

QUALITY TOURISM—A GENERATOR OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

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Abstract

The beginning of the new millenium has been marked by the travel and tourism industry, which represents the most dynamic activity sector. Taking into consideration the ascending trend of the tourism evolution in the last years, we may ascertain that this sector is a main source for the revival of the national economies and a major factor with strong social impact. The improvement of comfort and service quality in the tourism field is a permanent goal of the relevant entities, but also an essential criterion for the selection of tourists. For Romania, the quality tourism should represent a priority for sustainable development and a major factor of economic and social progress.

Key words: tourism, quality, sustainable development, economic and social benefits

JEL Classification: M10, L83

1. Introduction

The unique experience of traveling and facing new ways of life, cultures and customs, visiting historical places, etc. has become the main motivation pushing us to go on holidays. Therefore, the tourism activities are today an essential income source and a niche for the creation of jobs.

The tourism represents a key sector both within the world and national economy. Nowadays, literature gives new dimensions to the tourism, anchoring it in a complex process which splits itself into a varied industry generating benefits.

The quality is a variable which has become more and more used in the business sectors, and the managers of the companies from the travel and tourism industry, the employees and consumers wish this quality. Thus, we assist to the existence of a win-win concept where both parties must win something in order to gain further benefits. In the end, quality makes the difference, an aspect which is reflected in the profit of the companies providing tourist services and of course in the state budget.

2. Benefits of the quality tourism

The World Tourism Organization defines the quality tourism as „the result of a process which implies the fulfilment of all consumer’s needs, requirements and legitimate expectations in terms of product and service, at an acceptable price, in accordance with the contract conditions of a mutual agreement and the adjacent determinants of the quality which are safety and protection, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity and harmonization of the concerned tourist activity with the human and natural environment”.

Tourism is a big **labour consumer** and plays a very important role in economy. Besides the specific jobs required for these types of activities, it generates the consumption of living labour and from other related sectors, which come in support of the tourism industry, and thus contribute to the decrease of unemployment rate. The dynamics of the activities required and necessary for the tourists determine a whole range of jobs, and studies in the field show that a job in the tourism sector may create from 1 to 3 indirect and induced jobs. Thus, we can explain the beneficial influence of the tourism through the consumptions of goods and services upon the utilization of labour and the adjacent sectors (construction, agriculture, food industry, medicine, etc.)

Another benefit is the **increase and diversification of international exchanges**, and the quality of tourist services implies a major component of the international economic relations. Only if we consider the example of some poor countries which considered tourism as a „lifesaver”, we will see that they managed to turn this sector into a real „money making machine”. For example, such an edifying model was certainly Egypt which, not long ago, made billions of dollars from the rational exploitation of its national vestiges and not only. Turkey, also called the holiday paradise, is another example that knew how to get benefit from this industry and it curenly collects „no end

of money” for the state budget. However, not only the wonderful landscapes with intensive contrasts, the ancient history, the tasty meals and the existence of hospitable people made Turkey an attractive destination, but especially its top quality tourist services.

The tourism contributes to the state budget income, as a result of different taxes and duties which people have to pay: airport tax, visa fees, customs duties, resort tax, VAT, etc. Considered in other words one of the major world industries, tourism has a **significant impact upon the balance of payments** in many countries through the currency contribution obtained from their participation in the international tourist market.

Another aspect from which our country may benefit a great deal would be the **development of new modern types of tourism**, namely: agro-tourism, business tourism, political, medical, spa, religious, sports tourism, etc. The variety of types of tourism is actually an opportunity for getting major benefits.

