

ROMANIA TOURIST DESTINATION-CAPITALIZATION POSSIBILITIES, FORECASTS AND TREND

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Abstract. Tourism represents, in essence, a market where consumer demand for a wide variety of products and services is manifested. This market is of particular interest in most countries, due to its growth rate and current size, its future growth potential, its contribution to economic development expressed in terms of investment, jobs created and income, its effects on host communities, as well as the impact on the environment. Romania has considerable natural resources, with a great potential for the development of tourism, respectively rural tourism, the market for Romanian tourist product is facing some particular trends that make the subject of our paper.

Key words: tourism, Romania, capitalization possibilities, forecasts, trend

INTRODUCTION

In recent years we have become increasingly aware of the complexity, fragility and priceless value of our planet. [1,2] At the same time, tourism tends to become an increasingly popular expression of this consciousness. Tourism industry represents one of the largest industries in the world and at one of the most important factors of global economic development.[13] In recent years, tourism has registered many negative aspects due to phenomena that get out of control, the most important damage being to the natural environment. Sustainable tourism comes with the idea of meeting the needs of current tourists and the tourism industry with special care regarding the protection of the environment and with it to ensure the presence of opportunities for the future.[11,12] It is considered the satisfaction of all the economic, social, aesthetic needs, etc., of the "actors" in tourism, mentioning the cultural and ecological integrity, the biological diversity and all the systems that support life. Tourism sells these resources as part of the tourist product and, at the same time, brings other resources for local population. So between tourism and environment is a special relation, this is why sustainable development in tourism must be a necessity, because the economy and the environment are sides of the same coin, in other words, the two are closely linked and interdependent.

Tourism is currently a global market, being not only its size and growth rates make, very attractive, but also its future potential, which is far from exhausted. Experts say that, in the global perspective, tourism and travel will be alongside information technology and telecommunications the three service industries with the highest turnover. This is because, the tourist services will permanently attract, regardless of the conjunctural states and the mutations occurred in the tourist demand, a growing segment of the world population.

The development of tourism presupposes the existence of a tourist potential which, through its attractiveness, will ensure the integration of an area, regions with tourist vocation in the domestic and international tourist circuits and which will allow the access of tourists through appropriate arrangements. As a component part of the tourist offer, together with the production equipment, the mass of goods destined for tourist consumption, the labor force, the tourist infrastructure, the structures and trading conditions, the tourist resources include the natural and anthropic attractions from an

area, country or geographical region. The inclusion of tourist resources in the category of resources of the service enterprise means the specificity of the composition of the tourist product and components that attract, retain, are "tasted" but not consumed [14] with food and wear of means of transport, are unstoppable, although of appreciable longevity. In the existence of the Earth, they produce aesthetic emotions and unforgettable emotional feelings. Tourist resources are divided into two main categories: natural tourist resources and anthropic tourist resources.

The implications of the development of tourism and the efficient capitalization of tourist resources and other related ones are known, especially in international tourism, in: increasing foreign exchange earnings and balancing the balance of external payments, absorption and redistribution of labor, development and diversification of economic sectors providing goods and services for tourism, economic and social growth at local and regional level and increasing local population incomes, sustainable development of rural areas, protection and conservation of the environment, natural tourist resources and cultural-historical traditions of the country, improving the health of the population, educating and raising its level of education, etc.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main purpose of the paper is to expose the position of Romania as tourist destination, at international level, and to see which are the advantages for future capitalization. At the private level it was pursued

At a particular level, the main stages were:

- global view on tourism and clarification of the link between tourism and sustainable development;
- highlighting the possibilities for capitalizing on Romania's tourism in the eyes of foreigners;
- forecasts of the evolution of tourist activity in the context of the current crisis
- the view on the trend of the rural tourism product market.

In order to achieve the proposed goal, a multi-criteria analysis was used, going through as logical steps: data collection, processing, analysis, observation and their interpretation.

