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The progress of ideas

PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF CONSUMER'S SATISFACTION REGARDING TOURISM PRODUCTS

Abstract

The paper provides an overview of consumer's satisfaction regarding tourism products. Doing particular research in this distinct field of consumption is necessary because the standards of holiday and travel consumers (expected quality) are achieved in the absence of the actual product, depending on the providers' forms of presentation, travel guides, on-line sites, the impressions of other persons, the reputation of "fashionable" destination and, to some extent, depending on the affective and cognitive abilities, the personal and social values of the tourists, their culture, their previous experiences and consumption symbolism. The subjectively perceived quality regarding a consumption experience only partly depends on the objective quality.

In this paper the authors aim at: (1) completing the issues related to the satisfaction survey, customizing them for the field of tourism; (2) achieving a consumer satisfaction rating scale for the field of tourism, (3) completing the research process regarding consumer's satisfaction regarding tourism products by using a mix of methods, namely: The Method of Attributes – Consequences – Values analysis (ACV), based on the idea of the hierarchical organization of elements that contribute to achieving satisfaction under the form of means – goal linkages; Lickert Scale type Analyses; Analyses based on the regression and correlation method; the Interpretation of the achieved results by using the Tetraclasse model.

The theoretical and practical analyses, as well as the results presented are intended to induce the fellow researchers to approach and refine the studies regarding consumer satisfaction for the particular field of tourism.

Keywords: measuring tourism services consumer's satisfaction, cognitive and affective components, quality, loyalty, tourism products.

1. Contribution statement

Previous research mainly focuses on testing the methods and scales of measuring consumer's satisfaction regarding tourism services, by combining the cognitive and affective components that contribute to its achievement in terms of values and desires (Oliver, 1980; Parasuraman et al, 1988, Cronin et al, 1992, Westbrook, R.A., Oliver, R.L, 1991), and the level of generalization mostly corresponds to the expected quality or ideal quality, focusing either on the aspects regarding the performance of the product's attributes or on the elements of the service system. Or tourism products consumers only partially retrospect to these issues; their expectations, according to the motivation attached to the purchase, largely regard the psychological, cultural, aesthetic, socialization, self-fulfillment aspects, which the classical instruments of measuring satisfaction are unable to capture (Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A., Berry, L.L., 1988; Oliver R.L., 1993; Evrard, Y., 1993; Rust, R.T., 1996).

In this paper the authors aim at: (1) completing the issues related to the satisfaction survey and customizing them for the field of tourism; (2) achieving a consumer satisfaction rating scale for the field of tourism, (3) completing the research process regarding the satisfaction of tourism products consumers by using a mix of methods, namely: The Method of Attributes – Consequences – Values analysis (ACV), based on the idea of the hierarchical organization of the elements that

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contribute to achieving satisfaction under the form of means - goal linkages; Lickert Scale type Analyses; Analyses based on the regression and correlation method; the Interpretation of the results by using the Tetraclasse model (Llosa, S., 1997).

2. Theoretical views

Tourism consumption is the expression of a very diverse set of needs and motivations: rest, relaxation, escape from the everyday environment and satisfaction of cultural, aesthetic, emotional aspirations, based on the principle of pleasure, of individuals' integration in their social environment as well as their possibility to retrospect to their own personality, their desire to achieve new personal or family experiences.

Although the needs, motivations, attitudes, personality, preferences and the interest centers that individualize tourism products consumers are extremely varied, they will inevitably be influenced by the emotional nature and quality of the social contacts and interactions, with important repercussions on satisfaction.

Consumption is the process by which final users are able to appreciate the quality of the products/services purchased and that will ultimately lead to the consumers' satisfaction/dissatisfaction.

If consumption is generally based on products and services that are well defined by certain determining attributes, which will provide utility, value and satisfaction, in the case of tourism consumption utility plays a secondary role. Recent studies provide a new, different perspective regarding consumption and consumers (Halle, 1992; Holbrook, 1994; Holt, 1995). The new current of thought highlights four particular dimensions of the act of consumption (Holt, 1995), in which the experiential aspects of consumption occupy a special place.

In experiential terms, consumption points out the need to overcome the notions of utility and use-value (Holbrook, M.B., Hirschman, E.C., 1994) and to examine consumer behavior also by using methods that are specific to socio-human sciences, which are capable of highlighting their emotional and subjective reactions in relation to the consumption situations.

Tourism services generate relaxation, fun, emotions and excitement or activate imagination. These consumption experiences are based on hedonism, surprise and achieving satisfaction thanks to a variety of emotional states and social contacts that cannot be pertinently explained by the theory of utility. Cultural consumption, artistic consumption and entertainment in general are included in this category. Contemplating natural monuments, visiting a museum or a "museum city" and watching theatre plays involve an intense emotional activity, spiritual satisfaction and deep experiences, both during the actual consumption as well as under the form of the continuation of the state of pleasure and emotion, by reliving those experiences. The subsequent interpretations will relate both to the conduct of the actual acts of consumption as well as to the context, the environment, the global affective reaction and sharing feelings with the other spectators, tourists, etc.

The experiential aspects need to be taken into consideration and analyzed for all the types of travel services, including those that can be analyzed in terms of utility (balneary tourism) and framed into a well-defined functional register. Utility is reduced at the level of all luxury tourism products, where the atmosphere, peripheral services, physical evidence of the environment, posture and professional training of the providers, as well as the design are likely to cause deep emotional reactions. However, the importance that must be given to the experiential aspects varies by product category or typology of tourism services, but also according to the user classification. The typology of tourism consumption has important consequences for consumer satisfaction.

Specific literature provides many different definitions of customer satisfaction. We share three views that have particularly come into prominence:

- **The Howard-Sheth concept** - considers satisfaction/dissatisfaction to be a psychological state that reflects the adequacy/inadequacy of the effort made by the buyer in order to purchase certain products and/or services, with its expectations regarding the quality – price ratio (Howard J.A., Sheth J.N., 1969);

- **The Hunt concept** considers satisfaction to be an evaluation based on the knowledge and experience of the consumers, which, based on these, requires a quality level for the respective product/service (Hunt, S.D., Morgan, R.,M., 1994);
- **The Cadotte, Woodruff and Jenkins concept, 1987** considers satisfaction to be the feelings developed as a result of evaluating a consumption experience (Cadott, Woodruff and Jenkins, 1987).

We believe that tourism services consumer's satisfaction is equally a psychological, emotional, affective and cognitive response, which develops during consumption, through the overall assessment of the multitude of services and consumption experiences that make up the overall tourism product. After consumption, the evaluative judgments can be relieved on each service or experience. Because it is, by excellence, an experiential consumption, which can only rarely refer to similar, past consumption situations, the expectations and perceptions of the individual can be strongly influenced by both the cognitive dissonance as well as the consumer's imagination; the perceptual distortions are easily produced due to the influence of the forms of presentation used by different suppliers, but also due to the influence of the impressions expressed by the entourage members, family members, opinion leaders or reference groups.

The essential elements of the tourism products consumer's satisfaction can be summarized as follows:

- Consumer satisfaction is simultaneously an emotional, affective and cognitive response;
- The response has a specific target (expectations, consumption experience); it is relative and subjective;
- The concept of satisfaction is situational, punctual and has a transitory character;
- The response occurs at certain moments (during or after consumption) and will refer to the concept of equity;
- If it is not a repetitive but experiential consumption, post-consumption impressions will not evolve over time and will not generate loyalty.

Satisfaction is generally presented as a one-dimensional concept that sets two factors against on a scale: satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Maddox, 1981). (Figure 1) presents the model of achieving satisfaction, individualized for tourism products consumers.

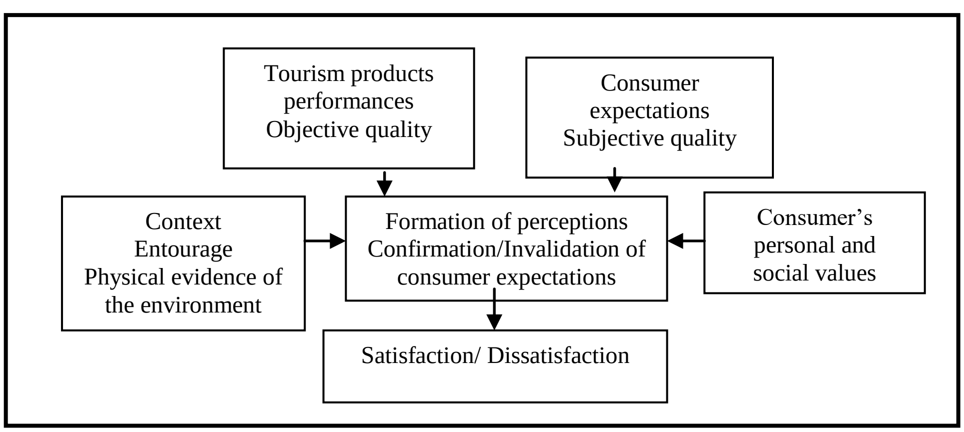

Figure 1. The model of achieving tourism products consumer's satisfaction

We share the view that has been expressed by several marketing specialists, according to which tourism products consumer's satisfaction corresponds to the paradigm of confirming/disconfirming consumer expectations (Figure 1).

In the context of the model presented in (Figure 1), satisfaction is achieved as a consequence of the comparative process, with five main components[3]:

- The assessment of **tourism products performance** during consumption or post - consumption corresponds to the **quality, which is subjectively and punctually perceived** with respect to a consumption experience, and only partly depends on the **objective quality**, expressed by the characteristics of the offer; the context, the entourage, the physical evidence of the environment and the consumer's personal and social values will have a major impact on its perceptions and attitudes, especially due to the fact that, at the place of providing the tourism services, the presence of heterogeneous groups with different motivations, values and behaviors may either be a disturbing factor or a favoring factor in achieving satisfaction;
- Consumer expectations prior to purchase or consumption correspond to the **expected performance or quality** and represent a **reference standard**;
- Comparisons between performance and expected and perceived quality as a result of consumption lead to the confirmation/disconfirmation of expectations (positive, negative, neutral experience).
- Confirmation will generate customer satisfaction and disconfirmation will generate dissatisfaction. **The concept of confirmation** characterizes the result of the confrontation between the initial expectations and the perceived quality and is formed both in relation to the cognitive as well as the affective aspects, as follows:

  - The differences between the initial expectations and the perceived quality from the cognitive point of view refer to the attributes that provide the product with utility. In the case of new experiences, the convergence of new experiences with those derived from previous experiences leads to the formation of expectations, which will be assessed within the consumption process. The consumption context may yet be completely different when surprise is generated, which can also lead to satisfaction/dissatisfaction;

