

POLITICS IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SUCEAVA DISTRICT

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Abstract

Focusing on the touristic phenomenon in the district of Suceava, the aim of the paper is to elucidate elements related to the conditions and the size of the touristic market, offering both quantitative and qualitative information relevant to current and potential touristic markets. In the last part of my work I tried to underline a series of suggestions that could be designed in order to contribute to the renewal of the tourism in the district of Suceava and, why not, in the whole country.

Key words: touristic market, service quality, Suceava.

JEL classification: L10, L83, M10, O20.

1. INTRODUCTORY ASPECTS

Right from the beginning, one has to emphasize the fact that accomplishing a research on the touristic phenomenon, no matter its complexity, the seriousness of the team, or the quality of the work involved, will not solve the problems that tourism faces. Applying the conclusions and suggestions of the study goes beyond research, over to the tasks of the executives. The latter (from touristic companies and district managers up to the national executive) are those who may be interested in the conclusions of this study whether they accept its suggestions or not, and it is their decision that its success or failure on the market finally depends on.

When deciding on the amount to be invested in the touristic field on the level of not only national but also local economy, one should take into account the extant market studies (sometimes the only means of information necessary for market research), which may provide aid in appropriately determining the destination and profitability of investment.

The design of any study on the touristic phenomenon in a certain area should take into consideration the market interdependence phenomenon. This implies that no touristic market can be analysed independently without making connections with other markets. The touristic demand is under constant pressure, due to competition, on the one hand, and to certain economic and extra-economic

circumstantial factors (phenomena related to inflation, economic or political circumstances, etc.), on the other.

Focusing on the touristic phenomenon in the district of Suceava, the aim of the research presented in this paper was to elucidate elements related to the conditions and the size of the touristic market, offering both quantitative and qualitative information relevant to current and potential touristic markets. For this purpose, beside the goals of research, the following aspects have been targeted:

- the identification of touristic consumers with an emphasis on quality, namely on the typology of the current and potential consumers on the touristic market;

- the estimation of service quality on the touristic market in the district of Suceava;

- the identification of the existence and functionality of a promotional and advertising system, as well as of a touristic product distribution network with an emphasis on a good knowledge of the touristic products on sale;

- the characterization of the touristic context with all its implications and influences.

The economic, social, and political context after 1990 has not been such as to contribute to the development of Romanian tourism. Moreover, according to the specialists (Talabă, I., 2001), the effects of the transition to market economy determined a regression of tourism regarding:

- the amount and structure of income in tourism, a fact that resulted in diminishing the economic efficiency of tourism;

- the use of the touristic assets;

- the volume and structure of the national and foreign touristic circulation;

- the methodology of recording, analysing, and statistically interpreting touristic circulation and its effects;

- touristic service quality;

- the use of creative potential;

- the investment in tourism;

- the income and living standard quality of the touristic agent.

Against the background of the major changes required by the process of passing from an economy based on order to one based on the law of supply and demand, certain tendencies have been manifesting in

the dynamics of the national and foreign touristic demand during the last years (Neacșu, N., 1999):

- the accrued diminution of the demand for national tourism;
- the diminution of the percentage of the demand for national journeys;
- the diminution of the Romanian touristic circulation in the highly developed countries in Europe (Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, etc.);
- the diminution of the percentage of mass tourism;
- the growth in demand for weekend tourism;
- the diminution of the length of stay;
- the diminution of the demand for international tourism;
- the insignificant growth of the number of check-ins at the accommodation units in the country;
- the accrued use of means of transportation such as road and air.

Within the general context indicating the existence of a real problem regarding the functioning of tourism in the whole country, a field that is very sensitive to the social and economic stimuli, an equally pessimistic outlook results from the analysis of the phenomenon in the district.

A study on the lodging assets in the district of Suceava (Hapenciuc, V., 2001) identified a series of specific aspects such as the fact that it is characterized by the same elements as all touristic assets on national level: the existence of large units – from the past regime – that are inefficiently administered and managed on the one hand, and the foundation of small private units during the last years, on the other.

Due to the continuous need for investment and improvement, the large units suffer from continuous degradation, being significant consumers of resources that are hard to find given the current legislation and difficult economic conditions. This has also been favoured by the incoherence and ambiguity of legislation in the field of property, which caused the lack of interest on the part of managers to affect the touristic potential in the district.