Regarded as a social phenomenon, a generator of benefits, tourism was defined as: „the art of traveling for one’s own pleasure” (M. Peyromarrie Debord). Thus, apart from the economic consequences, the tourism has also a **deep social and human meaning**, directly acting both upon the tourists and the existing population from the regions visited. The favoring of communication, the exchange of ideas and information, broadening of the cultural horizon have a major impact upon the mental and intellectual human development. Currently, the tourism is recognized as an **education method** for increasing people’s culture and civilization level. Thus, in this context, we don’t speak only about the fulfilment of the material needs, but also about the **increase of life expectancy** and **the fulfilment of the spiritual needs** because any journey may become an „adventure of knowledge”.

The literature often associates tourism with the concept of **sustainable development**, a concept already used in many other fields of activity. The most famous definition of sustainable development has been of course given by the World Committee for Environment and Development (WCED) in „Our common future” report, known also under the name of Brundtland Report: „the sustainable development is the development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

There are three major principles of sustainable development: *environmental sustainability*, which ensures a tolerable development by maintaining the essential environmental processes, especially the diversity of biological resources; *social and cultural sustainability*, which guarantees a favorable economic growth for community’s members, compatible with the existing culture and the values of culture and civilization by preserving the community identities; *economic sustainability*, having the role of ensuring an efficient economic growth, and managing the resources in such manner as to exist in the future.

Starting from these essential principles, the impact of the tourist activities implies a sustainable development which should ensure:

- the use of less productive agricultural lands through appropriate tourist endowments;
- the increase of localities’ economic power by obtaining income from new local taxes and duties;
- the encouragement of the traditional activities, especially of handicraft activities and small traditional industry;
- the development of a specific trade based on local and hand-made economic products;
- the income obtained from tourism and the specific trade may contribute to the modernization of cultural objectives, ecological restoration of valuable landscapes;
- the profit and estimate contribution – as a result of the receipt, accommodation, transport and public food service – will represent a major contribution at the local development level;
- the improvement of life quality in the human settlements receiving tourists;
- the possibility to offer the visitors top quality experiences;
- the preservation of the environmental quality, an essential element for visitors and hosts.

3. The current situation of tourism

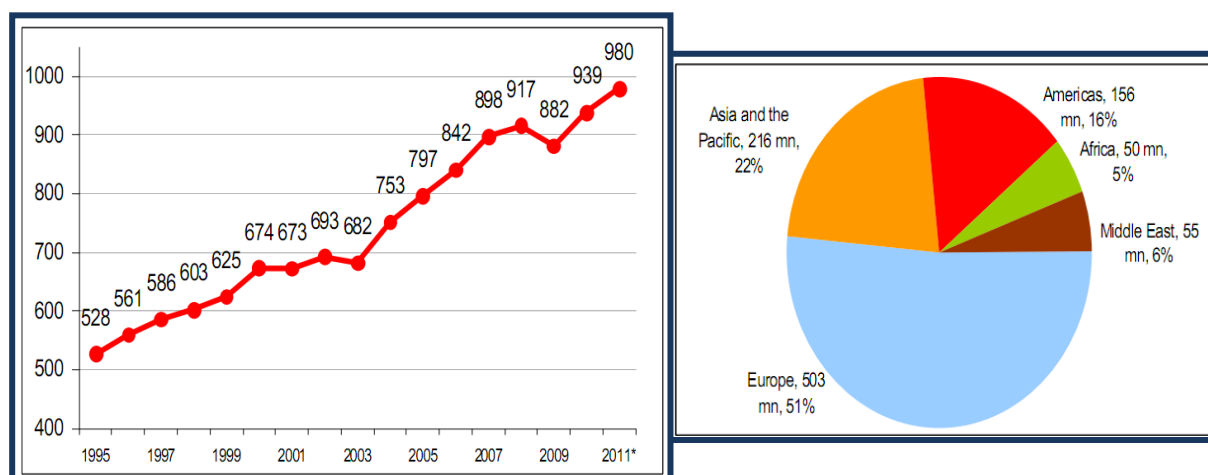
3.1. International tourism

According to the World Tourism Barometer made by the World Tourism Organization in January 2012, the first preliminary results in terms of international tourism at the level of 2011 have been presented. Thus, according to the latest studies, an increase of over 4% was stated in 2011 compared to 2010.