  - The affective aspects (happiness, ecstasy, passion) are derived from the symbolic and imaginary components of the products and services, based on assigning a unique sense to the product or its attributes. The difference between expectations and their confirmation/disconfirmation will generate positive or negative affective states, pleasure or displeasure. Pleasure is a fundamental dimension of tourism consumption, constituting a major factor that contributes to the quality of life, achievement and self-fulfillment.
- In the case of the products in whose case consumption occurs repetitively, the quality corresponding to expectations has a concrete support, that of the past experiences, while in the case of tourism consumption, expectations are general and abstract in terms of values and desires, which are formed solely on the basis of expectations. In tourism, the experiential consumption is the rule, not the exception. Although specific literature has proposed a multitude of definitions, concepts,

[3] Adjusted after: Engel, J.F., Kollat, D.T., Blackwell, R.D. (1978) - *Consumer Behavior,* New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston; Oliver, R. (1980) - *A Cognitive Model; The Antecedents and Consequences of Satisfaction Decision,* Journal of Marketing Research, November, 17, pp. 460-469; Oliver, R.L. (1993), *Assessing the Dimensionality of the Consumer Research,* June, 20, pp. 23-45; Westbrook, R., Reilly, M.D. (1983) -*Value Percept Disparity: An Alternative to the Disconfirmation of Expectations Theory of Customer Satisfaction,* Advances in Consumer Research, Associations for Consumer Research, pp. 256-261; Evrard, Y. (1993)- *La satisfaction des Consommateurs: Etat des Recherches,* Revue Francaise du Marketing, 155/145, pp. 53-65; Lache, C. (2005) - *Măsurarea satisfacţiei clienţilor (Assessing customer satisfaction),* the volume - The Romanian economy in the context of European integration, UPA Yearbook, Volume XV, pp. 349-359; Maddox, R.N. (1980) – *Two Factor Theory Consumer Satisfaction: Replication and Extension* – Journal of Consumer Research, 8.

methods and multi-item evaluation scales, which are valid and reliable for identifying the elements that contribute to the formation of evaluative judgments and the measurement of consumer satisfaction, by combining the cognitive and affective components that contribute to its achievement in terms of values and desires (Oliver, 1980; Parasuraman et al, 1988; Cronin et al, 1992; Westbrook, R.A., Oliver, R.L, 1991), the level of generalization mostly corresponds to the expected quality or ideal quality, focusing either on the aspects regarding the performance of the product's attributes or on the elements of the service system. Or tourism products consumers only partially retrospect to these issues; according to the motivation attached to the purchase, their expectations largely regard the psychological, communion with nature, spiritual enrichment, cultural, aesthetic, socialization and self-fulfillment aspects, which the classical instruments of measuring satisfaction are unable to capture (Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A., Berry, L.L., 1988; Oliver R.L., 1993; Evrard, Y., 1993; Rust, R.T., 1996).

However, tourism destination marketing heavily relies on these items. Oliver R.L (1997) points out that the level of generalization is sometimes much higher, and the attribute that consumers are seeking for is, in fact, the materialization of an aspiration, being subject to a process of reification, such as for example the case of aesthetics or gladness, cheerfulness. For the case of tourism products consumers in particular, we propose the gradation of consumer satisfaction, by presenting a grid for measuring the elements that contribute to achieving satisfaction/dissatisfaction, with various levels of profoundness. This grid complements the customer expectations in regard to the qualitative standards set out in the tourist offer, as follows[4] (Table 1):

Table 1. The elements of achieving tourism products consumer's satisfaction

State of satisfaction/dissatisfaction	Level of the tourism products consumer's satisfaction/dissatisfaction						
Affective dimensions							
Evaluation scale	-5	-3	-1	0	1	3	5
Pleasure	Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Moderately unpleasant	Neither/nor	Pleasant	Excellent	Hedonism
Beauty	Very ugly	Ugly	Moderately ugly	Neither/nor	Beautiful	Superb	Fascinating
Cheerfulness/ Gladness	Very sad	Sadness	Melancholy	Neither/nor	Relaxation	Cheerfulness	Happiness
Surprise	Revolting	Indignation	Regret	Neither/nor	Surprise	Overwhelmed	Enthusiasm
Contentedness	Extremely discontent	Discontent	Indifferent	Neither/nor	Content	Very content	Delighted
Interest	Very boring	Boring	Ordinary	Neither/nor	Moderately interesting	Interesting	Exciting
Attractiveness	Disagreeable	Unattractive/ Boring	Moderately unattractive/ Moderately boring	Neither/nor	Moderately attractive	Very attractive	Irresistible
Authenticity	Ordinary/ Common			Neither/nor			Authentic
Novelty	Very old	Out-dated	Moderately old	Neither/nor	Relatively new	New	Totally new
Passion	Extremely	Disgusting	Unpleasant	Neutral	Moderately	Thrilling	Ecstasy

[4] Beckman S.C. (1999) - *Emotions and Consumer Behavior,* Consumer Research and Economic Psychology, P.E. Earl, S. Kemp eds., pp. 182-187; Derbaix, C., Pham, M. (1989) – *Pour un développement des measures un marketing: synteses des pré-requis,* Recherches et Applications en Marketing, pp. 71-87; Russel J. A., Pratt G. (1980) - *A Description of the Affective Quality Attributed to Environement,* Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 38, August, pp. 311-322

	disgusting				thrilling		
Achievement/ Self-fulfillment	Without signification	Minimum signification	Indifferent	Neither/nor	Contributes to personal development	Heavily contributes to personal development	Achievement/Self-fulfillment
Cognitive dimensions							
Importance of the service/ attribute	Without importance	Minimum importance	Indifferent	Neither/nor	Moderately important	Very important	Extremelyi mportant
Equity	Disappointed	Frustrated	Moderately inequitable	Neither/nor	Moderately equitable	Equitable	Above expectations
Hospitality	Hostile	Inhospitable	Moderately hospitable	Neither/nor	Hospitable	Very hospitable	Total empathy
Security	Very dangerous	Dangerous	Unsafe	Neither/nor	Safe	Very safe	Total safety
Comfort	Very uncomfortable	Discomfort	Modest	Neither/nor	Comfortable	Very comfortable	Impeccable
Trust	Total distrust	Distrust	Partial distrust	Neither/nor	Partial trust	Trust	Total trust
Quality	Inappropriate	Satisfactory	Moderately good	Neither/nor	Good	Very good	Irreproachable
Communication/Socialization	Inexistent/Weak	Sporadic/ Mediocre	Satisfactory	Neither/nor	Good	Very good	Irreproachable
Personalization /empathy	Inexistent/Weak	Sporadic/ Mediocre	Satisfactory	Neither/nor	Good	Very good	Irreproachable
Conative dimensions							
Intention to repurchase/Loyalty	Inexistent/Weak	Sporadic	Minimum probability	Undecided	Medium probability	High probability	Certainty

The elements listed in (Table 1) simultaneously reflect the attitudes, perceptions and the consumers' level of involvement in relation to the consumption experience/tourism services analyzed, connecting them with their value system. We share the opinion according to which the attributes of the tourism products generate evaluative judgments on a set of consequences or benefits that correspond to the values reflecting the tourism products consumer’s preferences and motivations, constituting the behavioral source (Rokeach, 1968). The idea of organizing the elements that contribute to achieving satisfaction hierarchically, under the form of means-goal linkages, has been introduced into the marketing specific literature by Gutman, J., 1982 and has been presented in the works of Zeithaml V., 1988, Reynolds T.J. and Gutman J., 1988.

Tourism products consumers are guided by different values when choosing a tourism destination and the services that they purchase, each of them selecting certain attributes that they consider to be important for obtaining the expected satisfaction, thereby generating a variety of cognitive linkages. Reaching the goals, namely the terminal values (Rokeach, M., 1973) will lead the tourism products consumers to achieving the expected satisfaction, to a greater or lesser extent.

3. Research objectives and methodology

In the field of marketing, Gutman (1982) adapts the idea of linking the consumer’s behavior to the attributes of a product by associating the different cognitive/emotional levels to the product or brand. The author defines the various hierarchical levels, which, in fact, are attributes of the product, the expected benefits under the form of the consequences associated to consumption and individual values of the consumer. Thus, the method allows highlighting the links between **Attributes - Consequences - Values**.

We have used this method because it highlights the different levels of generalization of the consumers' judgments and allows a better understanding of the border between the attributes of the tourism product and the values shared by the individuals, reflecting their preferences and motivations and justifying their behaviors (goals, means of reaching the goals) and therefore their different levels of satisfaction.

3.1. Research objectives

The research objectives are focused on studying the particular dimensions of consumer satisfaction associated with the tourism destination "Iasi" and on the dependence of the tourism products consumer's satisfaction on their abstract needs, as follows:

1. Identifying and validating the elements (attributes) that contribute to the formation of the evaluative judgments, the consequences and values associated with tourism consumption;
2. Determining the share of the different criteria that lead to the achievement of overall satisfaction;
3. Assessing the levels of satisfaction;
4. Highlighting the correlation between the levels of overall satisfaction of the customer segments and the attributes of the tourism offer, the consequences of the purchase and the value system that determines the purchase of the tourism services.

The research goal is improving the elements of the tourism destination marketing mix, based on the importance of the elements that lead to the achievement of satisfaction, according to the value system underlying the evaluative judgments and the achievement of the best possible customer segmentation.

3.2. Research methodology

In order to reach these objectives, the research has been conducted in three distinct phases. In the first stage, we have used the laddering method (Reynolds, J.T., Gutman, J., 1988).

We have conducted a thorough group interview, based on which we have established a list of the most important elements (attributes) that consumers have had in mind when building their concept of satisfaction. Evoking each of these elements was then justified by the associated benefits (consequences), based on the answers to the question "why is this important to you?"; afterwards, they were correlated with the personal, individual or social values of the individuals.

Based on this semi-directive, direct interview, which was applied to a group of 49 consumers, a list of attributes-consequences-values was structured. The most important attributes, the consequences related to the attributes and the associated personal values, according to the principle of cause-effect cognitive linkages were retained. The consequences we considered to be quasi-similar or the recurring ones were merged, and those that were mentioned by too few respondents were eliminated. Twenty-eight attributes, consequences and values were selected, according to Table 3.

In the second stage, a formalized questionnaire for assessing the levels of satisfaction with Likert scale was built based on the elements mentioned by the respondents.

The results were analyzed by using the correlation and regression method in order to highlight the level of intensity of the relationship between the overall satisfaction of the tourists and each of the attributes-consequences-values variables, so that we would be able to validate the research hypothesis, according to which the level of consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction is subjective and depends not only on the quality characteristics of the overall tourism product and its attributes, but also on the personal and/or social values associated to the tourism product.

