

## TOURISM AND POVERTY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES. THE CASE OF INDIA AND ROMANIA

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### Abstract

*Sustainable tourism has become lately an important issue addressing the question of over-exploiting and degradation of resources. The topic is quite more challenging and presents particular importance in the case of developing countries, facing also social issues and the poverty of large segments of population. This paper investigates, based on surveying experts' opinion, the impact of mass tourism vs. voluntary tourism vs. pro-poor tourism in India and Romania, two very different countries but facing similar challenges, and it highlights the similar issues but also the differences concerning the economic, social and environmental effects of these forms of tourism.*

**Key words:** *tourism, pro-poor, volunteer, India, Romania.*

**JEL Classification:** *L83; O15; Z32.*

### I. INTRODUCTION: THE TOURISM INDUSTRY: LUCK OR CURSE?

The importance of the tourism industry for the world economy is indisputable, with revenues reaching \$ 7,600 billion and more than 270 million people employed (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2015). Tourism has the capacity to promote regional development, to induce development of different related sectors, and it highly impacts the life and economic profile of the destination areas.

The economic component of the tourism industry addresses three groups of stakeholders, i.e. tourists, local community, and local/central authorities (Reisinger, 2009; Elkan, 1975; Sadler and Archer, 1975; Gunn, 1977). Tourists enjoy the benefits of leisure and pay the costs of their stay. The resident population of the host region enjoys the benefits (not necessarily financial) of tourism, but faces the costs generated by the tourism industry. For the authorities, tourism industry generates revenues from taxes, creates jobs and contributes to the equilibrium of the balance of payments (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997; Saarinen, 2007; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2012). It also generates development of peripheral regions which are lacking opportunities for industrial development, fosters development of related activities and improves the infrastructure. Unfortunately, the local population enjoys little benefits from this development, as the

tourism industry is partly controlled by international companies, leading to capital leakage from the destination region (Swarbrooke, 1998; Liu, 2003). In some cases, tourism development incentives generate inequities between regions and social classes (Tosun, Timothy et al, 2003), create mostly seasonal jobs, poorly paid and with limited opportunities for promotion and specialization (Lickorish and Jenkins, 1997; Saarinen, 2007).

In social terms, tourism is associated with the contact between cultures, behaviors, values and traditions. It stimulates the emergence of new ideas, values and motivations for social and economic progress, and it can revitalize the cultural life of a community, local craft and traditions (Brown, 1998; Nyaupane, Morais et al, 2006) but, as always, there is also a dark side, due to the negative socio-cultural impact of globalization and consumerism on local culture and population (MacLeod, 2004; Reisinger, 2009).

Finally, the environment acts as a fundamental element of the tourists' experience. On one hand, the natural and cultural resources have benefited from tourism, through conservation action, protection or renovation, precisely because they are tourist attractions (Swarbrooke, 1998; Holden, 2009). On the other hand, tourism development consumes resources, creates waste and sometimes determines the degradation or even the destruction of natural heritage. Unfortunately, the local population pays finally the

costs of environmental degradation resulting from the over-exploitation which is usually felt only after a long period of time (Holden, 2009; Beeton, 2006).

It is obvious that tourism industry has various consequences, which are influenced by a large number of factors, especially the ability and willingness of the community to accept or reject changes (Beeton, 2006; Joshi and Dhyani, 2009). The real challenge is to foster that type of tourism activities that may contribute to the overall economic, social and environmental development, by promoting sustainable tourism and development (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2012).

Indeed, the problems and challenges generated by the tourism industry have determined the emergence of new forms of tourism, aimed at eliminating the negative effects and enhancing the positive ones (Saarinen, 2007). Beyond the somewhat ambiguous term of alternative tourism, several new forms have emerged, i.e. ecotourism, rural tourism, pro-poor tourism, volunteer tourism etc. We are now considering volunteer tourism and pro-poor tourism as alternative, sustainable forms of tourism, addressing the key issue of poverty that is faced by both India and Romania, as to be discussed in the next section.

As Weaver stated, volunteer tourism “encompasses a diverse array of experiences and settings that involve tourists who receive no financial compensation while undertaking various forms of, usually, organized social and/or environmental work in the destination” (Weaver, 2006). The main difference between mass tourism and volunteer tourism concerns the benefits. While for the mass tourism the benefits are calculated as the number of tourists arriving or total receipts, which will be felt, to some extent, by local people, volunteer tourism generates direct benefits for local people, e.g. the construction or renovation of houses, medical or educational services (Weaver, 2006). That is why volunteer tourists are perceived not as tourists either by the host community or by themselves.

