

COMPETITIVE IMAGE OF ROMANIAN TOURIST DESTINATION

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Abstract:

The problem of competitiveness has become an important theme at the level of each actor of the economy and the tourist destination competitiveness can be described as the element that makes an increase of visitors over time, they ensure their memorable experiences in a profitably, enhancing the welfare of the residents and preserving natural capital for future generations. Therefore, tourist destinations are in constant competition. Each one of them wishes to obtain a competitive advantage, so it must have something specific and in this case animation represents a factor of competitiveness.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the connection between the tourist destination, competitiveness, sustainable tourism in creating a competitive tourist destinations namely Romania.

Keywords: tourism destination, competitiveness, sustainable tourism, tourist management.

JEL Classification: Q01, L83

1. The concept of tourist destination

Currently it must be noted a concern emphasizing the concept of a competitive destination. However, when we speak of competitiveness of the tourist destination, we regard the two parts of the concept, namely: tourist destination and competitiveness.

Tourist destination is the place chosen by the traveller to spend a night or a longer period of time. Tourist destination can be both the geographical area for which one has opted, as well as a social entity represented by the inhabitants with their habits and life style.

We can speak of many schemes to tourist destinations, according to various criteria (Cismaru, L., 2009, p.33).

I. From the point of view of the magnitude of the tourist destinations, they are divided into microdestinations (internal region of a State, several places) and in macrodestinations (continents, countries, Terra).

II. Regarding the degree of recognition, we can distinguish established tourist destinations and unknown.

III. According to the level of recognition of tourist destinations, tourist destinations are taking shape in international and internal tourist destinations: national or local tourist destinations.

IV. On the length of the tourist destination, there are old tourist destinations, new ones or reinvented tourist destinations.

V. As regards the life-cycle stage of destinations, we can highlight: tourist destinations that are born, grow, mature, tourist destinations which are in decline or simply disappear.

VI. Another classification is based on competitive advantage, which results in a division of tourist destinations: competitive or non-competitive destinations.

VII. Another criterion for division is represented by the level of development of tourist destinations, namely: dynamic and static tourist destinations.

VIII. In view of the element, we can distinguish: sustainable tourist destinations that practice a sustainable tourism and tourist destinations which do not practice a sustainable tourism.

IX. On the basis of membership of a state or across borders, there can be: internal tourist destinations or foreign tourist destinations.

X. Regarding the forms of travel, we can speak about the following types of destinations:

- Tourist destinations which is one form of travel;
- Joint tourist destinations: destinations to see mountain, seaside, tourist destinations for older or young people, tourist destinations that practice social tourism, urban and rural destinations.

XI. Depending on the season, tourist destinations can highlight: tourist destinations affected by departures (summer or winter destinations) or tourist destinations unaffected by departures.

Each tourist destination wishes to obtain a competitive advantage. What advantage does not mean a struggle of tourist products and services offered, but turned into a battle of perceptions in the minds of the guests? (Pike, S., 2002, p. 12). The psychological factor and experience play an important role in assessing the competitiveness of tourist destinations, becoming more important as a factor. In the past, competitiveness meant a remarkable quality of the product and efficiency; now competitiveness is seen as efficiency and as satisfaction of the tourist which comes from what brought the size of communication. Touristic experience must be unique to attract the tourist through emotions.

2. The competitiveness of the tourist destination

We are not looking at a single definition of competitiveness, because due to the very different approaches of this theme, it can be asserted that there is no one universally recognised. According to Buckley (1990), competitiveness is closely linked to the quality of resources used, while Kovacic (2004) examines the phenomenon in terms of process efficiency, productivity being a key element. Competitiveness is defined in the IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook as a “part of the economic domain, which refers to the activities and the policies that determine a nation's ability to create and maintain an environment that ensures the prosperity of population and the economic development” (IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook, 2003).

The literature defines the notion of competitiveness in tourism from the perspective of capacity to face competition in cost effective and efficient on the market. The term competitiveness has become a current topic, being debated in the framework of international conferences and congresses as well:

- ✓ 1990 – a workshop on the theme of competitiveness by the Institute of geography of the University of Groningen;
- ✓ 1993- Conference with the title, „The long-term competitiveness of tourist destinations" has been prepared by the International Association of Travel Scientific Experts;
- ✓ 1996 – Cavanilles Foundation for advanced studies in tourism held the second international forum on tourism with theme „the future of international tourist destinations";
- ✓ 1998- Congress, number 48 titled „Marketing of destinations - purposes and limits" by AIEST;
- ✓ 1999- the annual Conference with the theme „Tourist destinations marketing -success through competitiveness" by TTRA Europe;
- ✓ 1999 – Centro Internazionale di Studi Economica (CISET) prepare an annual Conference that has as its main theme: tourism destination marketing and management;
- ✓ 2004- „Networks and partnership in the development and management of tourist destination" is the theme of the Conference of the ATLAS;
- ✓ 2005 – ATLAS Conference has as its main theme „Viewed again destinations-perspectives in the development and management of protected areas ";
- ✓ 2007 - European Economic and Social Committee conclude work on Agenda 21 for tourism which takes account of the creation of an "Agenda for a sustainable and competitive european tourism", Brussels;

- ✓ 2008 – World Economic Forum, The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report;
- ✓ 2009 - World Economic Forum, The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report;
- ✓ 2010 - URBACT Annual Conference (Tourist campaign in Romania) that has as its theme the development of tourist destinations and Romanian products.

A central element of economic policies can be considered as long-term competitiveness as the only Nations with fields competitive on international markets can benefit from a high level of productivity in those branches (Porter, M., 1993, p. 188). Also, it can be said that competitiveness can be regarded as an „indicator of capacity, the granting of tourist products, instead of in the manner and at the time in which they are sought after by buyers at prices as good or even better than the price of other tenderers, so that consumers can obtain at least the opportunity cost of the proceeds of the resources involved” (Freebain, J., 1986, p.189).

We can speak of several types of competition:

- A competitive tourist product both on the domestic market and on external markets;
- A competitive market factors involved;
- Competition with regard to the level of aggregation of specific products.

When we say competitiveness we consider several elements that contribute to achieving this:

1. Environmental conditions:
 - Natural and cultural resources;
 - Capital resources and infrastructure;
 - Human resources.
2. The quality and structure of tenderers;
3. Market structure and the organizational structure;
4. The conditions of demand and adjust the supply.

The success of tourist destinations is influenced and attractions and tourist resources of it benefits, namely: the geographical location, natural and anthropogenic tourist resources, organizing events, recreational activities and tourist equipment, animation, commercial network for tourists. In the tourism area, the effectiveness of the activities are measured by indicators/indices, by which are classified the national economies, under some international rankings. These indices for measuring the competitiveness can be classified into categories such as: price competitiveness index, Human Tourism Index, index of infrastructure, environment index, technology index, index of human resources, openness index, social index, whose value on a scale from 0 to 100 shows each country's performance compared with other countries.

International Economic Forum competitiveness index introduced tourism and travel (ICTC) has as its main purpose to identify the strengths of a tourist destinations as well as the recognition of the obstacles in the development of tourism.

The concept of competitiveness of tourist destinations has led latest to the theory, several models have been developed to synthesize the theory and to make it usable in practice. Thus, the theory knows models like: *Porter Model*, *Poon Model*, *Bordas Model* or *Ritchie and Crouch Model* (Rotariu, I., 2009, pp. 90-99), but another set of models such as *Servqual Model* or *Qualitest Model*. Other factors that ensure the competitiveness of a country's tourist destinations are: private tourist attractions, the factors of destinations and other resources, tourist demand conditions, planning and sustainable development, the management of tourist destinations.

The concept of competitiveness in tourism is based on two subconcepts, namely comparative advantage (the abundance of relatively cheap) and competitive advantage (competitiveness of the tourist environment and unique experience of the journey in the mind of tourist). Also, one can say that a long-term practice of sustainable tourism contributes categorically to the development of tourist destinations. Competitive advantage is represented by the fact that sustainable development contributes to raising the living standard, bringing the medium term welfare to the long one. It is always assumed that sustainable tourism involves optimal use of resources, a decrease of the negative impact of the economic, socio-cultural, ecological, an increase in benefits to local communities, national economies and on the protection and preservation of the environment. For a tourist destination to be increasingly more competitive, it should be supported by "a strong brand; the brand destination according to Ritchie (1998, p. 103) is a name, symbol, a logo, a keyword or any sign that identifies and sets the destination. Furthermore, he expressed the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; [brand] serves to strengthen the emotional bond between the visitor and the destination".

3. Romania - competitive tourist destination or not?

Dobrea Razvan (2008, pp. 42-46) presents, in a research, such an analysis, based on these indices. In the analysis of competitiveness for the Romania tourism there were taken as reference for comparison eight countries that are competing in tourism and situated nearby, in terms of territory: Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine. Highlighting the global situation of the country is done by

reporting at the values of the eight index of the countries considered in this analysis, calculating their average index.