3.3. Sample characteristics

The sample characteristics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample characteristics

Sample characteristics	**Number**	**%**
Total sample	49	100
Sex : - feminine (F)	19	38.77
- masculine (M)	30	61.23
Age: - 15-24 years	2	4.00
- 25-54 years	32	65.30
- 55-64 years	12	24.60
- over 64 years	3	6.10
Education - General and professional education	0	0
- High school and post-secondary studies	15	30.60
- Higher education	34	69,40
Economic activity: - Active	35	71.43
- Non-active	14	28.57
Number of persons per household:		
- 1-2 Persons	8	16.32
- 3 Persons	5	10.20
- 4 Persons	36	73.48
- 5 Persons and more	0	0
Subjective self-evaluation of the financial situation:		
- Very good	19	38.77
- Good	22	44.90
- Average	8	16.33
- Satisfactory	0	0
- Unsatisfactory	0	0
Tourism destination choice was made:		
- Personally	27	55.10
- By another person (head of the family, professional association)	22	44.90
Frequency of visits to destination:		
- first visit	38	77.55
- second visit	5	10.20
- third visit	2	4.05
- annually	4	8.20

As shown in Table 2, 38.77% of the respondents are females and 81.23% are males. The sample is relatively homogeneous: most of the respondents (65.3%) are aged between 25-54 years, graduated from a higher education program (69.40%) and are active persons (71.43%). The household consists of 4 members in the case of 73.48% of the respondents. The subjective self-evaluation of the financial situation shows that 38.77% of the respondents have a very good financial situation, 44.90% have a good situation, 16.33% have an average situation and no respondent considers having a satisfactory or unsatisfactory income.

The tourism destination choice was made personally by 55.10% of the respondents, while for 44.9% of them it was made either a the professional organization/association or another person within the family.

Most of the respondents, 77.55%, are at their first visit, thus for them the tourism destination is a new experience.

The group is relatively homogeneous, with a high education level, which allows an interview of this type.

The study was conducted from February to April 2011, with support from the managers of Europa Hotel in Iasi.

3.4. Results and discussions

Since the data were collected based on a direct, unstructured, in-depth, group interview, the collected data were classified into categories, according to the laddering method: attributes, consequences and values.

The main eight attributes mentioned by the respondents generated cognitive linkages, associating them with 13 consequences and 7 personal values, as shown in Table 3, which also presents their citation frequency. The elements with the same scores and those that generated the same cognitive linkages were merged.

Table 3. The categories associated to consumer satisfaction

Categories	Citation frequency	Centrality coefficient
Attributes		
1.Hospitality	41/83.7%	0.209
2.Gastronomy	39/79.6%	0.191
3.Culture/Spirituality	39/79.6%	0.191
4.Hotel services	31/63.3%	0.152
5.Price	19/38.8%	0.093
6.Personalization/empathy	11/22.5%	0.054
Consequences		
7.Safety/security	39/79.6%	0.191
8.Spiritual enrichment	39/79.6%	0.191
9.Communication/Socialization/Friendship	38/77.5%	0.186
10.Health	37/75.5%	0.183
11.Pleasure/contentedness	37/75.5%	0.183
12.Novelty	35/71.4%	0.172
13.Symbolism	12/24.5%	0.060
14.Equity	10/20.4%	0.049
15.Avoiding negative consequences	8/16.3%	0.039
Values		
16. Self-esteem	36/79.6%	0.176
17. Self-fulfillment	35/71.4%	0.172
18.Comfort/Quality of life	24/48.9%	0.118
19.Hedonism	12/24.5%	0.059
20. Group membership	11/22.4%	0.054
21. Responsibility	10/20.4%	0.049

The graphical representation of the linkages within the system of consequences - values - attributes is shown in Figure 2. Associating the attributes with the expected consequences and the values of the consumers has generated 28 cognitive linkages.

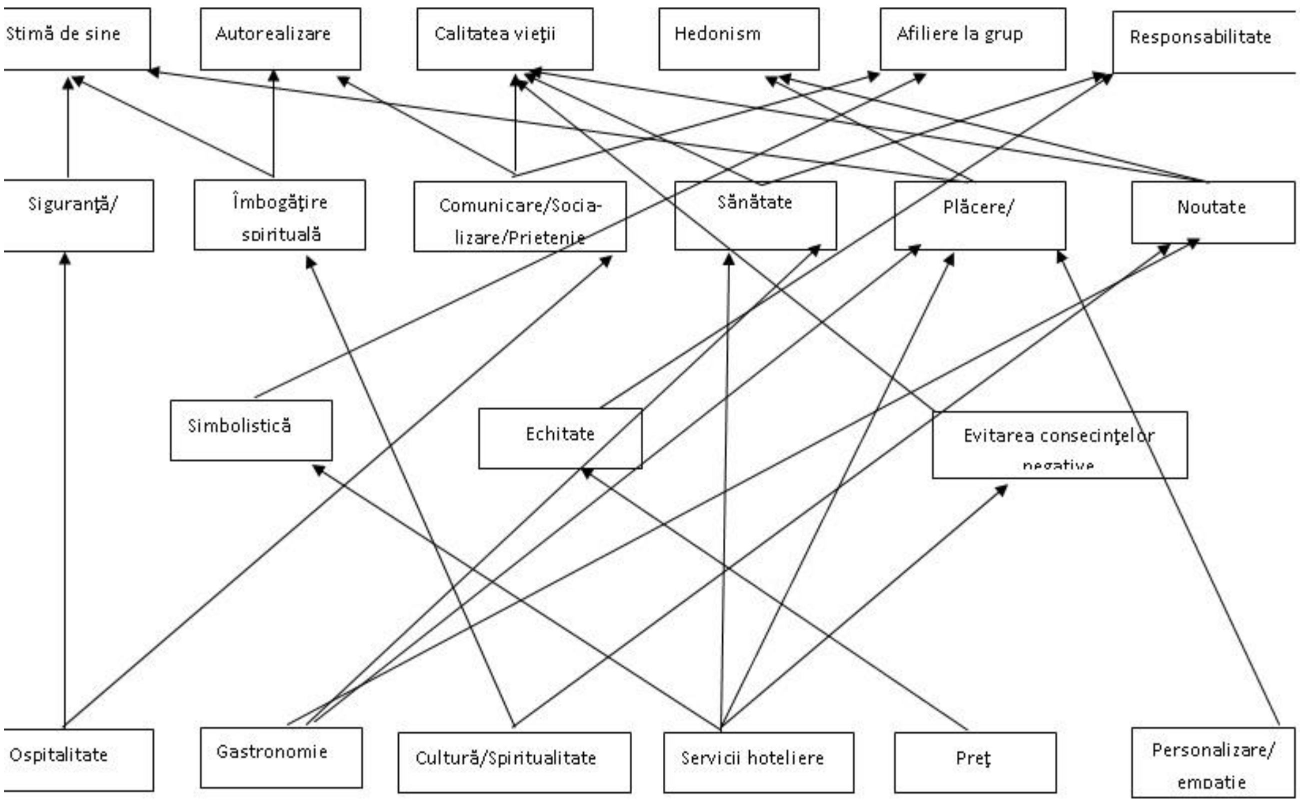

Figure 2. Graphical representation of the cognitive associations between attributes – consequences – values

Since we collected the data by using the laddering method (Reynolds, J.T., Gutman, J., 1988) and since we conducted an in-depth, group interview, without any formalized support, a variety of very abstract elements was generated, especially regarding the associated consequences and the values.

The levels of choice for the cognitive linkages were selected freely, with no restrictions regarding the number of combinations; thus, only three attributes (50%) generate one single direct consequence, and safety/security is the only consequence related only to an individual value (self-esteem), the rest having more corresponding values. An average of 1.75 cognitive linkages resulted for every participant in the interview. This is inextricably related to how the data were collected.

The attributes selected by the surveyed consumers rank, in order of importance, the main attributes based on which they will make judgments regarding the quality of the tourism destination. We note that hospitality, which defines the local population, is first, and culture/spirituality, defined by the historical and cultural sites, art, ethnography, folklore, etc., which create the image of the destination, is third. The aspects regarding the quality of the hotel services and gastronomy are not included in the first place, although most of the studies on tourism products consumer's satisfaction focus on the quality of these attributes and usually the idea of meeting more elevated values is completely ignored.

In order of importance, out of these attributes, the respondents mention: Gastronomy - 39/79.6% Hotel services - 31/63.3%, Price - 19/38.8%; Personalization/empathy - 11/22.5%.

The analysis of the attributes selected by the respondents reflects the fact that, ever since the first level of substantiating the evaluative judgments regarding satisfaction, the importance of the cultural and spiritual aspects is outlined; they will have psychological and aesthetic consequences that will generate satisfaction by reaching the terminal values (goals), which guide them both personally and socially: personal and family safety, family responsibility, inner harmony, social recognition, friendship, group membership, self-esteem, quality of life, hedonism, self-fulfillment.

After analyzing the consequences and values that determine consumer satisfaction with the tourism destination Iasi, we may characterize the group of consumers as being mainly motivated by self-esteem and spiritual enrichment (79.6%) and the quality of life (71.4%), and secondly by self-fulfillment (24.5%), hedonism (24.5%), group membership (22.4%) and responsibility (20.4%). Service personalization is important and ensures satisfaction for a relatively small number of respondents (22.5%). Their satisfaction also derives from the fact that the tourism product has met their need for safety/security (79.6%), for spiritual enrichment (79.6%), communication/socialization/friendship (77.5%), it has provided them with pleasure and contentedness (75.5%), it has met their need for trying something new, different from their previous experiences (71.4%), at a fair price (20.4%). The fact that respondents mentioned, to varying degrees, that these factors led to the decision regarding the destination choice, subsequently contributing to the achievement of satisfaction, does not reflect the respondents' level of satisfaction in relation to the selected elements.

Therefore, in the second phase of the research, the respondents were given a formalized questionnaire, quantified under the form of the Lickert scale, where they checked the level of satisfaction corresponding to each generalization element identified in the first part of the research, as well as the level of overall satisfaction.

