

DIRECTIONS OF ACTION REGARDING THE SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN THE SOUTH WEST-OLTENIA REGION

CEAUSESCU AURELIAN IONUT,

LECTURER. PHD. "CONSTANTIN BRÂNCUȘI" UNIVERSITY OF TÂRGU JIU, ROMANIA

e-mail:ionutaurelian81@yahoo.com

Abstract

The important role that tourism and travel must play in the development of Romania's economic and social future is undeniable. However, much remains to be done to ensure that the industry's potential is fully realized. Both government and industry will have to overcome a number of challenges to ensure that maximum benefits are achieved for the economy and society in a sustainable and long-term way.

Long-term planning at both regional and national level is a premise for generating investor confidence and organizing the sustainable and successful development of tourism in Romania.

The lack of a tourism development strategy can lead to the degradation of tourism resources with very serious socio-economic implications. From the economic point of view, the degradation of the tourist potential is reflected first of all, in the impossibility of its capitalization from the tourist point of view as a source of income, thus constituting a definitive loss for the economy..

Keywords: *sustainable regional development, tourism development strategies, tourist regions, tourism activities*

Classification JEL:*L83, O18, P28*

1. INTRODUCTION

The application of the concept of sustainable development in tourism is based on the understanding of sustainability as a strategy that must be followed in order to achieve certain well-defined objectives.

Strategies usually have the following characteristics[1]:

- in a competitive environment they are meant to lead to the positioning of a company or tourist destinations from the current position to a more favorable one;
- planning can be done on different time horizons, achieving the proposed objectives requiring patience and perseverance;
 - achieving the goals proposed by the strategy implies a clear definition of the mission, establishing a set of motivating, flexible, tangible, acceptable and comprehensive objectives, and last but not least a team of competent people eager to achieve them;
 - Successful strategies must make a realistic connection between available resources and the objectives to be achieved. Proposing unrealistic goals, without any concordance with the availability of resources can only bring frustration and ultimately failure;
 - strategies are very complex and require the cooperation and participation of many interest groups.

Tourist regions should not be defined for administrative reasons depending on the area of the territory but in relation to the following criteria:

- the tourist offer, present or of immediate perspective, which must correspond to the minimum estimated demand, to serve the potential tourists from the region in question and from the adjacent areas (its surface depends on the one hand on the population density and on the other existing tourist attractions);
- the distances between the tourist objectives within the region, which must be within certain limits, depending on the quality of the communication routes and which allow to cover

them in a reasonable time (maximum 2 hours) thus making possible the organization of tourist tours of a day, stay programs with multiple destinations, etc.

The general objectives of the regional tourism management must be, in our opinion, the following[2]:

1. Establishing a tourism strategy designed to ensure sustainable tourism development at the regional level.

2. Establishing the appropriate forms of tourism for the studied region: rural, ecological tourism, transit tourism, etc.

3. Identifying the demand for services and promoting the offer for the following groups: locals already engaged in tourism (financial consulting, advertising, etc.);

- ✓ new entrepreneurs in tourism activities (information, consulting, training courses);
- ✓ tourists (who will be directed to more suitable destinations with their wishes and possibilities);
- ✓ local authorities (for example County Councils) which are and must be generally interested in sustainable development but also in finding solutions to some particular problems, such as reducing the tourist pressure on some areas (for example natural monuments, as is the case of Poiana Narciselor in Gorj County) by creating buffer zones, etc.

4. Resolving conflict situations that may arise:

- between the local population and tourists - are well known, for example, conflicts in the UK between ramblers and the rural population;
- between those already integrated on the tourist market of the region and the newcomers on it, etc.

5. Outlining the most effective strategies for optimizing the relations between the social groups involved in the tourist activity.

The development of sustainable regional tourism should be a concern of the leading factors of Romanian tourism, but it must be said that this has not happened so far, much less in the context of the current Covid pandemic 19.

2. Is there a need for a strategy for the sustainable regional development of tourism in the South-West Oltenia region, in the current context?

The development of the Romanian tourism and its transformation into a successful sector of the Romanian economy, according to the exceptional tourist potential that our country has, supposes the elaboration and especially the application in practice of adequate strategies.

Given the economic, social and political importance of tourism, its contribution to the overall development of a region, it appears obvious the need to design, implement and promote tourism development strategies, not only nationally but also regionally. One aspect that must be taken into account when developing these strategies is to respect the principles of sustainable development, which take into account the development of the tourism sector, respecting the requirements of environmental protection, taking into account the specific objectives of each area or region[10]:.

The main aspects of the objective regarding the development of the tourist product aim at [4]:

- modernization and development of the national tourist product, so that Romania can be distinguished from other countries as a tourist destination;
- diversification of the tourist offer by deepening the specialization and increasing the quality of the established offer and promoting for the development of new offers according to the market trends;
- creation of model tourist centers / areas / resorts in selected areas and domains, with financial support from the central and local administration as well as through investments on the international capital markets;

- optimizing to the maximum the cultural and business component of the product in order to attract profitable changes in the clientele structure;
- increasing the quality of tourist facilities and developing tourist capacity in areas where tourist demand is higher than the specific supply;
- establishing priorities in the general infrastructure proposals, in order to overcome the existing difficulties for tourism;
- raising the standard of basic and complementary tourist services in accordance with the comfort category and the tariff practiced;
- approval of the offer;
- stimulating the development of some forms of tourism or complementary / parallel tourist products necessary to ensure a response to certain segments of domestic demand (youth tourism, rural tourism, social tourism);
- tourism development in the context of sustainability, involving in all objectives, programs and development actions:
- protecting and improving the environment in tourist areas;
- programs and plans for the development of the built environment that respect the legislation on environmental protection, on urbanism and spatial planning and those specific to tourism, which have the effect of harmonizing with the environment and optimizing it;

Some characteristics of mountain tourism in the South-West Oltenia region[14]:

- outdated service offer, non-competitive on the international market;
- poor and poor quality leisure offer;
- limited ski area and insufficient means of cable transport;
- the non-correlation between the accommodation capacities in the resorts and the endowments for winter sports, which are undersized;
- the concentration of the tourist structures on Prahova Valley - Poiana Brasov, the other mountain massifs being poorly developed;
- the network of tourist chalets is growing but there are many non-competitive tourist reception structures as endowment and comfort category, etc.