Pro-poor tourism is rather an approach and a vision regarding the management and the general development of tourism than a specific tourism product. It emerged from the idea that tourism can play a major role in eradicating poverty and improving the situation of poor people (Joshi and Dhyani, 2009).

Although the benefits of volunteer tourism and pro-poor tourism are important, the main challenges faced by these alternative forms of tourism come from the motivation of tourists and non-profit organizations involved, and their long-term effects on the weakest members (especially children) in the visited communities (Weaver, 2006).

## II. TOURISM AND THE CHALLENGES OF POVERTY IN TWO COUNTRIES: INDIA AND ROMANIA

The tourism industry has become the largest service industry in India, and it generates revenues of about 37.44 billion US\$ in 2014, with expectations to increase with a steady 6.9% annual growth rate between 2015 and 2025. India is ranked as 11th in the Asia Pacific region and 65<sup>th</sup> overall, on the list of the world's most attractive destinations, and also as the 14<sup>th</sup> best tourist destination for its natural resources and 24<sup>th</sup> for its cultural resources, with many World Heritage Sites, both natural and cultural, rich fauna, and strong creative industries (World Economic Forum, 2013).

In the case of Romania, the tourism industry generated about 2.75 billion US\$ in 2014, and it is expected to increase with a steady 3.8% annual growth rate between 2015 and 2025. Romania is ranked as 35<sup>th</sup> in the Europe region and 68<sup>th</sup> overall, on the list of the world's most attractive destinations (World Economic Forum, 2013).

Selected indicators concerning the tourism industry in India and Romania, also illustrating the significant differences between the two countries (in terms of population, size and distribution of tourism resources) are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Selected indicators for tourism industry, India and Romania**

Indicator	India	Romania
Direct contribution of tourism to GDP, 2014 (%)	2.2	1.6
Direct contribution of tourism to employment, 2014 (%)	6.7	2.4
Domestic tourism visits, 2014 (million visits)	1,280	6.5
Foreign tourist arrivals, 2014 (million arrivals)	22.57	1.9
Share of foreign tourists in total no. of tourists, 2014 (%)	1.8	29
Tourism density, 2014 (foreign tourists /km <sup>2</sup> )	6.9	7.8
Seasonality (%)	49	42
Concentration coefficient (Gini-Struck)	0.24	0.38

Source: World Travel and Tourism Council (2015), Government of India (2015), World Economic Forum (2013), Eurostat (2014), National Institute of Statistics (Romania) (2013), United Nations Development Programme (2013).

On the other hand, the issue of poverty is significant in both countries. In India, the problem is still acute, in spite of all the development during the past five decades, the share of the Indian population living below the international poverty line of \$1.25 being of 32.7% in 2013 (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). Moreover, India has 28.6% of its population in severe poverty and 16.4% of its population being vulnerable to poverty (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). In the last decades, due to impressive economic performance, India

dramatically reduced the share of income poor people, from 49.4% in 1990 to 32.7% in 2010, but however, the income per capita income is still low, i.e. around \$3,400 in 2012 (United Nations Development Programme, 2013).

Regarding the poverty problem in Romania, the data reveal not a very low standard of living of a large part of the population, but a considerable gap compared to other EU member states. Thus, in 2006 the poverty rate in Romania stood at 13.8%, down sharply compared to 35.9% in 2000, yet about 2.5-3 times higher than in other Central European countries and nearly 5 times higher than in the prosperous western Europe (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). There is still a considerable risk of poverty, especially for the rural population. The poverty, the economic crisis and limited local options, but also the proximity to the more prosperous countries of the EU and freedom of movement have accelerated the process of labor migration, worsening the economic and social problems in the rural and poor areas of Romania.

### III. INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF TOURISM IN INDIA AND ROMANIA: METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Starting from the situation of the tourism industry and the challenges of the poverty in two different developing countries, i.e. India and Romania, our research aims at investigating the economic, social and environmental impact of several forms of tourism in those countries, by using a simple research instrument. In a first phase, we made an inventory of the main projects related to volunteer tourism and pro-poor tourism in both countries, projects which have been already finalized or still in progress. In the second phase, we listed the potential effects (i.e. negative, positive, potential) of classic mass tourism versus sustainable tourism. In the third phase, we have conducted a survey among experts to investigate their opinion on the impact of those previously mentioned actions/projects. Finally, we made a synthesis of the responses and figured out the main results and their significance.