RESEARCH RESULTS

From the start we begin from the statement that Romania has considerable natural resources, with a great potential for the development of tourism, respectively rural tourism.[4,10,15]

Possibilities for capitalizing on Romania's tourism in the eyes of foreigners. Most of the possibilities of tourist capitalization mentioned by the *French* refer to: the treatments with mineral or thermal water from the spa resorts and the tourism from the seaside resorts. Romania can also use the diversity of natural landscapes (a strongly contrasting natural environment) and the warm welcome made by the population.

The study undertaken on *Spain* shows that Romania's potential as a tourist destination is representative and involves: diverse and complementary tourist resources (culture, nature, sports and ethnography); a well-preserved, original and attractive nature (especially the Carpathians and the Danube Delta); the enormous cultural, architectural and artistic richness ("the greatest jewels-monasteries, castles, churches and traditional villages in Maramures and Bucovina should be highlighted").

The *Danes* emphasize the fact that Romania has the potential to offer more opportunities for a family vacation with children, so with strong inclinations towards

agritourism or rural tourism. In addition to the values of adventure and family, many former Danish tourists say it is cheap to visit Romania.

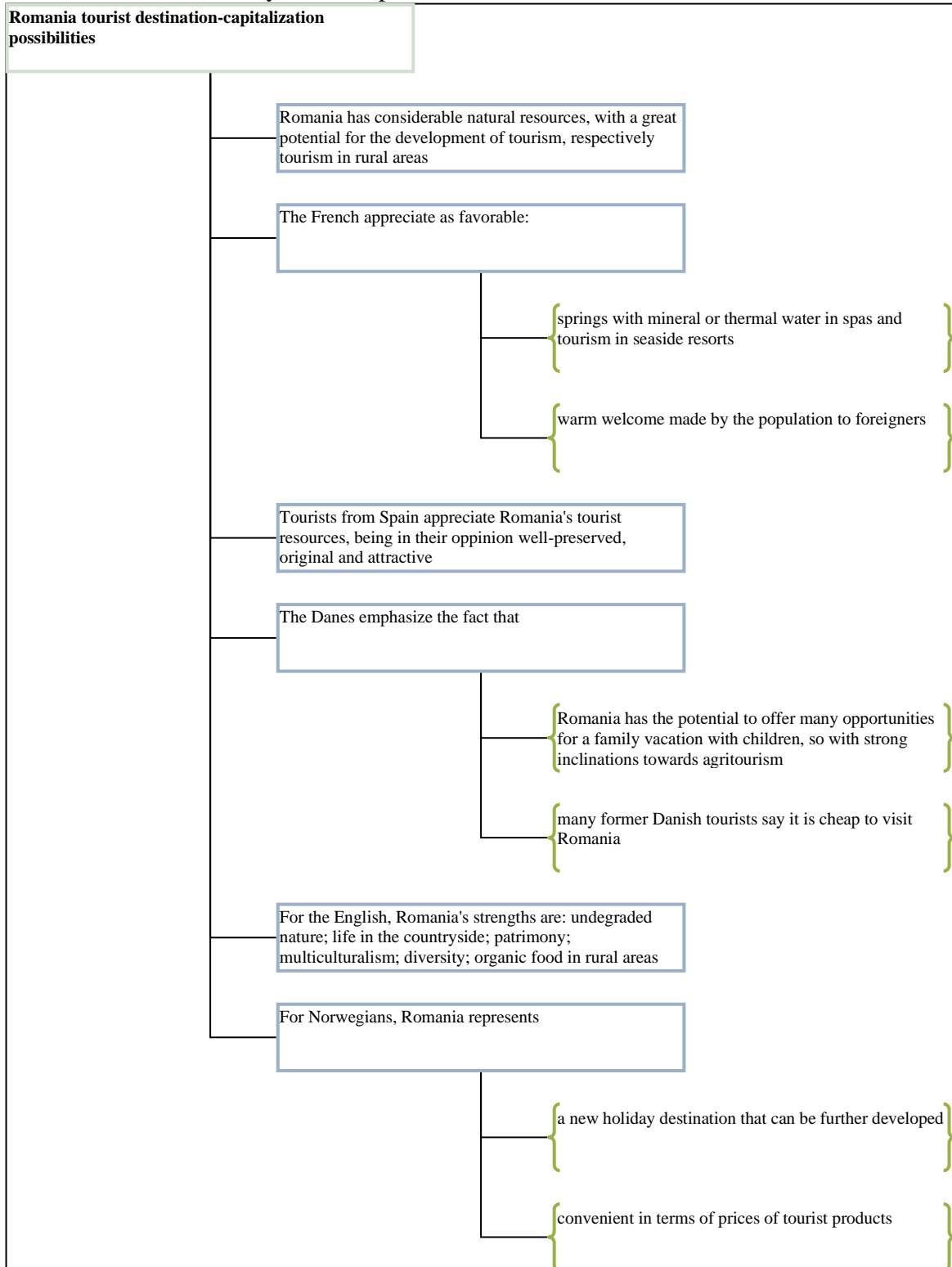


Figure 1. Romania tourist destination-capitalization possibilities

According to the some studies, the *British* consider that Romania's strengths are numerous and converge towards "originality": undegraded nature; life in the countryside; patrimony; multiculturalism; diversity; smaller, beautiful and undiscovered cities; lifestyle;

deep family orientation; organic food in rural areas, etc. The British consider that the main opportunities of Romania, around which a number of specific product offers can be added, could be: [16]

- differentiation starting from specific holidays focused on the "country life" direction;
- emphasis on the architecture and history of the destination.

There are a sufficient number of themed holidays that can be linked to the same primary communication to give Romania a differentiating, distinctive and positive point from other destinations, especially those in Eastern Europe.

From the direction of the *Norwegians*, our country is seen as focused on the following issues:

- a new holiday destination, which can be further developed;
- a convenient destination in terms of prices of tourist products;
- an interesting destination for consolidating the Eastern European myth.

Forecasts of the evolution of the tourist activity in the context of the current crisis. The crisis has a negative effect on companies' budgets, population savings and implicitly on consumption, the identified aspects referring to:

- It is possible to maintain and even increase prices by 10 - 15% for 2 and 3 star hotels taking in consideration the migration of business customers and a reduced offer of high quality 2 and 3 star rooms.
- The business market is expected to decrease by 30-40%, which will fuel the competition between rates of hotel operators.
- The average length of stay will decrease and the trend is towards round-trip business but without overnight stays. In this sense, it is possible for airlines to come up with new types of offers and prices.
- Hotels will seek to reduce costs and boost sales through global distribution systems and customer loyalty programs.
- It is possible to appear offers that include in the accommodation rate two or all meals.

Tourist demand

- The demand for tourist service packages will remain constant but will undergo some changes regarding the average length of stay and the final cost of the tourist package;
- Customers expect to pay less for food, drinks and entertainment and to shorten their stay. Short vacations will be fashionable;
- Customers will be reluctant to spend their money on anything. That's why agencies need to give them enough reasons to buy a tour package. Expensive travel packages will be harder to sell;
- In case of trips of 2, 4 people, the companies will request double rooms for savings on travel budgets;
- Customers will choose the tourist packages that have several services included and implicitly added value;

Tourist offer

- The residential complexes from the unsold tourist areas due to the increase in the price of loans will be offered for rent and will compete with the hotel offer;
- Hoteliers are expected to come up with more and more tempting offers in the desire to attract new customers. The share of bookings through travel agencies and other booking systems will increase;

- During this period, investments in 2 and 3 star hotel development projects will predominate due to the increase in the price of investment credit and the tendency to save customers.

Booking

- It will increase the number of travel package bookings through travel agencies, to save money. The role of consultant of travel agents will be decisive in boosting sales;

- Travel agencies need to diversify their online sales to minimize staff costs;

- The contraction of demand will determine the appearance of many opportunistic clients who will constantly look for the best offer in the market and will double a reservation for a certain tourist package at several agencies.

- The role of the Internet will increase significantly: customers will compare the price of tourist offers to choose the option with the lowest price and the most services included. Customers will want to know in detail the costs that are not included in the packages and their size.

Holiday destinations

- The winner of the crisis will be domestic tourism and destinations comparable in price and quality to domestic supply.

