeholders and minimize negative environmental impacts. Thus, the pronounced dynamism of the tourism sector currently makes tourist destinations to be in fierce competition where the long-term success is conditioned by the sustainable development strategy adopted and operationalized by management organizations destinations. In this context, the minimum requirements for sustainable tourism development are: supporting the diversity of ecosystems; conservation and management of natural resources; finding ways to reduce uncontrolled population growth and unification of national decisions concerning the environment and the economy. Based on these considerations and the fact that Romania has a valuable ecotourism potential, internationally recognized by profile associations and other stakeholders, this paper presents an overview regarding the way in which sustainable management of tourist destination influence obtaining sustainable competitive advantage.

Key words: competitive advantage, sustainable development, tourism destination, natural resources

JEL classification: L83; M10; Q56

1. INTRODUCTION

The complexity of the current economic environment has made the tourist destination to be considered in last years a "pillar of the tourism construction" (Ispas, 2008). Thus, to achieve this goal were created management organizations destinations, considering that the entire tourism development of a destination should be coordinated by a single structure (Carter, 2004). At the same time, it must be stressed that sustainable development has become a necessity also in the tourism sector, as in most areas of human existence (Pike, 2002), stating in this regard that a destination that is not based on sustainable management can not possibly become competitive (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003).

In this context, destinations management organizations provide decisional support for sustainable development of destinations, based on a responsible collaboration of a large number of stakeholders, thereby contributing to reducing the tourism vulnerability as well as to its adequate planning according to the industry dynamics (Vanhove, 2005).

Therefore, the main purpose of this article is to bring some clarifications upon the necessity of developing a sustainable management at the level of tourist destinations in Romania in order to obtain a competitive advantage.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The essential condition for the continued development of the tourism phenomenon in a particular territory is the need to preserve a high level of quality of natural and anthropogenic resources. Altering the characteristics of environment, either due to unfavorable natural factors triggered either by destructive human intervention, may lead to the reduction or cancellation of the

tourism potential and destruction of the ecological balance" (Snack, 2001). Thus, it becomes desirable the sustainable development of tourism as a vision of progress on medium and long term.

In this context, we can say that since 1987, the concept of sustainable development has entered all areas of economic and social life: from sustainable agriculture to sustainable transport and finally to sustainable tourism.

The sustainable development of tourism is an economic requirement and a contemporary trend, the two are closely linked and interdependent. In this respect, tourism can favor the sustainable development by (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006): providing opportunities for economic development and creating jobs, as well as stimulating investment and supporting local services; better use of all categories of resources; contribution to the peacekeeping in the world and to the inter-cultural understanding.

In addition, the publication of World Tourism Organization - Tourism in 2015 - states that "sustainable tourism is developing the idea of serving the needs of present tourists and the tourist industry and at the same time, protecting the environment and the opportunities for the future". Thus, it is envisaged satisfying all economic, social, aesthetic needs of tourism actors, maintaining the cultural and ecological integrity, the biological diversity and all systems that support life.

Sustainable tourism development requires the involvement of all all stakeholders, namely the assumption of responsibility at the individual level, but also teamwork and, not least, coordination at the level of a territorial unit (Hardy, 2005). Thus, among other activities, it should be considered part of sustainable development, being necessary to take into account its impact on other sectors, in terms of the competition for the use of resources and mutual support (Hunter, 2004).

Furthermore, sustainable tourism highlights the mutual dependency between sustainability and quality. It should be accepted that quality tourism products and destinations are those that meet the sustainable requirements, being focused not only on satisfying the visitor's needs. In this way, tourists are determined to contribute to the protection and preservation of the environment (Yunis, 2006).

Therefore, sustainable tourism development is a necessity because it allows obtaining a competitive advantage by maintaining the quality of the destination's natural, cultural and social environment.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Currently registered worldwide phenomena - increasing production, expanding cooperation between states, environmental degradation, health concerns – have quantitative and structural influenced tourist activity, making it necessary and appropriate to develop and implement a tourism destination management system.

According to some specialists (Snack, 1999) tourist destination is "a set of services and facilities which is materialized in the specific atmosphere of natural and artificial factors of attractions and tourist facilities created, that represent components of the tourist offer and can exert a positive force of tourists attraction". Thus, tourist destination is perceived as the experience that the tourist acquires after consumption (Ispas, 2011).

At the same time, through tourist destination it can be understood a country, a region within a country, a city, a village or a resort. Regardless of the type of destination, marketing tasks are the same: creating a positive image of the destination to the level of target visitors segments, designing instruments to support and disseminate the image and, not least, the promotion of destination image in the origin regions (Mazilu, 2010).

Reviving tourism in Romania, tourist destinations and attract more foreign tourists could bring additional benefits, according to the tourism sector managers, but with more and necessary changes. Here attention should be drawn to the fact that transformation, change, revitalization or promotion of tourism requires another strategy than incremental change (continuous improvement), because the success of the past may be sometimes the biggest obstacle (Mazilu, 2010).