Among the main projects/actions and organizations involved in pro-poor tourism and volunteer tourism in India we have considered the following:

- The Responsible Tourism policy - designed to achieve poverty alleviation through tourism activities, launched by the Indian state of Kerala (Michot, 2006);
- The development of tourism potential of Cooch Behar district of West Bengal – meant to improve the living standard of the poor communities and to rejuvenate local economy (Basu Roy, Basu Roy and Saha, 2010);
- The project “From Tiger Conflict to Tourism

Social Transformation, Poverty Alleviation and Conservation Initiative” in the Sunderbans, India” (Bauer, 2006);

- The Uttar Pradesh plans to begin pro-poor tourism development program in Buddhist circuit and Agra-Braj corridor (Times of India, 2013a; Times of India, 2013b) etc.

For Romania, the main projects and organizations involved in pro-poor tourism and volunteer tourism are the following:

- The Romania Bear Sanctuary - project focused on the rescuing the European Brown Bears with the help of volunteers (Responsible Travel, 2015);
- Wild Carpathia Association - project aiming at promoting modern values, sustainable development in tourism, sport and environmental protection, awareness and involvement of civil society, political and economic decision makers in solving problems in these areas and related fields (European Youth Portal, 2015);
- Save Romania's virgin forests!- a project of World Wide Fund for Nature (World Wide Fund for Nature, 2015);
- The Living Heritage - a program aiming at preserving the genuine traditions in Apuseni Mountains, focusing on traditional activities, e.g. pottery, weaving, and wood sculpting (CAPDD Bihor, 2015);
- BIG BUILD - the largest construction and volunteering event of the year (Habitat for Humanity Romania, 2015).

During the research, we used a simple instrument to assess the effects of mass tourism vs. volunteer tourism vs. pro-poor tourism, by simply integrating the evaluations and assessments of the experts. We targeted academics, experts and touristic projects' managers who have been involved in several types of tourism (i.e. mass, rural, volunteer, pro poor etc.). They were asked to assess the economic, social and environmental effects, respectively, of mass, volunteer, pro-poor tourism, by using grades from 1 to 5 (where 1 means very low and 5 very high). For a better description of the effects, each category of effects was divided in three different subcategories (see Table 2), as follows: the economic impact was assessed through: a) revenues; b) benefits for the local community/for local authorities; c) contribution to reducing unemployment. The social impact was divided into: a) supporting the local culture and traditions; b) increasing the quality of life; c) direct contact between civilizations. The environmental impact was assessed through: a) conservation of landscape and wildlife; b) recycling the resources; c) clean energy consumption.

The questionnaire was administered, during June-August 2015, to 36 experts, i.e. academics and touristic projects' managers, by using ResearchGate

and LinkedIn professional platforms, several professional groups where the authors are members, and email. As professional experience, 17 of them are scholars affiliated to faculties or departments of Tourism, Business Administration, Geography and Hospitality; 5 of them are experts working for local, regional and national public institutions (i.e. regional councils, governmental agencies and offices), 9 are managers / representatives of private business ventures,

NGOs and associations with touristic profile, and 5 are project managers involved in several types of tourism projects. As country affiliation, 19 of them are affiliated to Romanian institutions and entities, 5 are from India, and the rest from Turkey (2), Hungary (2), Italy (2) and international NGOs or foundations (6).

The final grade (see Table 2) was determined as simple arithmetic mean of all individual assessments.