The levels of satisfaction associated to the image of Iasi city are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Assessing the level of the tourism products consumer's satisfaction

State if satisfaction/dissatisfaction	Level of the tourism products consumer's satisfaction/dissatisfaction				
Attributes					
Evaluation scale	-5	-3	0	3	5
Hospitality	Inhospitable	Moderately hospitable	Neither/nor	Very hospitable	Total empathy
	0	0	0	9/18.4%	40/81.6%
Gastronomy	Inappropriate	Moderately good	Neither/nor	Very good	Excellence
	0	0	5/10.2%	4/8.2%	40//81.6%
Culture/ Spirituality	Ordinary/ Common		Neither/nor		Authenticity
	0	-	6/12.2%	2/4.1%	41/83.7%
Hotel services	Inappropriate	Moderately good	Neither/nor	Very good	Excellence
	0	0	1/2.0%	3/6.1%	45/91.9%
Price/Equity	Disappointed	Frustrated	Indifferent	Equitable	Above expectations
	0	0	0	11/22.4%	38/77.6%
Personalization/ Empathy	Inexistent/Weak	Sporadic/ Mediocre	Indifferent	Very good	Irreproachable
	0	0	0	5/10.2%	44/89.8%
Consequences					
Safety/security	Dangerous	Unsafe	Safe	Very safe	Total safety
	0	0	0	2/4.1%	47/95.1%
Spiritual enrichment	Very weak	Weak	Mediocre	Good	Very good
	0	0	0	0	49/100%
Communication/S	Inexistent	Weak	Sporadic/	Good	Irreproachable

ocialization/Friendship			Mediocre		
	0	0	0	0	49/100%
Health	Inappropriate conditions	Moderately good	Neither/nor	Very good	Excellence
	0	0	0	0	49/100%
Pleasure/contentedness	Discontent	Moderately discontent	Neither/nor	Content	Very content
	0	0	0	0	49/100%
Novelty	Very old	Moderately old	Neither/nor	New	Totally new
	0	0	0	0	49/100%
Symbolism	Without importance	Minimum importance	Neither/nor	Important	Extremely important
	0	0	0	0	49/100%
Avoiding negative consequences	Without importance	Minimum importance	Neither/nor	Important	Extremely important
	0	0	49/100	0	0
Values					
Self-esteem	Without significance	With minimum significance	Neither/nor	Important	Extremely de important
	0	0	0	0	49/100%
Achievement/ Self-fulfillment	Without significance	With minimum significance	Contributes to personal development	Heavily contributes to personal develop.t	Achievement/ Self-fulfillment
	0	0	0	0	49/100%
Quality of life	Without importance	Minimum importance	Neither/nor	Important	Extremely de important
	0	0	0	0	49/100%
Hedonism	Very unpleasant	Unpleasant	Neither/nor	Excellent	Hedonism
	0	0	0	16/32.7%	33/67.3%
Group membership	Weak	Sporadic	Medium	Very good	Irreproachable
	0	30/61.3%	7/14.3%	1/2.0%	11/22.4%
Responsibility	Very low	Low	Neither/nor	High	Very high
	0	0	0	39/79.6%	10/20.4%
Conative dimensions					
Intention to repurchase/Loyalty	Inexistent/Weak	Minimum probability	Medium probability	High probability	Certitude
	40/81.7%	0	2/4.1%	3/6.1%	4/8.1%
Overall satisfaction					
	Dissatisfied	Moderately satisfied	Neither/nor	Satisfied	Very satisfied
	0	0	8/16.3%	10/20.4%	31/63.3%

The analysis of the tourism products consumer's level of overall satisfaction shows that 63.3% of them were very satisfied, 20.4% were satisfied and 16.3% were rather indifferent, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Disloyalty regarding the tourism destination is highlighted by the fact that the intention to repurchase the tourism product is inexistent in the case of 81.7% of the clients, despite the high level of satisfaction.

In the third stage of the research we used the method of the regression analysis in order to make judgments regarding the variation of the dependent variable - consumer satisfaction - in relation to each of the factors taken into consideration in the study, as being responsible for the achievement of the tourism products consumer's satisfaction. The descriptive analysis of the options expressed by the consumers in relation to the overall satisfaction and the elements that contribute to its achievement (Table no. 4) allow calculating the mean and standard deviation of each variable influencing consumer satisfaction - Table 5.

Table 5- Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Overall satisfaction	3.78	1.863	49
Hospitality	4.63	.782	49
Gastronomy	4.33	1.573	49
Culture	4.31	1.673	49
Hotel services	4.73	.884	49
Price	4.55	.843	49
Empathy	1.94	3.008	49
Security	3.96	1.154	49
Spirituality	4.31	1.475	49
Communication	4.06	1.701	49
Health	3.71	2.061	49
Pleasure	4.80	.612	49
Novelty	3.73	2.018	49
Symbolism	4.59	1.383	49
Avoiding negative consequences	2.61	2.255	49
Self-esteem	4.84	.553	49
Self-fulfillment	4.80	.612	49
Quality of life	4.67	.747	49
Hedonism	2.49	1.869	49
Group membership	-.65	3.333	49
Responsibility	.61	1.222	49
Loyalty	-3.49	3.324	49

After analyzing the data in Table 5, we can say that the variables with the greatest influence, according to the calculated mean, are: self-esteem - 4.84 and self-fulfillment - 4.80, both being categorized as *values* within the Attributes - Consequences – Values cognitive linkage, followed by pleasure - 4.80, hotel services - 4.73, quality of life - 4.67 and hospitality - 4.63. The calculated means of these variables, as well as the means of price, symbolism, gastronomy, culture, spirituality have values that are close to 5 on the evaluation grid, respectively - extremely important, very content, excellence, extremely important, total empathy, above expectations, extremely important, excellence, authenticity, very good. The means of the variables such as security, novelty or health have values that are close to 3 on the evaluation grid: very safe, new, very good. The means of the variables such as empathy, responsibility, group membership and loyalty are very low, which shows that these indicators have little effect on the tourism products consumer's overall satisfaction.

Table 6 - *Correlations* presents the Pearson correlation coefficients the significance (Sig.) for each correlation coefficient and the number of cases considered in the study (N). For our study, it presents the simple correlations of each independent variable with the dependent variable - overall satisfaction.

Table 6. **Correlations**

	Overall satisfaction	Hospitality	Gastronomy	Culture	Hotel services	Price	Empathy	Security	Spirituality	Communication	Health	Pleasure	Novelty	Symbolism	Avoiding negative consequences	Self-es-teem	Self-fulfillment	Quality of life	Hedonism	Group membership	Responsibility	Loyalty
Overall satisfaction	1.000							.703	.837	.905	.557	.690	.732	.611	.639	.611	.690	.905	.378	.473	.336	.305
Hospitality	**.886**							.537	.858	.863	.574	.711	.491	.629	.658	.629	.711	.931	.270	.338	.240	.218
Gastronomy	.495							.535	.495	.460	.606	.547	.566	.541	.582	.541	.547	.447	.246	.308	.219	.199
Culture	.457							.414	.510	.498	.344	.429	.561	.415	.444	.415	.429	.282	.239	.298	.212	.192
Hotel Services	.545							.561	.734	.648	.872	.745	.567	.846	.825	.846	.745	.560	.173	.216	.153	.139
Price	**.863**							.580	.884	.362	.506	.627	.565	.554	.580	.554	.627	.821	.306	.383	.272	.247
Empathy	.625							.357	.447	.525	.256	.317	.596	.280	.294	.280	.317	.415	.605	.757	.538	.488
Security	.703	.737	.535	.414	.561	.580	.357									.446	.460	.516	.519	.648	.461	.418
Spirituality	**.837**	**.858**	.495	.510	.734	**.884**	.447									.880	.856	.849	.271	.338	.241	.218
Communication	**.905**	**.863**	.460	.498	.648	.362	.525									.719	.813	.869	.318	.797	.282	.256
Health	.557	.574	.606	.344	**.872**	.506	.256									.913	.807	.616	.155	.194	.838	.125
Pleasure	.690	.711	.547	.429	.745	.627	.317									.884	1.000	.763	.892	.240	.171	.155
Novelty	.732	.491	.566	.561	.567	.565	.596									.557	.529	.494	.961	.451	.321	.291
Symbolism	.611	.629	.541	.415	**.846**	.554	.280									1.000	.884	.675	.170	.212	.151	.137
Avoiding negative consequences	.639	.658	.582	.444	**.825**	.580	.294									.927	.926	.707	.178	.222	.158	.143
Self -esteem	.611	.629	.541	.415	**.846**	.554	.280	.446	.880	.719	.913	.884	.557	1.000	.927							
Self-fulfillment	.690	.711	.547	.429	**.745**	.627	.317	.460	.856	.813	.807	1.000	.529	.884	.926							
Quality of life	**.905**	**.931**	.447	.282	.560	**.821**	.415	.516	.849	.869	.616	.763	.494	.675	.707							
Hedonism	.378	.270	.246	.239	.173	.306	.605	.519	.271	.318	.155	.892	.961	.170	.178							
Group membership	.473	.338	.308	.298	.216	.383	.757	.648	.338	.797	.194	.240	.451	.212	.222							
Responsibility	.336	.240	.219	.212	.153	.272	.538	.461	.241	.282	.838	.171	.321	.151	.158							
Loyalty	.305	.218	.199	.192	.139	.247	.488	.418	.218	.256	.125	.155	.291	.137	.143							
Overall satisfaction	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.004	.000	.009	.017
Hospitality	.000	.	.002	.002	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.030	.009	.048	.066
Gastronomy	.000	.002	.	.006	.000	.010	.002	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.044	.016	.065	.086
Culture	.000	.002	.006	.	.000	.000	.003	.000	.000	.000	.008	.001	.000	.002	.001	.002	.001	.025	.049	.019	.072	.093
Hotel services	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.001	.024	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.118	.068	.146	.170

	Overall satisfaction	Hospitality	Gastronomy	Culture	Hotel services	Price	Empathy	Security	Spirituality	Communication	Health	Pleasure	Novelty	Symbolism	Avoiding negative consequences	Self-es-teem	Self-fulfillment	Quality of life	Hedonism	Group membership	Responsibility	Loyalty
Price	.000	.000	.010	.000	.001	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.016	.003	.029	.044
Empathy	.000	.001	.002	.003	.024	.000	.	.000	.001	.000	.038	.013	.000	.025	.020	.025	.013	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000
Security	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
Spirituality	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	**.000**	.001	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.030	.009	.048	.066
Communication	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.013	.002	.025	.038
Health	.000	.000	.000	.008	.000	.000	.038	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.144	.091	.173	.196
Pleasure	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.013	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.093	.048	.120	.144
Novelty	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.005	.001	.012	.021
Symbolism	.000	.000	.000	.002	.000	.000	.025	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.122	.072	.150	.174
Avoiding negative consequences	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.020	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.111	.063	.139	.163
Self-esteem	.000	.000	.000	.002	.000	.000	.025	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.122	.072	.150	.174
Self-fulfillment	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.013	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.093	.048	.120	.144
Quality of life	.000	.000	.001	.025	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.041	.014	.061	.081
Hedonism	.004	.030	.044	.049	.118	.016	.000	.000	.030	.013	.144	.093	.005	.122	.111	.122	.093	.041	.	.000	.000	.000
Group membership	.000	.009	.016	.019	.068	.003	.000	.000	.009	.002	.091	.048	.001	.072	.063	.072	.048	.014	.000	.	.000	.000
Responsibility	.009	.048	.065	.072	.146	.029	.000	.000	.048	.025	.173	.120	.012	.150	.139	.150	.120	.061	.000	.000	.	.000
Loyalty	.017	.066	.086	.093	.170	.044	.000	.001	.066	.038	.196	.144	.021	.174	.163	.174	.144	.081	.000	.000	.000	.

The correlation coefficients have values between -l (showing the existence of a perfect and inversely proportional connection between the variables) and +1 (showing the existence of a perfect and directly proportional connection between the variables). Value 0 indicates the total independence of the variables taken into consideration[1].