Thus, in the governance of tourist destinations, to ensure a superior capitalization of natural and anthropic tourism potential, we must take into account the life cycle of the respective destination. Any model postulates that tourist destinations tend to experience five distinct phases of development: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation and stagnation. Depending on the reaction of destination managers to stagnation phase, different scenarios are possible, including the decline, stabilization, rejuvenation or reinvention.

Developing a tourist destination must be a continuous process given the dynamics of the tourism market. Thus, any tourist destination should adopt sustainable development strategies (Muntean and Stremtan, 2008).

At the stage of consolidation and stagnation, managers must intervene and take action to avoid the unwanted decline of tourist destinations. Therefore, it is necessary to organize a Destination Management (**DMO - Destination Management Organisation**), whose governance steps can ensure the sustainability of tourist destinations.

In this regard, the sustainable development of tourist destinations requires a management capable of ensuring the fulfillment of the following objectives (Ruhanen, 2010): supporting tourism activities that bring the lowest impact on the environment, reducing pollution forms produced by tourism, conservation and enhancement of local cultures, of ethnographic traditions, protection of historical monuments, local architecture and introduce them into the values circuit, ensure the infrastructure and technical utilities equipment modernization, of access roads, of services.

The responsibility to achieve these objectives in an efficient and effective manner lies with the tourist destination management organizations (DMO) that are holding the needed capacity and resources.

Sustainable management of destinations is important for tourism development, especially through effective spatial planning and land use the local communities as well as through development control and investment decisions on infrastructure. Ensuring that the new tourism development is suitable to the needs of the local community and environment, sustainable management can strengthen on long-term the economic performances and competitive position of a destination (European Community Commission, 2007).

Therefore, tourist destination management is the determinant that provides solutions for ensuring the competitiveness of the tourist destination, to the extent that it includes programs, structures, systems and processes that can be run and managed by individuals / organizations but also collective actions. It covers actions related to the framework of policy and planning implementation for tourism destination and seeks to improve the effectiveness and quality of resources and supporting factors as well as adaptation to the opportunities offered by the external environment. In these conditions, this determinant is based on seven action areas of quality management: ensuring quality experience to visitors, successfully marketing the destination, the continuous information of partners, development of human resources and their adaptation to existing needs, providing a financial and capital contribution adjusted to the needs, efficient management of visitor flows, environmental protection (the competitiveness model according to that adopted by Richie Couch).

In a study conducted by the World Economic Forum (WEF) on tourism competitiveness index, Romania occupies 66th place in 2015 from 141 countries a higher position than the one held in 2013 when ranked 68 of 140 countries. The same study reveals that Romania has achieved the best score in Health and Hygiene pillar - 5.94 points - and the lowest score from Cultural Resources and Business Travel pillar - 2.07 points out of 7 possible (see table below).

Table no.1 Tourism Competitiveness Index for Romania

Competitiveness Indicators	Rank (from 140)	Value (scale 1-7)
Enabling Environment	59	4.88
Business Environment	96	4.11
Safety and Security	65	5.42
Health and Hygiene	46	5.94
Human Resources and Labor Market	64	4.56
ICT Readiness	59	4.36
T&T Policy and Enabling Conditions	35	4.37
Prioritization of Travel & Tourism	88	4.34
International Openness	42	3.91
Price Competitiveness	54	4.89
Environmental Sustainability	46	4.35
Infrastructure	71	3.49
Air Transport Infrastructure	87	2.34
Ground and Port Infrastructure	91	3.10
Tourist Service Infrastructure	42	5.01
Natural and Cultural Resources	66	2.38
Natural Resources	79	2.70
Cultural Resources and Business Travel	49	2.07

Source: World Economic Forum: *The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015*

At the same time, analysis of data contained in the table reveals a score of 4.35 for environmental sustainability, which means that Romania - according to data provided by WEF - although although it has to recover compared to other countries of the world in terms of protecting natural resources, has however made, efforts to create a favorable framework for the sustainable development of the tourist destination

Romania's human resources in tourism rank 64th in the world and have a score of 4.56. In order to improve competitiveness in this area, management organizations at the level of the tourist destination should work with tourism managers to train staff on providing services, mitigate and overcome conflicts, on how tourists should be treated (Alhroot, 2007).

In terms of price-quality ratio, Romania ceased to be an attractive tourist market. In this regard, the crucial role of management is the fact that the organizations responsible for the management of tourist destinations can partially control the price by establishing regulations and through partnerships with the private sector. Often these organizations establish some ranges in which should fit the prices of local tourism operators in order for operators to win and travelers to be free from overcharge (Buhalis,1999).

Accordingly, to improve competitiveness score specialists in the field recommends certain activities, most relevant are shown in Table 2.