**Table 2. Assessment of the effects of mass tourism vs. volunteer tourism vs. pro-poor tourism, India vs. Romania**

Impact/country/form of tourism	India			Romania		
	Mass tourism	Volunteer tourism	Pro-poor tourism	Mass tourism	Volunteer tourism	Pro-poor tourism
<b>Economic impact</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>4.8</b>
Revenues/benefits for the local community (minimal leakages)	4.1	2.8	1.7	3.9	2.6	1.5
Revenues/benefits for local authorities	3.7	2.3	1.6	4.1	2.5	1.5
Reducing unemployment	3.2	1.3	1.8	4.1	1.4	1.8
<b>Social impact</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>8.6</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>10.8</b>
Support the local culture/traditions	1.7	3.2	4.0	1.5	3.1	4.0
Increase the quality of life	3.2	4.1	4.2	3.9	3.4	2.9
Direct contact between civilizations	2.7	4.3	4.5	3.2	3.7	3.9
<b>Environmental impact</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>11.9</b>
Conservation of landscape and wildlife	2.2	4.4	3.9	2.1	4.1	3.5
Recycling of resources	2.9	4.0	4.3	3.3	4.1	4.3
Clean energy consumption	2.7	3.7	4.1	2.9	4.0	4.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>30.1</b>	<b>30.1</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>28.9</b>	<b>27.5</b>

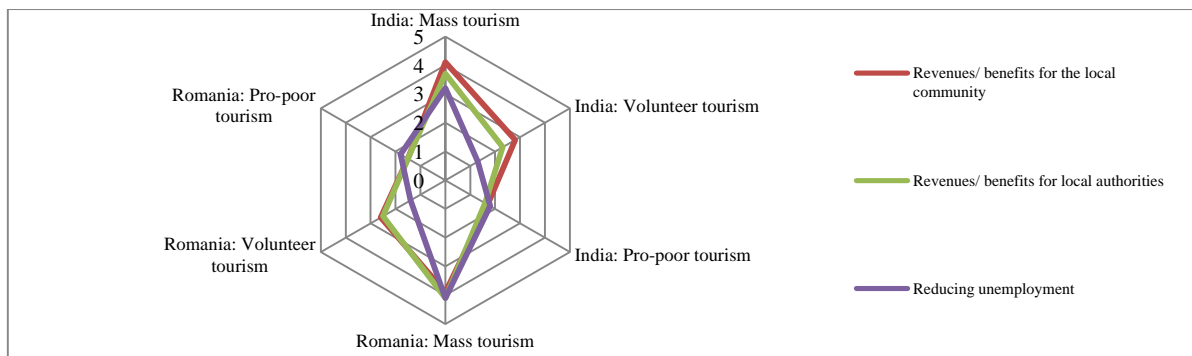
Source: experts' assessments

Explanatory notes: Figures showed in normal letters in the table represent the arithmetic mean of the individual assessments of the consulted experts, going from 1 to 5 (i.e. 1-very low, 2-low, 3-medium, 4-high, 5-very high). Figures in bold italics represent the sum of the arithmetic means assigned to all three components of the economic, social and environmental impact, respectively.

#### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The positive economic effects of mass tourism seem to be obvious compared with the effects of both volunteer and pro-poor tourism, both for India and Romania. While the scorings recorded for “revenues” and “benefits for the local community/ authorities” are similar for the two countries, there are still differences, especially regarding the effect on “reducing unemployment”. Thus, experts consider that the effects

on reducing unemployment are more important for Romania than for India. Concerning the least positive effects, the contribution of volunteer tourism to reducing unemployment is considered limited, probably due to the social and humanitarian focus of volunteer tourism travels and lack of formal organization of travels. In the same category of low effects we mention the contribution of pro-poor tourism to generating revenues for the local population and for authorities in Romania (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1 – Assessment of the economic effects of mass tourism/volunteer tourism/pro-poor tourism, India vs. Romania**

Concerning the social impact, we notice a shift of high scores from mass tourism to the volunteer and pro-poor tourism. The best positive assessments were assigned to the subcategory “direct contact between civilizations”, especially for India, but also to “increase the quality of life”, and still for India (see Figure 2). The scores for the same subcategories or forms of tourism are slightly lower in the case of Romania, which can be explained through the expectations regarding the contribution of new tourism forms in reducing disparities and social impact of poverty. The

only subcategory where Romania scores highly is “supporting local culture/traditions”, with a score similar to the score for India. One explanation is that during the last 10-15 years, tourism promotion in Romania has been focused on the image of a country with beautiful natural landscapes and rich in genuine rural life and traditions. This image was conceived mostly as opposed to the image of continental Europe, in continuing loss of genuine relationship with authentic nature, life and traditions.