We note that the value of the correlation coefficients on the diagonal is equal to 1 because each variable is correlated with itself.

We find that the most significant correlation between the attributes and the consequences is that between price and spiritual enrichment, the value of the coefficient being 0.884 and indicating a very strong and direct correlation between the variables, with a significance value under 0.01 (0.000). We also note strong correlations between hospitality and communication - 0.863, between hospitality and spirituality – 0.858, between hotel services and health – 0.872, between hotel services and tourism product symbolism – 0.846, and between hotel services and avoiding negative consequences – 0.825.

Strong correlations are also shown between hospitality and security, between hospitality and pleasure, self-fulfillment (the coefficient reaches values over 0.700), between hotel services and pleasure, spirituality.

Regarding the relationships between attributes and values, the strongest correlation can be noticed between hospitality and the quality of life – 0.931. Strong correlations can also be seen between hotel services and self-esteem and between price and the quality of life.

The strongest correlation between consequences and values are those between avoiding negative consequences and self-esteem – 0.927, between avoiding negative consequences and self-fulfillment – 0.926, between health and self-esteem - 0.913, between pleasure and hedonism – 0.892, between novelty and self-fulfillment – 0.884, between pleasure and self-esteem – 0.884, between spirituality and self-esteem – 0.880, between communication and the quality of life – 0.869, between spirituality and self-fulfillment – 0.856, between spirituality and the quality of life – 0.849, between health and responsibility – 0.838, and between communication and self-fulfillment – 0.813.

The overall satisfaction is strongly correlated with the independent variables quality of life and communication - 0905, with hospitality – 0.886, with price – 0.863, with spirituality – 0.837 and with novelty – 0.732. Weaker correlations can be noticed for security, pleasure, self-fulfillment, avoiding negative consequences, empathy, symbolism and self-esteem.

Although the direct correlation between some variables such as avoiding negative consequences, health, responsibility, security and others and the overall satisfaction is weak, by analyzing the contribution of these variables to the tourism products consumer's satisfaction, according to the Tetraclasse model, we can emphasize that these variables are part of the **fundamental elements or risk factors**; although they do not have a major contribution to the achievement of satisfaction, their absence would create a major impact on satisfaction, generating profound dissatisfaction (Llosa S., 1997). According to the same model, some key elements such as price, equity, quality of life and spiritual enrichment were able to generate maximum satisfaction, any variation of these elements being prone to result in profound dissatisfaction. The Bonus element is represented by tourism service personalization/empathy; although it was cited by a relatively small number of respondents as strongly influencing the tourism product choice, it was an important satisfaction factor for the whole group, representing an element of surprise.

In (Table 7) we have used the regression method in order to validate the correlations between the variables.

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[1] Carmen Mariana Codreanu – The statistical analysis of prices variation of agrifood products, Ed. Junimea, Iasi, 2007, p. 119

Table 7. Model Summary [b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.982[a]	.964	.942	.448	.964	44.465	18	30	.000	.804

a. Predictors: (Constant), loyalty, health, culture, empathy, hospitality, gastronomy, novelty, hedonism, self-fulfillment, price, security, hotel services, responsibility, symbolism, communication, quality of life, avoiding negative consequences, group membership

b. Dependent Variable: global satisfaction

The determination ratio R^2 indicates the ratio of the variation in the dependent variable through the regression model and is used for assessing the quality of the adjustment (choice of the model)[1]. R^2 takes on values between 0 and 1. If R^2 is equal to 0 or has a very small value, then the regression model chosen does not explain the relationship between the variables; the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable does not coincide with the chosen model. If R^2 is equal to 1, then all observations fall on the regression line and therefore the regression model perfectly explains the relationship between variables.

In our case, 96.40% of the overall satisfaction is explained by the independent variables chosen. The adjusted R square tries to correct the R square in order to better reflect how the model fits the sample of the consumers investigated.

The standard error of the dependent predicted variable (Std. Error of the Estimate) indicates the standard deviation of the tourism products consumer's satisfaction, the value of the independent variables of the model being known. Since the change interval is small, this means that the independent variables correctly assess the dependent variable, customer satisfaction.

Overall satisfaction is the result of conjugating the influence of the variables analyzed.

4. Conclusions

The contribution of the paper regards the theoretical as well as the practical level. At the theoretical level, the paper aims at highlighting the sources and levels of satisfaction of tourism products consumers on different levels of generalization, issues that have been conferred little attention by specific literature so far. The research methodology combines the profoundness of the laddering method with the evaluations made by using the Lickert scale, the method of analyzing the relationships between the variables by using the correlation and regression model, as well as the interpretation of the results by using the Tetraclasse model.

The practical contribution regards more aspects.

Emphasizing the abstract aspects of the sources of satisfaction, such as, for example, the personal and social values of the tourism products consumers can be a source of inspiration for reconsidering the way of approaching marketing communications as well as for management practices. Beyond the specific elements which are attributed to the tangible elements of the tourism product, an important source of differentiation is represented by the intangible elements, which are more difficult to express, but can be found within the tourists' cognitive linkages. Even if some of

[1] Carmen Mariana Codreanu – The statistical analysis of prices variation of agrifood products, Ed. Junimea, Iasi, 2007, p. 155

these issues do not contribute greatly to achieving satisfaction, such as the issues related to personal safety, avoiding negative consequences, abiding the conditions regarding hygiene, health care, their lack would have led to profound dissatisfaction. The research highlights the importance of the surprise, bonus elements in achieving satisfaction. These items such as service personalization/empathy can be important sources of satisfaction. This highlights the importance of integrating customer satisfaction into human resource management within the tourism activities and the need to correlate technological development and innovation with helpfulness, kindness and the personal attention given to each client.

One of the shortcomings refers to the fact data collection, due to the method used, was laborious and took a lot of time and it did not allow us to investigate a larger sample. The data collection method refers to an individual, in depth interview; thus, the results could not be generalized for all consumer groups. The fact that the examined group was relatively homogeneous and satisfied with the tourism destination and the tourism services consumed does not exclude the occurrence of dissatisfied customers, of other groups that retrospect to different personal and social values, thus having different opinions.

Further research could validate the importance of combining methods of analyzing customer satisfaction and could relieve more abstract levels of the tourism products consumer's satisfaction.

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The progress of ideas

INTER-, TRANS - AND MULTIDISCIPLINARITY, AND SOME IDEAS OR REMARKS ON CULTURAL TOURISM

Abstract

The introduction to the paper presents the main differences between inter-, trans-, multi- and cross-disciplinary research, both at a general theoretical level, and finally in practical terms, in rural and mountain tourism. Then there follows the detailed presentation, which makes up the main section of the paper, starting from the work methodology and results in researches of an economic, statistical, econometric, sociological, demographic, psychological, anthropological, linguistic, ethnographic, folkloric and cultural integrative type, going on to the specificity of the various approaches in programmes, projects and tourism policy. The main question that dominates the whole main section and the conclusions of the article refer to the current position of Romanian rural and mountain tourism, and is complemented by a number of solutions that could improve and even intensify the upward process of economic development of Romania through the added agency of rural and mountain tourism.

Keywords: inter-, trans-, multi- and cross-disciplinary research, programme, project, rural tourism, mountain tourism.

1. Introduction

Unidisciplinarity, in an open sense, without the intention to understand and explain everything related to one disciplinary field, is a natural and creative early stage of scientific knowledge. This general aspect is subject to a natural law of studying diversity in a homogeneous manner, or to the fact that the heterogeneity in the reality investigated in a scientific or disciplinary manner must be theoretically explained by homogeneity [Săvoiu, 2008]. The premises of the more and more intense development of the epistemology process are related to both the ontological nature of the sciences and disciplines separated from various areas of reality or specific universes composing their multiverse as a coherent set of a logical nature, and also of a general gnoseological essence, or, more specifically, strongly epistemological. The concepts inter-, trans- and multidisciplinary have a common origin, as noted in the conceptualization of the discipline and science, defining forms of antinomy of a multiverse of disciplines and sciences, in relation to unidisciplinarity, addressed in a limited, closed and slightly derogatory sense, as a unique, isolating discipline. This paper underlines the importance of these terms and the specific process to adequate inter-, trans- and multidisciplinary activities reunited in the tourism (focusing on mountain and rural tourism).

2. The concepts of inter-, trans - and multidisciplinarity

In both science and research proper, *interdisciplinarity* is basically the recognition of the fact that various scientific disciplines can operate efficiently only – or mainly – in interdependence, when trying to solve a particular issue, or gain a fresh, more efficient perspective on the topic under study. Some see *interdisciplinarity*, first and foremost, as a clear possibility of making up for the drawbacks of excessive specialization in science. A *discipline* is defined as “a branch of learning or instruction”, being more or less synonymous to the terms *area, branch of knowledge, field of study, specialty, subject,* and even *course, curriculum*. The number of the scientific disciplines currently referred to amounts to over 8,000 (as recorded by bibliometry).

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The origins of interdisciplinarity are multiple (and some historians of science argue that the need for interconnectiveness is as old as the Antiquity). Anyway, it is long since specialists have been convinced that traditional scientific disciplines are unable or reluctant to deal with some specific problems, e.g. technology as an object of study for anthropology and sociology. On the other hand, (comparatively) recent developments in research (mainly in technology, e.g. nanotechnology, but also in theoretical physics or humanities) have been harnessed to research activities. As a result, such new, unthought-of fields of research have appeared as bioinformatics, biomimetics, quantum information processing, sustainable development, etc.

So, in its simplest acceptation, the term *interdisciplinarity* means combining two or more academic disciplines into a single activity, such as a research project (rather than a domain), thus generating something new by crossing boundaries, and adopting a way of thinking that goes beyond such limits. Consequently, *interdisciplinary fields* or *domains*, or else *interdisciplines* emerged, which were basically *ad hoc* responses to the new needs and professions that appeared in the post-industrial world, shaped by crossing traditional boundaries between academic / scientific disciplines or schools of thought.

This superior type of cooperation can work either based on a bottom-up approach (when knowledge is shared by two or more disciplines, the concrete or theoretical results transcending and re-contextualizing the disciplines in question), or in a top-down investigative and integrative approach (when even the remaining fragmentation is amply reduced, in keeping with the systems theory); the latter approach is especially efficient in dealing with phenomena, issues, principles, frameworks and structures within the techno-sphere, the psycho-socio-sphere and the naturo-sphere, thus being able to facilitate *transdisciplinarity*, in both theoretical and applied debates and scientific researches.

As we can see, *interdisciplinarity* is a harmonized approach, which connects the open spaces or interstices lying *between* disciplines in a well-coordinated, coherent entity, providing a better scientific delineation and definition.