Contrary to all expectations, considering the world economic situation, the major political changes in North Africa and Middle East, but also the natural disaster in Japan, the percentage increases in terms of international tourism were: in Central and Eastern Europe and South Mediterranean 8%, Asia and Pacific 6%, South America 10%. As expected, the tourists avoided North Africa, and for this reason there was a decrease of 12%, as well as the Middle East with an 8 % drop.

It is interesting that Europe is in the top of tourists’ preferences, with approximately 503 million tourists (51%) who visited this continent. Also, the world forecasts are also favorable for 2012, estimating an increase up to 1 billion international tourists. If we take into consideration these forecasts, it is easy to understand the economic growth of the European countries which managed to get benefits from the tourist potential and related services.

Figure no. 1. International tourist arrivals (million)



3.2. What happens to the tourism in Romania?

Indeed, as may be seen, tourism is a „gold mine” for many states which knew how to fully exploit this opportunity. The numerous economic and social benefits tend to come first both for the private companies and the state budget. Unfortunately, Romania is still a „product” which does not sell well on this market. Why? A major problem is related to the very poor state of the roads, which, whether we want to recognize it or not, represents the biggest obstacle to the tourism development. If we take into account the fact that the majority of foreign visitors prefers the roads, we will see the actual loss of the national economy. The current poor infrastructure determines the ranking among the final places in the top of the world tourism competition.

Nevertheless, in order to obtain the multiple gains resulting from this sector, the decision-makers must be convinced of the tourism importance for the economy and labour employment. In these difficult times, tourism may be the solution for the economic hardships which Romania faces. The taxes, duties, unemployment rate, etc. increased in the context of economic uncertainty, and for this reason the tourism existence is highly required as a factor of increasing the exports, stimulating the economy, creating jobs and the convergence towards a sustainable development. In other words, by improving the basic infrastructure and services, the tourism may contribute to eradication of extreme poverty and starvation.

The tourist potential of Romania is very high, but it is continuously degrading, and that's why it is necessary to take steps in order to remediate this situation. Besides the other unfavorable aspects previously mentioned, the environment protection and conservation also becomes a major issue.

We are not doing very well in terms of promotion either because our country did not manage to create a clear and strong image on the international market since it did not adopt a systematic and sustained policy for attracting foreign tourists. While the Romanian seaside and Dracula were promoted one year, and the Danube Delta together with the rural tourism the following year, a confusing image was created in the foreigners' mind. Normally, the promotion must be strong, focused and continuous, it must show elements that make Romania different from the neighbouring countries, but, mainly should find out that unique element of attraction to stimulate as many foreign tourists as possible to visit Romania.

According to the Press Release no.23 of February 2, 2012 of the National Institute for Statistics, the arrivals recorded in the tourist receipt units were determined for the year 2011 compared to 2010.

Table no. 1. Arrivals recorded in the tourist receipt units. 2011 compared to 2010

	ARRIVALS		
	Year 2010 -thousands-	Year 2011 -thousands-	2011 compared to 2010 -%-
TOTAL	6.036,20	7.002,40	116,00
Foreign tourists	1.343,10	1514,80	112,80
Romanian tourists	4.693,10	5.387,60	116,90

The arrivals recorded in the tourist receipt units in 2011 summed up 7002.40 thousands, up 16% compared to those for 2010. In terms of the Romanian tourists' arrivals in the tourist receipt units with accommodation functions, there were 78.40% of the total number of arrivals in 2011 while the foreign tourists accounted for 21.60% of the total number of arrivals, percentages which are close to those for 2010. The arrivals in hotels in 2011 have a share of 76.70% of the total arrivals in the tourist receipt units with accommodation functions. Compared to 2010, the arrivals in hotels in 2011 increased by 16.80%.