- The "city break" type offers will be more and more accessible due to the decrease of the accommodation tariffs during the weekend in the main European capitals;

- The negotiating power of travel agents with the owners of the material base will increase against the background of diminishing business demand. Romania is a business destination and in times of crisis this segment is the most affected.

The trend of the rural tourism product market. Because foreign citizens notice favorably the rural potential of our country, we considered that it would be relevant to follow the trend of this segment. Local rural communities have been affected by the evolution of history in recent decades. To these were added the years of the centralized economy and then the transition to a market economy. All this made the inhabitants of the village to be among the temptations/forces to leave to the urban localities, in many cases this leading to uprooting phenomena. The last fifteen years have put the village at the center of many of the concerns of politicians, theorists and practitioners. Enlarged Europe also raises issues and questions for the economic and social development of local communities in rural areas. These uncertainties come at a time when we are increasingly convinced of the need for sustainable development, the perpetuation of responsible economic development, to ensure that the needs of society are met without endangering future generations. [3,5,6,7,8,9]

Forms of rural tourism could represent a real hope for Romania and rural areas. Therefore, these forms of tourism have been reconsidered and redefined, being extended as an area of practice over the entire territory of the country. Our country has every reason to address with attention and interest the issue of rural area. We are fortunate to have an extraordinary heritage: one of the richest, most diverse and largely least altered European rural areas. Currently the market for rural tourist product is facing the following trends:

- a relative stagnation of the clientele for the great hiking;

- a progress of the clientele of "day walkers" or half a day, the regular clientele that is not looking for sports exploitation;

- the increasing search, especially by specialized organizers, for "bagless" hiking and comfortable accommodation.