Another element that has led to the decline of these large touristic units in the district of Suceava was the dramatic decrease of the population's living standard, which resulted in diminishing the usage coefficient of accommodation units. The situation is all the more alarming, as the degree of utilization of the accommodation capacity has diminished under the circumstances provided by the continuous decrease in functional accommodation after 1998. There are various causes generating such a decrease of accommodation occupancy degree, such as:

- the decrease of service quality and minimum standard in the recruitment, training, and employment of the qualified labour force for basic jobs and managerial positions;
- the lack of interest of real owners in increasing and supervising the normal functioning

indexes of the accommodation units and in promoting the product;

- the relatively disadvantageous fiscal policy – for example, the high ratio of the value added tax within the final cost of the accommodation product;
- the decrease of personnel attachment and the increase of indiscipline at work;
- the lack of personnel motivation, given the fact that the wages in the touristic industry are far below many fields that are less productive;
- the lack of involvement of local authorities in supporting tourism, even in areas where this represents the basic tax generating resources for the budget;
- product and fare/price policies that ignore the evolution of the national and international market and the growing demands of the hotel and touristic service consumers.

The lack of coherent programmes for promoting tourism, the loss of some traditional markets, sometimes the unstable political conditions, all these have led to the acceleration of this decline.

On the other hand, we witness the “explosion” of private initiative in tourism, especially regarding the assets. Shortly after 1989, a programme was adopted towards sustained promotion of rural tourism, as a less expensive alternative to classic tourism. This programme had the merit of acknowledging the existence of assets (the agro-touristic households) and possible markets for agro-tourism, the necessity of organizing those who offer touristic products within networks and the possibilities of earning supplementary (sometimes substantial) income to the main income in the household.

The presence of private property was felt especially by small accommodation units, such as the touristic boarding houses and agro-touristic households. The growth in number of these types of units was due to a very attractive legislative initiative (income tax exemption for a 10-year period⁴).

Although an investment in tourism requires substantial financial effort under the circumstances of long-term repayment, there is an obvious tendency of the private entrepreneurs to invest in medium-sized units, which are easy to administer, improve, and adjust to the touristic market conditions.

Another very important aspect regarding the touristic assets is related to the infrastructure. The inappropriate state of the roads in the district of Suceava has generated situations when touristically important roads became impassable, thus hindering access to the respective areas.

Much like the whole of Romanian economy, the tourism in the district of Suceava is affected by the interminable transition towards market economy. The decrease or complete lack of alternative financing resources made the companies on the touristic market in the district of Suceava refinance on resulting income. Far from being sufficient, this income was

used solely for their survival on the touristic market and not for purchasing new equipment and assets.

All these factors have led to the dramatic decrease of the touristic service quality, and the difficulty of adapting to the qualitative norms required in Europe and worldwide. Thus, the cost has risen, and the district of Suceava, as a touristic destination, has had to suffer the consequences.

The low standard of accommodation is generally attributed to poor quality services. Expert opinions assert that misconception of the issue arises in the field of accommodation nowadays: the technological and logistic functions, endowment, and equipment of a hotel, required for satisfying both customers and personnel. The phrase "hotel industry" originates in the structure of the hotel system, but it should be observed down to hotel level, irrespective of comfort. Finally, the meaning of the phrase should read: each and every hotel constitutes a hospitality industry.

On the basis of *previous studies accomplished on district level*, the statistical data *regarding the touristic demand in the district of Suceava* (Hapenciuc, V, 2001) could be interpreted. There have been touristic activity elements since 1990, such as check-ins or the activity of travel agencies, which were only subjected to statistical rigour after 1992.

These deficiencies result in the lack of information necessary in order to thoroughly characterise a touristic phenomenon over a longer period of time and to allow for comparison regarding the evolution of the same touristic phenomena on a national level.

However, the following remarks may be made:

- the national and foreign touristic demand has diminished since 1990;

- a small number of Romanian tourists participating in touristic activities is recorded mainly due to the decrease of the population's real income and to the lack of correlation between fares and service quality;

- the demand for journeys in the country and abroad is relatively low;

- the importance of mass tourism has diminished as a result of the decrease of the population's income, whereupon the population with lower income have given up organised tourism (financially more accessible than unorganised tourism);

- during the above-mentioned period of time a decrease of the real income was recorded, with negative consequences on touristic demand;

- the spare time has (at least theoretically) decreased as a result of the fact that, once the value of the real income diminished, the citizens were forced to find other sources (jobs) for supplementary income;

2. POLITICS AND STRATEGIES FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SUCEAVA DISTRICT

It is generally acknowledged that the managerial process is based on diagnosis analysis to a great extent, which is absolutely necessary both for grounding current decisions and, especially, for ensuring the support in elaborating of various forecasts. As a consequence of this analysis, **a series of suggestions** may be designed in order to contribute to the revival of the tourism in the district of Suceava and, why not, in the whole country.