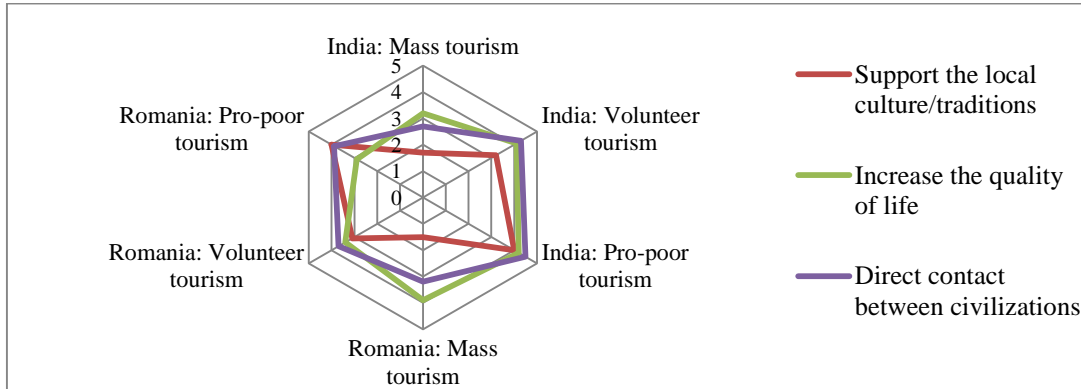


Figure 2 – Assessment of the social effects of mass tourism/volunteer tourism/pro-poor tourism, India vs. Romania

The environmental impact seems to be the most balanced, and the scores are quite similar and relatively high for both India and Romania, for most subcategories. As expected, mass tourism is considered to modestly contribute to “conservation of landscape and wildlife” (see Figure 3), but slightly improving its score for the ability of “recycling of resources and clean energy consumption”. This is basically the dichotomy of the tourism in general and of the mass tourism in particular. The huge size and scale of mass tourism, compared to the volunteer and pro-poor tourism, makes it certainly a major consumer of resources and a threat to the natural balance and protection of natural and

cultural heritage. On the other hand, the most considerable and lasting effects happen when large firms (e.g. hotel chains) undertake measures to enhance sustainability. On micro level, both volunteer and pro-poor tourism are assigned with high scores for “recycling of resources” and “clean energy consumption”, with higher scores for Romania than India. This advance is reversed for “conservation of landscape and wildlife”, where India records better scores, mainly due to the exceptional scale and diversity of the landscape and wildlife in the Indian subcontinent.

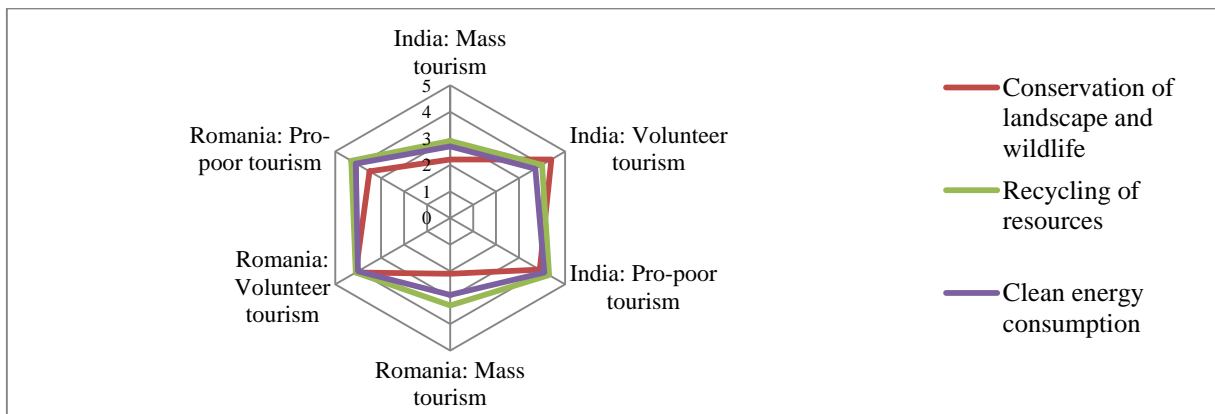
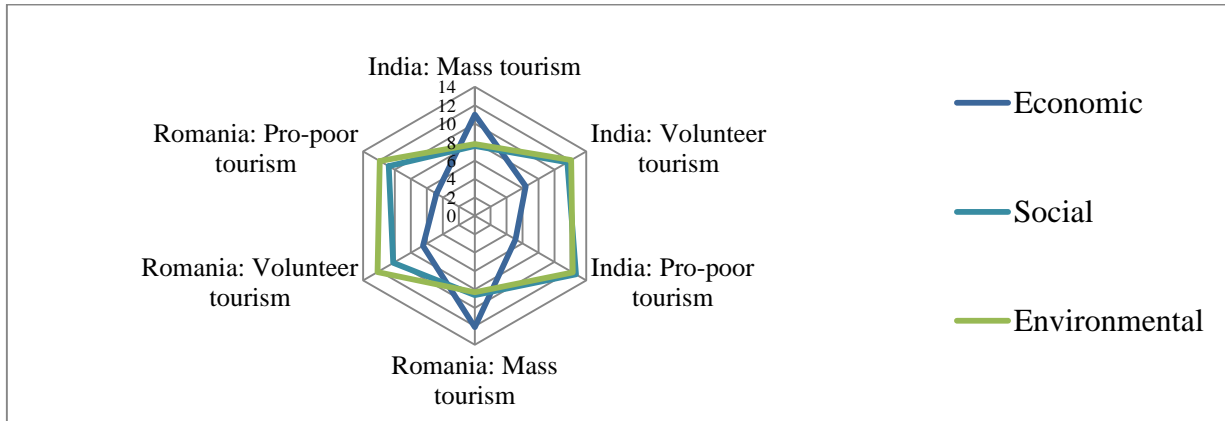