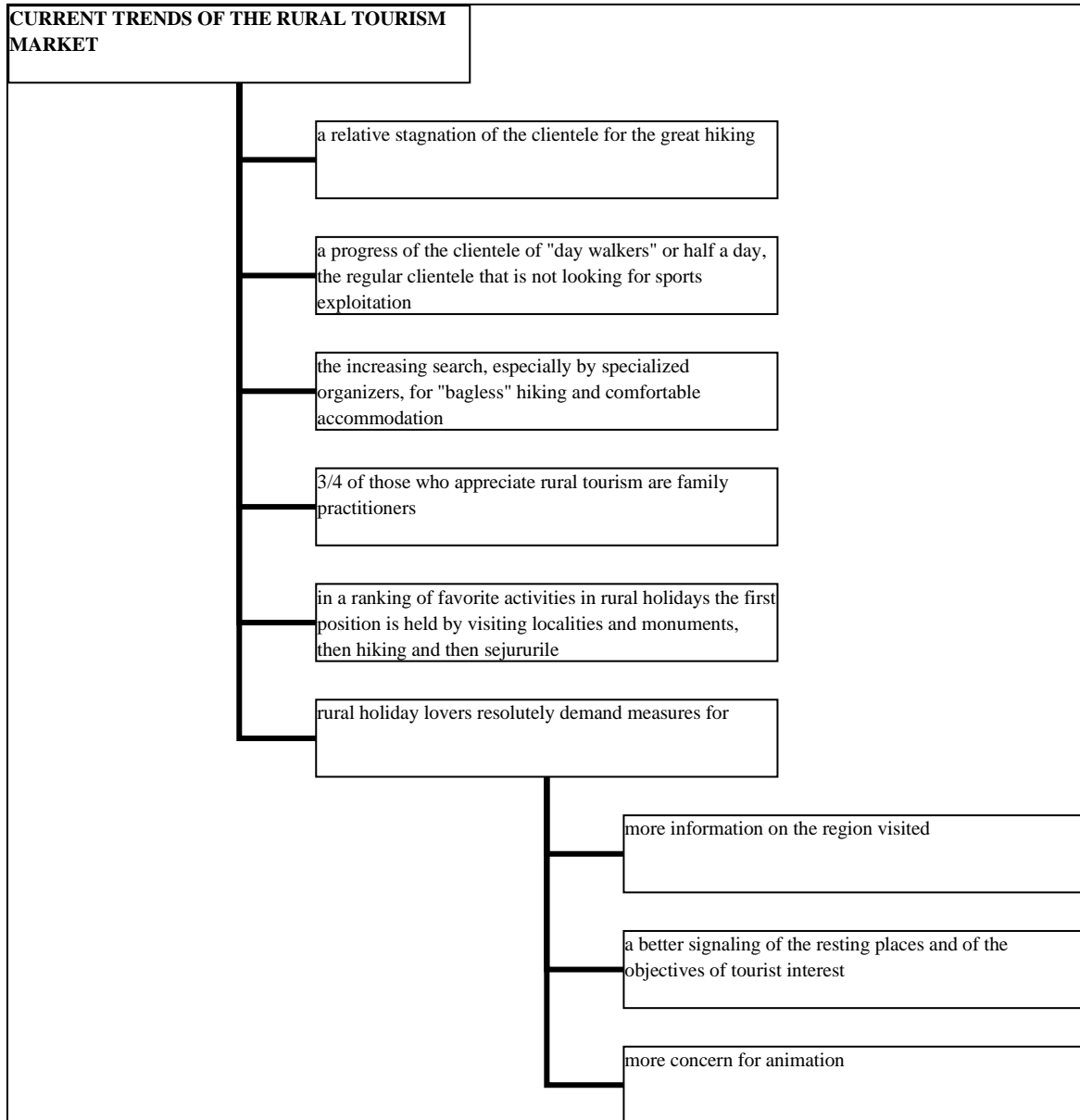


Figure 2. Actual trends of rural tourism market

The host localities, the small tourist regions that are organized to create and develop a local tourism economy must make sustained efforts to improve the quality, to promote a special image, to improve marketing. The main particularities are:

- 3/4 of those who appreciate rural tourism are family practitioners;
- in a ranking of favorite activities in rural holidays, the first position is held by visiting localities and monuments (23%), hiking (16%), baths and then stays;
- lovers of rural holidays resolutely demand measures for:
 - more information on the region visited,
 - better signaling of resting places and tourist attractions,
 - and in the case of holidays of more than four days, more concern for animation.

CONCLUSIONS

In relation to the existing potential in our country, and compared to the other Central and Eastern European countries, Romania is modest in terms of economic performance of the tourism industry. The good part is that the same rise in tourism creates many opportunities for both conservation and the well-being of local communities. Tourism can provide the much-needed income to protect national parks and other natural areas, which could not be obtained from other sources, but also to ensure the sustainability of the rural environment, for example, and in many cases the urban environment.

Rural tourism, strongly appreciated by foreigners, when it comes to our country, is a small industry, but it is expanding rapidly, within a niche governed by market forces and laws. It was initially promoted as equivalent to tourism in natural areas, and the lack of social and environmental policies in some countries, companies and destinations has led to general confusion about the meaning of rural tourism as a market segment. Thus, the need was felt for specific guidelines and accreditation systems based on the criteria of sustainable development, adapted to the needs of tourism and nature conservation.

Romania has been an important tourist destination for the zonal market, promoting mainly coastal tourist products, spas, cultural programs and monasteries from northern Moldova and Bukovina. The Romanian tourist offer and tourist products remains the same over time on the international market, being uncompetitive if we take in consideration the demands of tourists. Most of the tourist reception units are outdated, uncompetitive, the tourist services and tourist programs are made stereotypically and have a modest quality, so the quality-price ratio is inconclusive. Therefore, in the last 20 years there has been a continuous decrease in external tourist demand for Romania. In order to get out of the international tourist competition, it is necessary to modernize, relaunch and develop Romanian tourism and create modern and competitive tourist products on the tourist market, which should emphasize the new requirements of tourists, peace, relaxation, nature. One such tourist product that Romania could use on the foreign market is the rural tourism product.

Lately, tourism in rural areas is an alternative to traditional, classic tourism, developed in resorts and tourist centers as well as to the standard-industrial tourist offer. Rural tourism can have a very important contribution in the development of the rural area, not only in financial terms but also by creating new jobs, new work practices, injecting a new vitality into the rural economy, therefore the development of tourism in rural areas it is necessary, both economically and socially.

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