Thus some strategic directions of action could be[10]:

- Improving the quality standards for cable transport in the South West Oltenia area (resorts in Gorj, Vâlcea and Mehedinți counties).
- The exact delimitation of the ski area in the tourist resorts of international interest in accordance with the legislation in the field of environment and agriculture (many differences between different administrative-territorial units).
- Improving the specific infrastructure for leisure and increasing the number of specialized services / structures for leisure.
- Modernization of tourist structures with accommodation functions.
- Modernization and extension of access roads to different mountain areas, with a high degree of attractiveness for tourists (eg Sohodol Gorges, Olteț Gorges).
- Increasing the network of mountain huts and refuges in mountain massifs that do not benefit from shelters.

What actions can be taken to revive mountain tourism in the Southwest Oltenia region? In our opinion they could be[8]:

- + Endowment to international standards and in accordance with the specialized legislation of all the slopes in the main ski tourist resorts belonging to the South-West Oltenia region.
- + Development and diversification of leisure with emphasis on "après ski" leisure in all ski resorts.
- + Modernization of the network of chalets and shelters, currently existing in the mountain massifs of the analyzed region.

- ✚ Increasing the tourist circulation (number of tourists) from the mountain massifs that do not benefit from tourist structures with accommodation functions.

Another way to develop tourism in the South-West Oltenia region is the revitalization of the spa offer.

Overall, the South-West Oltenia region has good potential being an important country of tourist destination in the future. This will be done in the conditions in which substantial improvements will be made on the tourist product and the level of services. The diversity of the tourist offer in the spa resorts is considered as one of the strong points of the Tourist Center region (Băile Săcelu, Bala, Băile Govora, Băile Olănești, Călimănești-Căciulata).

Among the actions that could be taken to revitalize these areas, we can list:

- ✚ Creation of a spa network in the South-West Oltenia region equipped to international standards and in accordance with international trends - wellness.
- ✚ Inclusion of the Ocnele Mari salt mine in Valcea county, in the international tourist circuit.
- ✚ Rehabilitation of the infrastructure necessary for the exploitation of mineral resources (from mineral water springs to therapeutic mud) in modernized resorts.
- ✚ Re-engineering of the existing treatment bases, modernization and raising the comfort level of the reception structures, extension of the arrangements and endowments of specific and general leisure;
- ✚ Modernization and development of transport and access infrastructure in spas.

3. The objectives of the tourism promotion strategy in the South-West Oltenia region

Problems with the product or tourism products offered play an important role in most short-term tactical and strategic decisions, as well as in long-term strategies, because any change in the product requires significant long-term investments.

For these reasons, among the general objectives of the tourism promotion strategy in the South-West Oltenia region should be:

- Positioning Romania as a tourist destination that offers unique tourist attractions and travel experiences, a destination with welcoming people and services comparable to those offered in Western European countries.
- Stimulating the interest of potential tourists from abroad to spend their holidays in the South-West Oltenia Region.
- Promoting the tourist products that can attract new market segments and / or that determine the prolongation of the duration of the visit / vacation in the South-West Oltenia Region and implicitly the increase of the revenues from the tourism activity.

Among the main groups of tourist products that will have to be the object of promotion efforts in the period 2021 - 2027, will include:

Summer Programs / Packages for the summer season:

- Thematic or general interest tours in the South-West Oltenia region;
- Active and recreational vacations, outdoor hobbies;
- Country vacations / rural tourism;
- geotourism (eg ecotourism plus local people and culture);

Programs / Tourist Packages for the winter season:

- Skiing and other winter sports,
- Cultural and social events (customs and traditions, Christmas and New Year celebration);

Tourist Programs / Packages for the whole year:

- Holidays or short trips in the main cities / cultural centers of the South-West Oltenia region;

- Conferences, Incentives and Events (MICE);
- Travel of special interest;
- Medical treatment, rest and recovery in treatment resorts;
- Continuous opportunities for health and treatment (eg from the recreational experience of spas to medical treatments);
- Cultural - artistic events;

4. CONCLUSIONS

Looking for answers to the above mentioned challenges, it is obvious that the answer can only be one, a well-argued strategy is needed to aim at the sustainable development of each tourist area in the South-West Oltenia region. Each area has a number of specific problems, problems that require alternative solutions and strategies.

The main recommendations for the current promotion approaches are the establishment of representatives in the main markets with potential and the support of trade in tourist products, bringing the market to Romania rather than bringing Romania to market, and the broad development of tourism in Romania.

The success of any strategy consists in the ability to achieve the objectives developed in a coherent framework that reflects the development potential of both the area and the region.

However, it must be borne in mind that no strategy is "nailed", it is essentially dynamic and flexible, undergoing changes during implementation depending on the new elements that may arise, especially since we must not forget that a development strategy is always made in long and very long terms.

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