Figure 3 – Assessment of the environmental effects of mass tourism/volunteer tourism/pro-poor tourism, India vs. Romania

In aggregate terms, the economic impact is considered to be the least balanced in the matrix of the three forms of tourism we have analyzed: significant in the case of mass tourism and limited in the case of volunteer tourism and pro-poor tourism (see Figure 4). The environmental dimension is more balanced and

features no major differences among the three forms of tourism, which confirms that both countries, despite the major differences in their size, economic potential and geo-political structures, face similar sustainability challenges and opportunities in the case of tourism industry.



**Figure 4 – Assessment of the overall impact of mass tourism/volunteer tourism/pro-poor tourism, India vs. Romania**

Finally, if we aggregate the figures and calculate a total index of the three components, i.e. economic, social and environmental, of the tourist consumption for the three forms of tourism analyzed, we note that India displays clearly more positive effects of volunteer tourism and pro-poor tourism (i.e. volunteer tourism in India gets 30.1 points versus 28.9 in Romania, and pro-poor tourism records also 30.1 points versus 27.5 for Romania). On the other hand, Romania relies more on the positive effects of mass tourism (i.e. displaying a total of 29 points, compared to 26.4 for India).

## V. CONCLUSION

Tourism plays an important and complex role in the economic development and social empowerment, while it is still quite difficult to integrate its role and contribution in a simplified and viable model. Classical, mass tourism has always been considered as a solution for reducing unemployment, creating economic options and valorizing the regions endowed with important and valuable natural and cultural resources, but industrially underdeveloped. In the same time, mass tourism is considered to generate inequitable transfer of income, overexploiting and degradation of resources, negative impact on the fragile traditional culture and on the environment, thus limiting the resources available for future generations. The new sustainable tourism can partially address these issues, but unfortunately it cannot compensate, through

significant income, the expectations of the local people and economies from developing countries (Preeti Singh, 2012).

Our survey-based research, regarding India and Romania, i.e. two very different countries but facing similar challenges, showed that classical mass tourism still “rules” when it comes to economic contribution, but it is seriously left behind when the social and environmental impact is approached, and this is mostly the case of India. This simple indicator that we have used to investigate experts’ assessment showed that the economic impact is the less balanced, indicating both growth potential, and source for possible disequilibrium, both in India and Romania. Overall, the research results confirm our expectations. This is probably due to the ab initio assuming of a difficult comparison, due to the disproportion of the three forms of tourism (i.e. mass tourism, voluntary tourism and pro-poor tourism) in the global tourist consumption, and the disproportion of the two countries in terms of size, population etc. Despite of those important differences, we emphasized the existence of a common path, of similar challenges, of a possible integration of the economic, social and environmental commitments within all three forms of tourism. Consequently, mutual assimilation of positive experiences could contribute to diminishing the negative issues and to enhancing the positive effects, regardless of national, economic and cultural context.

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