The statistics is the more alarming as we see the actual number of foreign tourists who come, however, to spend their holidays in Romania, namely 1514.80 thousands. Even if 2011 registers an increase of 12.80% compared to 2010, this does not mean that we provide quality tourist services at competitive prices. If we take into consideration that some of the world states register a significant percentage of the GDP from multiple tourist activities, Romania's situation is among the most unfortunate ones.

From the previous analysis, we must identify the guidelines that must be followed by the strategy for relaunching the international tourism in Romania:

- development of general infrastructure;
- development of tourist infrastructure;
- creation and intensive promotion of competitive tourist products that should capitalize both the anthropic and natural potential;
- improvement of the services provided for tourists;
- creation of a coherent image on the foreign markets, an image which should be completely different from that of the direct competitors: Hungary, Bulgaria.

Thus, for the less developed countries to be able to benefit from a sustainable development within the World Export Development Forum, several essential conditions were published in order to reach this goal:

- Tourism should be approached in a sustainable manner;
- It is important to prioritize tourism in development strategies;
- There is an absolute need for security and political stability;
- A circuit approach involving regional partners is highly desirable;
- The role of the state in policy, legal and regulation creation is essential, but there is also a need to reduce bureaucracy and streamline licensing processes;
- The empowerment of local communities and their sharing in benefits of tourism is critical;
- Public-private partnerships are essential;
- The issue of retention of earnings and reduction of leakages is one that confounds most LDCs;
- Training and human capacity development must be a high priority;
- Coordination and coherence with other economic sectors is important;
- Effective marketing and positioning strategies are important to achieve successful branding and create a niche in the market;
- Learning from the experiences of other countries and sharing success stories is an important ingredient.

4. Benchmarking – a real chance for tourism development and improvement

In a world where the competition resides in any field, the joining of the two concepts „benchmarking” and „quality of tourist services” represents a good opportunity for any entity to improve its performance in order to obtain maximum results.

The benchmarking is a strategy which helps to improve a business performance and which, once applied, ensures an extra efficiency of the services and a high quality of the products and services marketed. The benchmarking is a new vision which imposes the acceptance of an idea of change and receptivity to continuous and permanent learning from the business partners, and, why not, from the competition. This way, the quality increases and better services are provided.

The benchmarking consists in measuring the performance of the tourist service providers in terms of quality compared to those companies which are considered the best on the market. For this purpose, we include as benchmarking elements not only comparative statistics, but also visits or discussions with the management of the respective companies or the setup of complex observation and analysis teams.

As process, the benchmarking may offer multiple advantages, such as:

- improvement up to the level of excellence by observing the best practices in terms of international and national tourism;
- identification of improvement resources and ideas which are beyond the own environment limits, either if it refers to persons, departments, companies, countries, etc.;
- initiation of an active learning process within the entities which specialize in tourist services,
- need for a better understanding of the processes in the tourism industry;
- elaboration of strategic and efficient objectives by knowing the objectives and strategies of other successful models;
- establishment of a reference standard for performance measurement;
- understanding and fulfilment of the continuously changing needs of the tourists.

5. Conclusions

Taking into consideration the current economic and social situation, the tourism has all features to become a strong development factor and to bring a significant contribution in order to exceed the difficulties encountered. As industry, the quality tourism registers spectacular developments, becoming an inherent dimension of the contemporary society.

The tourist potential of our country is very rich and varied, but its capitalization is inappropriate. Thus, taking into consideration its multiple benefits at the economic, social, cultural, political level, etc., a priority for establishing the general development strategy of Romania is required.

Even if the world economic context may not be favorable, the tourism remains among the most important components of the international trade for the establishment of prices, the equilibrium of the balance of payments, the fair and right distribution of the national income and the full utilisation of the workforce. In other words, the tourism represents one of the main sources for reviving the national economy in each country and a generator of economic and social benefits.

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