As a rule, three degrees of interdisciplinarity are recognized:

a) applied interdisciplinarity (e.g. the methods of nuclear physics applied in medicine),

b) epistemological or logic-related interdisciplinarity (e.g. transfer of neutrosophic logic or formal thought to law),

c) interdisciplinarity generating new disciplines (e.g. transfer of physical models in the economy has led to the emergence of econophysics).

The dialectics of interdisciplinarity rests on interdisciplinary researchers being compelled to seek expert information with forefront specialists in disciplinary domains, while interdisciplinarity being the only feasible manner of circumventing excessive specialization – which can be questionable if not downright dangerous. The end result (i.e. the *feedback*) of such research collaboration transcending particular disciplines is new solutions, i.e. new information being added to the specific stock of knowledge and know-how of the various disciplines; so, the relationship between disciplinary and interdisciplinary researchers if mutually advantageous.

When merely used in educational contexts, the concept of *interdisciplinarity* implies pooling the individual, disciplinary approaches of the various researchers working on a project, trying to rethink them accordingly, to modify them so that they could deal with the respective issue more efficiently (the best, most familiar example is students being asked to perceive and study a given subject in terms of more than one traditional discipline, e.g. using water resources, when studied from the specific angles of geography, biology, ecology, economics, chemistry, and politics).

Though the term *interdisciplinary* was originally used in the fields of education and training pedagogy, the interdisciplinary approach is currently applied in solving new or neglected problems (e.g. global warming, crime, fighting AIDS, etc.) which cannot be solved without a thorough understanding of various scientific disciplines.

Interdisciplinarity has managed to connect and integrate a wide range of established disciplines, traditional fields of study, academic schools of thought, professions, technologies, together with the respective sets of perspectives, methods and epistemological systems, seeking to tackle and solve a common task. Most, though not all, the researchers, students, and teachers working in interdisciplinary projects or programmes are aware that the subject in question was comparatively neglected or misrepresented in traditional (i.e. mainly disciplinary) approaches, academic curricula or programmes of research organizations.

Interdisciplinary studies are conducted as academic programmes or processes whose aim is to synthesize knowledge, skills, interconnections, perspectives and epistemology under an educational umbrella. They are instrumental in the study of certain subjects which, although having a fairly consistent focus, essentially need the complex point of view provided by a multiple disciplinary perspective, otherwise their understanding may be severely impaired. The study of tourism is certainly one of these subjects, just like studies of feminism, ethnic area studies, or studies of democracy. On the other hand, interdisciplinarity itself can become the object of special study, in an attempt to anatomize the manner in which human knowledge is segmented by the various disciplines, in an institutionalized framework. Such studies of interdisciplinarity examine various issues relating to the functioning of interdisciplinarity, the nature and history of disciplinarity, the future of disciplinarity and its natural complement, interdisciplinarity, especially against the backdrop of globalization, as well the future of knowledge in post-industrial society, while philosophy itself has, relatively recently, identified a new domain of philosophical reflection which seeks to answer epistemological and metaphysical questions about the status of interdisciplinary thinking.

There has been an evident, continuous increase in interdisciplinary research and teaching, and the number of BA degrees in multi- or interdisciplinary studies, awarded mainly in the industrialized Western nations, has soared thousand-fold. Most scientists and researchers agree that the 21st century is bound to be an era of interdisciplinarity rather than disciplinarity, in most problem-solving approaches. Of course there have been some attempts at fending off, marginalizing or avoiding interdisciplinarity by followers of traditional (academic) disciplines, who seem to grow apprehensive of a possible dictatorial domination of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. Unfortunately, some disciplinary experts accuse most interdisciplinary research of being rather “soft” (i.e. not sufficiently “hard” to have intrinsic, “scientific” rigor)[5], or being overestimated, or else ideologically motivated.

Consequently, in many cases interdisciplinary research areas are, directly or indirectly, pushed towards becoming disciplines in their own right, e.g. cybernetics, biochemistry, neuroscience and biomedical engineering, domains that are sometimes even called “interdisciplines”.

On the other hand, *transdisciplinarity* designates a research strategy whose specific action implies crossing most disciplinary boundaries and barriers, generating a *holistic* approach. (The term *holism* is defined by dictionaries as “1) any doctrine that a system may have properties over and above those of its parts and their organization; 2) the treatment of any subject as a whole integrated system, esp., in medicine, the consideration of the complete person, physically and psychologically, in the treatment of a disease” (COLL); for instance, *bioinformatics* crosses the discipline limits of computer science / informatics and biomedicine. At other times, transdisciplinary endeavours simply use methods or concepts which were initially part of a given discipline, and were later adopted and widely employed by several other disciplines, such as ethnography, which used to be defined as a branch or field research (and even a set of methods) of anthropology dealing with the scientific description of individual human societies, and is currently used by many other disciplines.

By and large, *transdisiciplinarity* is a higher form of interdisciplinarity, which entails concepts, methodology and language that tend to become universal (systems theory, information theory, cybernetics, phenomenological modelling, etc.). It is a fully integrative approach that combines specific sciences in a general context, transcending the classical boundaries of the standard discipline. Transdisciplinarity is by no means a new discipline or even a “superdiscipline”, but its contribution to the betterment of science and research lies in the fact that it can derive profit by delving into disciplinary research, while clarifying disciplinary aspects in a fresh, transdisciplinary manner. Transdisciplinarity is connected to what lies

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[5] A *hard science* is usually defined as “one of the natural or physical sciences, such as physics, chemistry, biology, geology, or astronomy” (COLL), and thus opposed to *soft sciences*, especially the humanities (i.e. “the study of literature, philosophy, and the arts”).

between disciplines or cuts across *disciplines, and sometimes it is placed even above all disciplines*.

The most comprehensive acceptation of the term seems to be the sense introduced by Jean Piaget in 1970 (“a unity of knowledge beyond disciplines”) [Nicolescu, 2002], which was subsequently taken over and adopted by the International Center for Transdisciplinary Research (CIRET), in 1987, then introduced as a central concept into the Charter of Transdisciplinarity (in November 1994).

In defining transdisciplinarity, Basarab Nicolescu uses the following methodological postulates: (1) the existence of levels of reality; (2) the logic of the included middle; (3) and complexity [Nicolescu, 2008].

This means, first, that the space between and beyond the various disciplines is not void, but pregnant with information. As disciplinary research deals with only one level of reality, of mere fragments of such levels, the advantage of transdisciplinarity is immense, in that it takes into account the whole dynamics of the multiple levels of reality interacting.

In much the same way, it can be a felicitous, fertile complement to both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research. At the same time, transdisciplinarity radically differs from both multidisciplinarity (or pluridisciplinarity) and interdisciplinarity thanks to its very goal, which is the understanding of the present world.

What *transdisciplinarity* can also contribute to is further clarifying and minutely exploring a set of the basic assumptions that underpin the specific disciplines, thus emerging in new, more complex, re-contextualized knowledge (or a larger, more comprehensive truth), a process in which *synthesis* and *synergy* are the key-words – as particular disciplines tend to deal with, and analyze specific knowledge. (The dictionary definition of the term *synergy* is twofold “1) Also called *synergism*: the potential ability of individual organizations or groups to be more successful or productive as a result of a merger; 2) another name for *synergism* (sense 1)” [COLL, 1992].

From an operational standpoint, *transdisciplinarity* is about giving a framework for new research and organizing principles. It mainly seeks and supplies *new questions*, rather than trying to find new answers to old questions; it provides a new form / framework in which to place the discipline-specific content.

In most contexts concerning education, the terms *interdisciplinary* and *transdisciplinary* either go on a par, or are interchangeable, being conceived of as meaning practically the same thing. In some other contexts, though, they are attributed clearly separate meanings. Thus, *interdisciplinarity* is sometimes used in the sense “employing the methods of one discipline with another discipline of study”, while *transdisciplinarity* means “dealing with a particular issue both within and beyond discipline boundaries”, which can give the researcher or scientist the possibility of new perspectives.

The CIRET definition of *transdisciplinarity* distinguishes it carefully from interdisciplinarity. Unlike the former, *interdisciplinarity* (like *pluridisciplinarity*, in fact) lies in transferring the methods from one discipline to another, in which process research overflows disciplinary boundaries, while remaining within the limits of disciplinary research.

In transdisciplinarity, collaboration between participants is considered crucial: it is active, and affects the whole community interested in that type of research and its immediate or more remote objectives. Thus, various manners of knowing the world are incorporated and synergically boosted, finally generating new knowledge.

As a result of CIRET’s scientific efforts a new term, *multidisciplinarity*, was added to the already traditional terms *interdisciplinary* and *transdisciplinary*; it is also in education that the multidisciplinary perspective was introduced. The main contribution in this respect certainly belongs to Basarab Nicolescu, who considers that *interdisciplinarity* transcends the limits of particular scientific disciplines, while the main goal pursued remains within the framework of disciplinary research [Nicolescu, 1996; 1999]. In contradistinction, the object of study and research of *transdisciplinary* pursuits is placed between the particular disciplines, and also across the disciplines and beyond all disciplines. A multidiscipline then involves research of a topic through the agency of more than one discipline at one, e.g. studying feminism by a combination of literature, arts, economics, philosophy and mass media studies.

A slightly different (that is to say, a rather *specific*) acceptation of the word *transdisciplinarity* is frequently used in German speaking countries (i.e. *Transdisziplinarität*), which implies the integration of various forms of research, specifically involving certain methods for connecting knowledge in problem-solving. In the 2003 conference held in Göttingen, the quite numerous different meanings of *multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity* and *transdisciplinarity* were presented, compared and analyzed, in an attempt at making them meet as much as possible, without however excluding current usages.

Some of the staunchest advocates of inter- and transdisciplinarity go as far as maintaining that even the occasional confusions between the terms *interdisciplinarity* and *multidisciplinarity* (or even between *interdisciplinarity* and *multidisciplinarity*) may be seen as a confirmation of the huge scientific potential of transdisciplinarity.

According to Basarab Nicolescu, methodology of transdisciplinary, as well as, its three axiomes are outlined in an original *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity*: a) ontological axiom; b) logical axiom; c) epistemological axiom and in other terms interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity involve transfer of methods from one discipline to another, and have three degrees [Nicolescu, 2002].

a) ontologically, in keeping with the essential unity of the various fields of study of science; transdisciplinarity ontologically involves natural systems (the quantum level, the macrophysical level, the cyber-space or temporal cosmic level, super-tails level), and social systems (the individual level, the geographical level, the historical and community level from family, to nation; the community level, cyber-space or space-time level , the planetary level, the cosmic level etc.).

b) epistemologically (scientific facts, concepts, judgments, ways of reasoning, laws, methods, theories, which are common to all disciplines); the study concept of the disciplines becomes more and more abstract and allows to establish the epistemological isomorphisms and homomorphisms of a science within another, in order to generate development;

c) logical level included middle, or fuzzy or neutrosophic logic of Florin Smarandache, 1995 mentions: being inside the standard interval [0;1], or being outside the interval [0;1] or actually belonging to non-standard interval]+0, 1+[.