Concerning the extant accommodation assets, we believe that:

- A new mentality regarding the functional and technical structure of an accommodation unit should emerge;

- Compulsory training of the accommodation unit managing board, including the criteria according to which accommodation is rated for comfort, should be provided. The result is the diminution of comfort overrating as long as the accommodation unit to be reorganised cannot provide the conditions required by that rating. Also, a real knowledge of the issue may result in eliminating the diminution of touristic accommodation comfort rating in the case of a unit where reorganisation investment was decided on, which can provide the conditions required by a higher comfort rating and which may get the real rating by sufficient fund supplementation.

The inventory of all the unrated accommodation units should be the first step in a thorough analysis based on feasibility studies. All this will conclude upon the current physical state of the unrated accommodation units, the real ratings for comfort according to the currently available rooms, and, finally, upon the analysis of the real comfort ratings the units can afford.

Consequently, for a better use of the touristic accommodation units (especially hotels), an essential suggestion would be the reorganisation of extant hotels so as to reclassify them on an internationally acknowledged star-based system.

Another negative aspect of the tourism in the district of Suceava is the lack of major investors to infuse capital. The investment in tourism, characterized by high invested amount and long repayment period, has had fewer chances to flourish in Suceava. Yet, there have been investors willing to commit capital, mostly in small units, especially for carefully selected clientele, and not for mass tourism. The foreign investors avoided investing in tourism due to the unstable economic, political, and social situation Romania was in.

Unfortunately, the difficult economic situation has made it impossible to capitalise and exploit the entire touristic potential of the district of Suceava. The much-desired recovery involves a multitude of factors

to favour economic development in general. A growth of the Romanian population's income, materialised in raising the living standard, infrastructure development, computerisation, service quality improvement, programmes of intense touristic objective promotion carried out nationally and internationally, etc., all these could allow for expanding the touristic activity in Suceava, which would contribute to the economic development in the region.

Given the dramatic regression of the **touristic demand** in the district of Suceava during the last few years, feasible solutions should be put forth to improve the current condition. Given that the demand for internal tourism is diminishing and will follow this trend until the economic situation of the common citizen improves, *efforts will have to be invested in drawing as many foreign tourists coming from highly developed countries as possible to the district of Suceava*. This measure could be a solution for the recovery of the tourism in the district and maybe even of district economy.

The statistical situation regarding the foreign tourists accommodated in the district of Suceava and the number of check-ins is rather unsatisfactory. More precisely, the number of tourists and check-ins is small as compared to the accommodation capacity and the touristic potential of the region; out of the first five countries of origin (The Russian Federation, Germany, The Republic of Moldova, Austria, Ukraine), only Germany and Austria could be considered countries whose tourists have a consistent budget for spending a vacation in the district of Suceava. Openly speaking, *what matters is both the number of foreign tourists who visit a region and, above all, the amount of returns*. Thus, tourism in general should focus especially on attracting foreign tourists with high income belonging to wealthy countries.

The tourists from the neighbouring countries come and will come to the district of Suceava especially for that frontier trade (according to some opinions, such persons should not be considered tourists, although they appear in the customs records).

Attracting the foreign tourists also implies taking a series of measures such as:

- simplifying customs formalities;
- continuous delivering of high quality touristic product that should correspond to the goals of modern tourism;
- improving touristic personnel activity and touristic service quality;
- stimulating Romanian and foreign investment;
- promoting competitive Romanian tourism, able to stand comparison with the countries with

highly developed tourism (Spain, France, Switzerland, etc.);

- elaborating more aggressive marketing strategies aiming at the creation of a positive image of our country and of the district of Suceava abroad.

A remedy of the touristic situation should target the necessity of forecast activities on the various levels (touristic company, region, branch) of tourism as well. For this purpose, it would be useful that the local authority should provide the auspices for a structure primarily oriented towards complex territorial diagnosis and prognosis, particularly for the district of Suceava, but relevant also on a larger scale, with the support of the Ministry of Tourism and the collaboration of touristic companies as well as education and research experts.

The elaboration of touristic development regional strategies focusing on the highly efficient capitalisation of the local natural resources and aiming at preserving the ecological balance, diminishing unemployment, and developing the infrastructure is absolutely necessary in order to ground the macro-economic strategy of developing tourism and national economy on efficiency criteria.

Keeping in mind the implementation of these ideas as well, the conditions would be created that, in the near future, the district of Suceava should be assigned the task of providing the positive, accurate image of touristic destination for foreign tourists. Given the significant increase in number of foreign tourists, the district of Suceava holds the potential for the recovery of tourism and, implicitly, of the economy in the district.

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