After conducting the research it was determined the position of Romania in terms of competitiveness in tourism, compared with the neighbouring countries, and concluded that Romania has competitive edge in pricing, environment, openness to trade and tourism, and social; compared to other countries, the competitive disadvantage was achieved in: technology, human resources and infrastructure. According to a report published in 2008 by World Economic Forum, Romania ranks 69th place of 130 in tourism competitiveness rankings. Through the information contained, it stands the ones that refer on the Romania report to other countries, in some perspectives, for example:

- Romanians affinity to travel ranks the country at 101;
- Natural resources are relatively few, compared with other countries, Romania, reaching number 96;
- Cultural resources occupy a much higher position, reaching number 44;
- In terms of tourism prioritization, Romania ranks 102;
- At the price competitiveness level, Romania scored 109 points.

According to the sources, in 2009, Romania has climbed three places to 66, in a top tourism competitiveness conducted by the World Economic Forum, from 133 countries.

Unquestionably, Romania shall benefit from a valuable tourism potential to be exploited.

I believe that a first step in the realization of this approach would be to follow the advice of the Chairman of the WTTC, Jean-Claude Baumgarten (May 2006) according to which, „the first emergency for the purpose of the Romanian tourism to grow more than the European average by 2016 and world is improving the image of the country abroad". Also, I am of the opinion that in order to obtain a competitive advantage so crucial in determining the competitiveness of tourist destinations must highchair a sustainable tourism, although there are some opinions that this form of tourism in the short term should lead to „a decrease in attractiveness, tourist destinations". However, I am among the supporters of sustainable tourism, because I think that in the long term by means of this form of tourism, tourist destination can gain prosperity, being more competitive. In what follows I will expose the point of view with regard to the choice of such an approach.

Firstly, sustainable development contributes to raising the living standard, leading the medium term welfare to the long one. The second involves permanently where it appears that sustainable tourism involves optimal use of resources, a decrease of the negative impact of the economic, socio-cultural, ecological, an increase in benefits to local communities, national

economies and on the protection and preservation of the environment. Otherwise, sustainable tourism wants the development of new sources of energy and minimum consumption of sweepings affecting the environment (Dobrescu, M., E., Manea, G., Ștefănescu, R., Velter, V., 2011, p.74).

The main motivation of the option for a sustainable tourism is represented by the fact that only through such tourism we can contribute to conserving resources for future generations, protecting biological diversity and achieve a balance between the generations. Management of sustainable development must be present in all aspects of economic, social, environmental, to implement a new organic culture (Konrad, C., 2011, p.202).

To these a number of social reasons are also added: if each of us opt for a sustainable tourism we help improve the quality of life of the entire population and to maintain quality of the environment as essential aspect for a tourist destination. In other words, sustainable tourism constitutes a premise for a higher quality of life.

The option for practicing such tourism destinations is also sustained by official opinions, such as:

The World Commission on environment and development in the context of the report has defined sustainable development Brundtland as development "which aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

According to the WTO (World Tourism Organization), sustainable development is defined as: "development that meets the needs of travellers, and hosts the regions while protecting and strengthens opportunities for the future".

4. Conclusions

It can be concluded that the competitiveness is a current problem, which must be regarded as both at micro and macroeconomic areas, because currently there is a reduced competitiveness of the Romanian tourist destinations. Competitiveness means efficiency, differentiation, high quality, safety, suitability, modern management, optimal quality/price report.

Today, the tourist destinations intend to create a unique and competitive image in tourist mind; they wish to obtain a competitive advantage through high quality of services and a feeling „without equal” regarding the travel. I refer to authentic tourist experience, unique to draw emotional one. In this meaning, it can be said that the animation is a factor of competitiveness. Also, another competitive advantage worth taken into account by the tourist destinations is

practicing a sustainable tourism which contributes on the long-term at the prosperity of the tourist destinations. But there are opinions that the pursuit of a sustainable tourism is on short term, because of the many principles to be observed in the context of this form of travel. And this can result in a decrease in the attractiveness of the tourist destinations.

However, I believe that there is a close and strong link between the competitiveness of tourist destinations and sustainable development on a sustainable basis, because this form of tourism has a positive impact for economic, social, environmental, natural future and may have as a consequence, increasing employment and alternative income, and increasing the level of attractiveness of tourist destinations.

Management of the quality of service must be proposed and introduced in tourism in each unit to attract new customers. Therefore, the variety of quality tourist services is the tool through which we can ensure the competitiveness of the tourism offer, both internally and abroad. Tourism destination management should consider two essential elements: the satisfaction of tourists and getting profit.

Although, our country has a very rich and varied tourist potential, Romanian Tourism is still in the phase of development and rehabilitation.

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