Knowledge (culture), or what resists or remains after we… apparently forgot everything, and dissipates in nature and society according to different experiences, representations, descriptions, images, logical or mathematical formulations, etc. at different levels of objective reality and at different levels of subjective reality, too.

Following the three stages of development of scientific thinking, a set of paradigms, approached as combined networks, redefine, thoroughly trans-, inter- and multidisciplinarity, the new aggregative concept or meta- or multiparadigm, as a modern, phased and adequate solution of exploring a number of complex phenomena from disparate perspectives, through methods and models with distinctly scientific origin, and provide help to theorists and practitioners, simultaneously, in the increasingly diversified fields of scientific research

The support of scientific thinking is rendered in this text as a result of its characteristic paradigm, on Feigl complex concept of multiparadigm [2004], and Wild & Pfannkuch process cyclicality paradigm, [1999, pp. 223-265] and the universal trend towards the methods and models as an idea of combining the two paradigms, with emphasis on methods and final models [Săvoiu, 2008].

The new way of investigation, focused on the multiparadigm of modern scientific thinking, amplifies by methods and models of a purely scientific origin, the processes of inter-, trans- and multidisciplinarity, contributing to the emergence of new sciences or developing the old tourism science. In this way an innovative multiparadigm of inter-, trans-and multidisciplinarity is delimited in modern scientific research, under the impact of today's scientific thinking, which leads to a third-degree variation, nuance and cyclicality, which results in a scientific multiverse composed of distinct universes, exposed to principles characteristic of an increasingly holistic modern thinking of tourism.

Consequently, a tentative extended typology of interdisciplinarity involves: a) inter disciplinarity of neighbouring areas (where methods and concepts of other disciplines apply); b) inter disciplinarity of problems (i.e. problems that require the collaboration of several disciplines); c) inter disciplinarity of methods and models (the methods of a discipline apply to other disciplines, e.g. mathematics and statistics); d) interdisciplinary concepts (concept appertaining to various disciplines are applied to conducting research in a different disciplines).

A third concept has been added to this inter- and transdisciplinary context – that of *multidisciplinarity*. Multidisciplinarity is an additive approach, which aggregates knowledge from various disciplines (which however remain within their own original boundaries) on a certain subject of high degree of complexity, generating the best solution in the real world and combining different perspectives of the issues under study, whihc are solved in a complete manner and through disciplinary consensus. So, multidisciplinarity is the study of one part of reality by several disciplines simultaneously. Multidisciplinarity can be simple and complex.

Yet another related term is *cross-disciplinarity*, which designates the type of research and knowledge in which aspects of one discipline are explained in terms of another, e.g. studying the physics of music or the physics of human phonation, or the politics of literature.

Cross-disciplinarity is the approach which uses mixing, associating or combination; it represents the generic theoretical concept for all three previous theoretical delineations, combining any type of mixture or combination of disciplines; more recently, it has been particularized through the fact that it can explain and address aspects relating to a discipline through the terminology, the instruments and even the methods of other discipline**(s).**

Summing up, the following lexical sequences (i.e. prefixes and combining forms) define the overall picture of today's integrative and specialized system of human scientific knowledge and action:

● *inter-* (a prefix meaning "between" or "among", as in *international*; or "together", "mutually", or "reciprocally", as in *interdependent*; *interchange*; so, such associations intersect or connect);

● *trans-* (a prefix meaning: (1) "across", "beyond", "crossing", "on the other side", as in *transoceanic*, *trans-Siberian*, *transatlantic*; (2) "transcending", as in *transubstantiation*; (3) "transversely", as in *transect*; (4) "changing thoroughly", as in *transliterate*; so, such associations sum up or integrate);

● *multi* (combining form meaning (1) "many" or "much", as in *multiflorous*, *multimillion*; (2) "more than one", as in *multiparous*; *multistorey*; so, such associations aggregate, combine all the perspectives, changing quality);

● *cross-* (combining form meaning "action from one individual, group, etc., to another", as in *cross-cultural*, *cross-fertilize, cross-reference*; so, such associations generalize or translate).

Moreover, the various supplements to disciplinary approaches may be styled as: intra disciplinary, pluridisciplinary, hyperdisciplinary, metadisciplinary, integrated disciplinary.

One of the most useful contributions that transdisciplinarity can make to the betterment of research is discussing and trying to determine the very nature of the issue under study, as well as the most relevant questions that research must focus on. These may involve either knowing the system and the cause of the current problems, or knowing and defining the target, or knowing the way in which a problematic situation can be improved following a suitable transformation.

In transdisciplinary projects, disciplinary specialists interact by taking part in scientific dialogue, trying to recognize and appraise the equal share of each particular perspective, and to interconnect such perspectives and disciplinary angles.The main barriers in this co-operative, complex and superior process are, firstly, the fact that specialized concepts and terms are hard to equate and/or dovetail (they are, so to speak, incommensurable on account of their very specificity), and, secondly, the sheer amount of specialized information and domain-specific expertise involved in inter- and transdisciplinary projects. To surpass those obstacles, the participants in such projects must possess, in addition to their own field expertise and know-how, excellent capabilities of scientific association and transfer, no less than (the more human gifts of) moderation, equilibrium, empathy and mediation.

Transdisciplinarity has become the most important manifestation of sciences in their scientific universe, thanks to its concept of transculturality, which offers a methodology of dialogue (Basarab Nicolescu).

It is hardly debatable that, more or less recently, inter-scientific approaches, complexity, tolerance of views and flexibility have been interwoven into the (post)modern context of *modelling* and *globalisation*, to give a new interconnective synthesis, so much needed by today's society, in which audacious, even abrupt choice and decision-making (including epistemological choice) no less than initiative (not only business-like or technological) are necessary, e.g. generating new ideas, research concepts, domains and models. On the other hand, modelling and generating new ideas, mainly abstract ideas, should not amount to a dictate of scientific abstractness, be it inter- or trans-disciplinary. It is no longer a matter of epistemology or technological and scientific progress, but a matter of human status: if people are but a statistical simulation, and their behaviour is going to be a model of hyperconformity, they will probably be victims of too abstract concepts and ideas, groping through a lack of action and relativistic irrelevancy. Similarly, globalization should (naturally…) be – or become – a source of *global* prosperity and power / empowerment. (In the context of globalization, it will be fair to admit that most of the people whose lives are enriched by jobs exported from more advanced societies do not complain about globalization, and think that those who are complaining are those who are losing money or prerogatives…).

3.Some ideas and remarks on cultural tourism as an inter-, trans- and multidisciplinary activity

Actually, the very history of tourism (seen as business, but not only that), features the need for interconnectiveness, complexity and nuance – so it seemed to us that the above hints concerning inter- and transdisciplinarity perfectly fitted that field of human activity. We think that disciplinary specialists should make their own contribution to qualitative changes, i.e. improvement, in tourism, too – mainly with respect to what is called *cultural tourism*. Also, we are absolutely convinced that, sometimes, it is quite appropriate for a specialist in a particular discipline to just form (and enunciate) his or her own opinion on issues in an area that is accessible to them (although they are not experts in it), or to which they are attracted, because there are chances that their opinion is likely to generate interesting ideas, fresh viewpoints or actual revelations, which can be fertile in research work (e.g. the linguist's or the etymologist's perspective of history or tourism economy). We should stress the need for quality-oriented approaches, since, in the new world that is being created under our eyes, the prevalence of information and *symbolic* goods (vs. the ordinary, material goods) is a reality; that is rather striking, in the last analysis, as traditionally we used to judge value in terms of material utility. Moreover, the world is steadily and ineluctably becoming a *global village*, in which everybody should feel at home. In the context, let us add that the worst "myth" circulated by today's world is that people who are not like us are unworthy or ridiculous, that differences weaken us, that there is not enough for all of us…

Tourism can be inter- and trans-disciplinarily connected with the cultural sphere via history, the arts, and even linguistics (or only etymology, conceived as part of historical or diachronic research). In the present context, *culture* is not only the "formal" manifestation of human spiritual existence (cf. such dictionary definitions as "1. the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge, which constitute the shared bases of social action. 2. the total range of activities and ideas of a group of people with shared traditions, which are transmitted and reinforced by members of the group: *the Mayan culture*" – COLL); customs, traditions and everyday ways can also be part of culture – and note-worthy as such. For instance, one of the most common hobbies today is cooking, and most tourists appreciate the „edible anthropology" that they can discover in distinct ethnic or cultural settings. When they travel to a foreign country, they will certainly want a local beer, not an international brand, and it is fun to compare Romanian *ţuică* ("Romanian peasant plum brandy") for example, with *arrack* ("a coarse spirit distilled in various Oriental countries from grain, rice, sugar cane, etc."), and with its… etymological descendant, *raki* / *rakee* ("a strong spirit distilled in Turkey, Yugoslavia, etc., from grain, usually flavoured with aniseed or other aromatics"), or with *moonshine* (i.e. illegally distilled or smuggled whisky or other spirit) in the USA. (Cf. *linguistic tourism* – discovering lexical roots and their related *realia*, in different settings and cultures… When those *realia* are foods or specific national dishes, the encounter is all the more impressive, memorable and relevant… Or we could also think of *plurilingualism* and / through tourism… (Ironically – or not –, there are cases when the science of linguistics, i.e. its theories, mental grids, operational structures, etc., can represent an obstacle to learning foreign languages, whereas trying to understand, pick it up or even practise it in their native environment will more often than not pay off).

Cultural tourism is also – automatically or necessarily one should add – a type of *historical* tourism… Cultural tourism essentially means geography confronting history, but in a friendly way… And it is, as a matter of principle, the very opposite of the biased attitude according to which something coming *later* in the course of history is necessarily *superior* to its forerunners (i.e. *Posterior, ergo superior*). Unfortunately, one can see a whole lot of manifestations of the (self-styled) representatives of the "modern world" mocking at their "underdeveloped ancestors" – such as the condescending smile of the 20th and 21st centuries at the "primitives" / the "barbarians" living in other historical epochs… (Even genuine admiration at their technological, cultural, etc. achievements is sometimes couched in words like, "Hey, these guys were not so stupid after all!"). In cultural tourism, a well-selling (niche) product can be, for instance, the ceramics specific to various regions or cultural areas, e.g. Horezu, Corund / Korond, Marginea, etc. (cf. their counterparts in other countries, closer to Romania, or even more remote geographically). Similarly, such cultural and tourist "brands" as the *Horezu Rooster* can form associative networks in Europe (e.g. Barçao in Portugal, or similar regions in France, Italy, Serbia, etc.).