Table no.2 Action proposal for a competitive tourist destination

Planning	Informing	Establishing tourism offer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ establish the mission ▪ organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ information for guests ▪ information for the local population ▪ support for journalists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ guest care ▪ guest entertainment ▪ coordinate tourism infrastructure ▪ operation of entertainment facilities ▪ control and improve product quality

Marketing and communications	Sales	Lobby
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ promotion ▪ sales promotion ▪ PR ▪ brand management ▪ market research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ information reservation system ▪ tourist packages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ tourism awareness among population ▪ tourism understanding at the level of political authorities ▪ collaboration in “cooperative” organizations

Source: Melinda Căndeia, et.al., *The Tourist Destination-The Competitive Unit on the future Market of Tourism, Proceedings ISI of The 2-nd WSEAS International Conference on Cultural Heritage and Tourism, Corfu, 2009, pp. 101-106.*

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The directions to streamline the management of tourism and the measures that can be taken at central level may improve the competitive position of a destination. Therefore, important measures might include:

- policy in exchange and interest rates;
- income policy;
- policy and structure to encourage investment;
- the fight against environmental pollution;
- the competition law;
- the structure and objectives of national / regional / local tourism;
- related policies in the labor market;
- training and research policy.

In today's competitive environment, tourism strategy must help to create a favorable environment for this sector; he is a "multidisciplinary firm" who needs a strategy to provide a vision, a model able to guide the production and marketing of tourism products.

Moreover, currently, Romanian tourism contribution to the national economy is insignificant compared with the achievements of other competing countries, including Central and Eastern Europe.

In order to regain the lost positions, Romanian tourism must become for the decision makers an important objective of economic policy, especially since his becoming as a priority branch of the Romanian economy would entail a series of positive effect, such be: The geographical transfer of resources; balance of payments equilibration; creating new jobs; Romania faster integration through tourism in the EU structures.

However, the development of the Romanian tourism is only valid where it is recognizes its role in social and economic activity from our country and are taken firm steps to revive this sector, in order to become a priority in the national economy.

Moreover, experts say that from the global perspective, travel and tourism together with information technology and telecommunications will become the three service industries with the highest turnover. This is because, tourism will attract continuously, regardless of conjuncture conditions and the shifts in tourism demand, a growing segment of the world population.

The main aspects of the objective of developing tourism product aimed at:

- modernization and development of national touristic product so that Romania to distinguish from other countries as a tourist destination;
- diversifying the tourism offer by deepening the specialization and increasing the quality, as well as promoting for development new offers according to market trends;
- creation of centers / areas / model tourism resorts in selected areas, with financial support from the central and local administration, but also through investments from international capital markets;
- optimization of the cultural and business component of the product in order to attract profitable changes in the customer structure;

- increasing the quality of tourist facilities and tourism capacity development in areas where tourism demand is greater than the supply;
- prioritizing the proposals for general infrastructure in order to overcome the existing difficulties for tourism;
- raising the standard of basic and complementary tourist services in accordance with the category of comfort and pricing;
- stimulating the development of various tourism forms or complementary tourism products needed to provide an answer to some segments of domestic demand (youth tourism, rural tourism, social tourism, health tourism, business tourism, safari);
- tourism development in the context of sustainability, assuming all the objectives, programs and actions for development: protecting and improving the environment in tourist areas and programs and development plans of the built environment to comply with environmental protection legislation, which have the effect of harmonizing with the environment.

In conclusion, the implementation of an effective tourism destinations management manifests a variety of plans from stimulate economic growth to improve the social structure, from better use of natural resources and environmental protection, to improve the living conditions and meeting the needs of tourists .

5. CONCLUSIONS

Considering the Romania's competitiveness score in key areas such as: Environmental Sustainability; Natural and Cultural Resources etc. but also how destinations management organizations exercise their activity we can appreciate that sustainability-oriented management can make its contribution to the development and promotion of Romania as quality tourism destination, ensuring its profile market presence and the opportunities to increase market share currently held; in other words creating the premises for a sustainable competitive advantage.

Applying an efficient sustainable development management at the level of Romanian tourist destinations ensures tourism development planning in a manner able to reduce the negative environmental impact, simultaneously with fair use of resources so as to obtain a wide range of travel benefits for the various motivations of tourism consumers. Also, is ensured the material and technical tourism specify basis at a quality level comparable with that of the main Romania competitors, an optimal employment of the workforce in tourism but also continuous improvement of staff's skills essential for an improved quality of travel experience.

Last but not least the need and opportunity of a sustainable management operationalization in the tourism destination development processes is evidenced by the possibility to improve competitiveness in a crucial area, namely that of prices, often high compared to the competition, thus guaranteeing a optimization of quality price ratio and an increased satisfaction of tourists who choose Romania as a holiday destination.

For future research, it would be interesting to see how many of the tourism destinations from Romania have developed a sustainable management, and how this type of organizing does the tourism activities influences the achievement of a competitive advantage. It would be also interesting to see what is the competitiveness index of tourism in different Regions of Romania, and not only overall.

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