Similarly, the concept of transhumance in Central and Eastern Europe can associate the various shepherds' trails, from the Romanian Carpathians all the way up into the Tatra Mountains and Vlach Poland. Such tourist *trails* already exist in Europe and elsewhere, e.g. wine roads (as already existing in various countries, including Romania and the Republic of Moldova) or transhumance paths linking Southern France and Northern Spain. Likewise, it is conceivable to build an associative cultural tourist *Road of salt and mines*, going from Transylvania's salt mines (and famous balneology resorts, such as Praid or Turda) to Hungary's and Austria's similar tourist sights and resorts; or the *Road of cheese* (Rom. *brînză* – which is, incidentally, the name of a nationally-famous cheese brand in Slovakia; cf. also the Italian *branzi* or Swiss *Bränsekäse*), going from Romania to Slovakia and the Ukraine; or the *Road of maize flour porridge* (Romanian *mămăligă*), going from Romania and Bulgaria up to Poland; or the Road of butcher's products and pork sausages, going from Transylvania and Moldova up to Hungary, the Czech Republic, Germany and Austria etc.).

One can also imagine cross-boundary roads (or tourist "pilgrimages") for holidays (e.g. Easter, Pentecost, Christmas, "Cuckoos'" Easter, or vineyards' *Trifun* in South Wallachia and Northern Bulgaria, etc.). Coming closer to the ethno-folkloric core, Romanian *Căluşul* can be culturally and touristically associated with British *morris dance* ("any of various old English folk dances usually performed by men (*morris men*) to the accompaniment of violin, concertina, etc.; the dancers are adorned with bells and often represent characters from folk tales. Often shortened to *morris*" – COLL), and possibly other similar types of ritual dance all over Europe.

Some other conceivable cultural-historical theme tours based in (or associated with) this country can be: following the Celtic Trail in *Mitteleuropa* (through Transylvania, Hungary, Austria); Saxon / German Forts and Boroughs in *Mitteleuropa* (including Transylvania); mediaeval fortresses in historical Moldavia (Suceava, Hotin, Soroca, etc.).

Similarly, there can emerge cross-border Thracian tourism (associating, for example, Sarmizegetusa Regia in Transylvania, Panagyurishte in Bulgaria and Abdera in Greece); or cross-border Balkan-Romance tourism (associating, for instance, Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa in Romania, Serdica-Sofia in Bulgaria, and Nish in Serbia).

Why only large cultural centres or rural areas with tradition, etc. should make the object of cultural tourism? Wouldn't it be also worth visiting lesser-known towns and areas, for something a little bit different from their (cultural) sights proper (i.e. their "formal" cultural tourism component, e.g. museums, fairs, etc.), or for their night life, culinary tradition, etc.? Would it be worth making a tour of "traditional turn-of-the-century Bucharest", or "vintage Bucharest"?; or a tour of provincial towns connected in a cultural circuit?… and so on, and so forth.Of course, there are also some challenging or quasi-insoluble questions about interconnectiveness to face; for instance, can sex tourism be regarded, in some regions, as cultural tourism as well? (Especially if one considers the issue in the light of the more and more prevalent type of consumerism to which tourism, too, is prone; actually, the very idea of consumerist business comes up against what cultural tourism should, as a matter of principle, start from: *slow tourism* – *slow* meaning, in this context, "de-materialized", "spiritualized", "human", etc.).

Unfortunately – and also quite naturally, a number of related challenges and distortions can pose serious threats to the various interconnective (inter- or transdisciplinary) approaches to tourism, to the point of stifling their initiatives, or at least demeaning part of the credibility associated with them. The first category of such threats seems to be the worship of the overall lucrativeness of such projects or programmes. Consumerism, related or not to globalization, is another such drawback of cultural tourism. There is, for instance, tourism concerning, or via *shopping* (also called *retail tourism*, or even *retail therapy*); there is *adventure* tourism (although the question might justifiably and ultimately arise, *Whom does the peak really belong to, the climber or the traveller?*); but there is also plenty of what one may call *pseudo-adventure tourism*, i.e. the kind of adventure tourism that some super-rich people practise, involving overnight “accommodation” and “full board” in a tourist replica of the Auschwitz concentration camp…

Secondly, there is the danger of misdirected, manipulative or improper advertising. For instance, if you read some guidebooks written abroad about your own country, you will be surprised to find a lot of “new” or “surprising” details – though, to be fair, the adjectives *new* and *surprising* should not necessarily appear with the inverted commas)… It should however be added that, paradoxically, tourism, very much like the arts in fact, can render both the most accurate, and the most false image of a country and its people; unfortunately, in tourism, even poverty can be – considered and sold – as picturesque.

Sometimes tourist projects are not very ethical or well-meaning, to say the very least. For example, after trying – and even systematically experiencing – to do cultural tourism, eco-tourism and ecumenical tourism, some tour-operators in Romania even considered turning to *electoral* tourism. Which is not to say that the various “indirect, manipulative” marketing strategies are not economically justifiable. Tourism (very much like cinema, in fact) implies marketing for and through well-contrived stories, e.g. Dracula’s castles, the outlaws (Romanian *haiduks*), the (pseudo)-Druids at Stonehenge, the “ghost-haunted”castles, etc. In tourist activities, even a defect can be turned into tourist advertising; for example, the progressive depletion of Lake Balaton was likely to generate a “children’s protection area” in local and international tourism (the children are allegedly safer now, because they cannot drown…). A *profitable tourist product* can very well be – especially if effectively and interconnectively advertised – the place where the Danube reaches final peacefulness before flowing into the Black Sea… There are even world-renowned tours of famous cemeteries (i.e. what the English-speaking nations, especially the North-Americans, call “the geography of Death”), e.g. Montparnasse, Père Lachaise, New Orleans – why not Sulina, as well?…

4. Concluding remark

Inter-, trans-, and multidisciplinarity as ways of interaction of modern sciences, and especially of their specific way of thinking, are able to induce formation trends and generate new sciences, with varying degrees of coverage with respect to the source or sciences origin, and to develop old science in new directions. Tourism is nothing else but pure and applied inter-, trans-, and multidisciplinarity in the holistic reality as the mix of leisure, knowledge, creative recreation, mood, and self-healing spiritually and physically…

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LAURA GASCON HERRERO[1] Present-day topics

PUBLIC TRANSPORT, THE KEY FOR TOURISM

Abstract

Public transport in rural areas is a crucial point for making there more lively and of course, from a touristic point of view, more attractive and accessible. Nevertheless, with the economic crisis, tourism is a key factor for many subsistence economies. Before, it was an extra complement for home economy but now we are more aware of the possibilities of this activity, not only as an income but also as a tool for creating the external image of the region. Many people before moving to a territory come as tourist, so the territorial marketing is a key for achieving more and more inhabitants. But not everyone has a car, some people, and special targets, as youngsters, elderly people, disable people... that need special attention for making their life as normal as possible. The access of mobility is one of the flagships of the Provincial Government of Teruel, and this is the reason why we are involved in Move on Green. An INTERREG IV C project that study the situation of the transport and Best Practices in 12 mountain territories spread in 10 European countries taking in to account the environmental point of view of the practice.

***Key words*:** tourism, transport, mountain areas, environment, project.

1. Introduction

Transport is a key element if we talk about rural areas, communication with other places is crucial for making it more lively and attractive for present and future inhabitants. In Quality of living terms being close to services and work is essential. In addition, if you want to make it interesting for tourist. This is the reason why 13 different regions have focused their interest on this topic as an essential element for the sustainable development of a territory. In the project Move on Green, the objective is to share positive experience in rural transport that allow communicate special targets (teenagers, elderly people, commuters, disable…) that live or work in the areas or have touristic interest on each region. Talking about tourism we have collected around 10 best practices (BP) around this topic, from a total of 51 BP.

2. Body of paper

Rural regions are the areas in which transport contributes most to the deterioration of the environment, in comparison with high density metropolitan areas. However, taking into account the importance of rural areas in Europe as a whole, if most of them would adopt policies designed to foster sustainable mobility, their natural resources (a source of development for these areas) would be preserved and the impact on the environment at European level would be noticeable.

In addition to environmental damage, the social costs of traditional transport patterns include accidents, time and cost of commuting and vulnerability to the price of oil. In rural areas owing a car is almost compulsory because mobility initiatives decrease due to the lack of critical mass of inhabitants, in this areas live social groups least likely to own and drive cars, what increase the negative impact. How to develop real sustainable mobility in rural and mountain areas?

This was the principal question that MOG's partners face to. 13 partners from 10 countries of the whole Europe were involved during a three-year-project with the objective of finding sustainable transport solutions in rural areas without forgetting the environmental point of view in our best practices.

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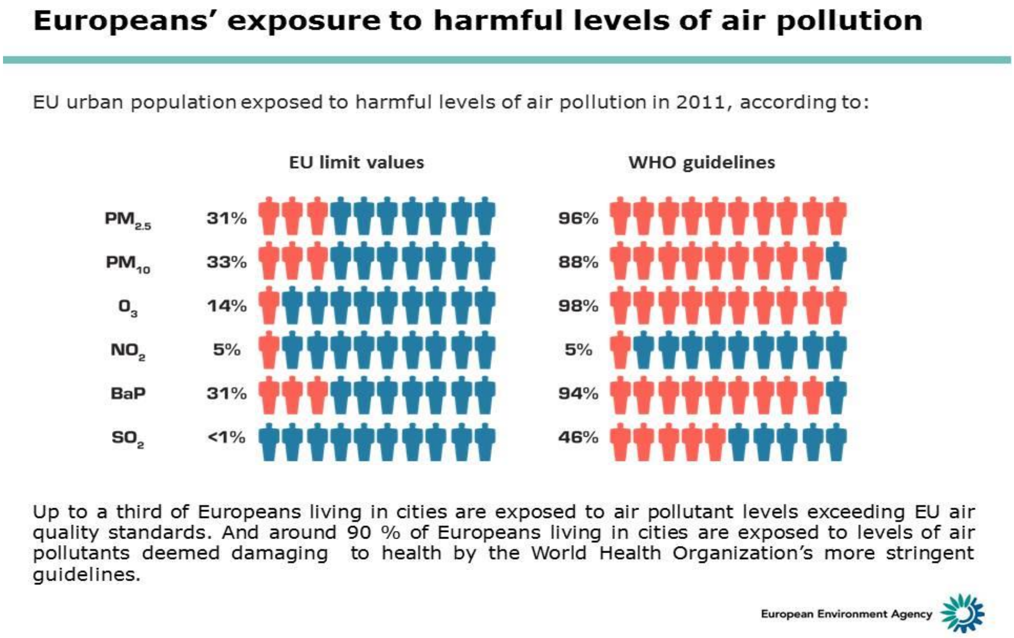
Table no. 1



3. Starting point

The provision of quality basic services is one of the great challenges in the vast majority of villages marked by low density, dispersion and aging populations. Moreover, this problem is exacerbated in these times when economic sustainability is an absolutely decisive criterion. Clearly, even if all services are important for people living in villages, the transportation service is a key issue in rural areas because it is the gateway to other basic services like access to education, or medical services. Therefore, it is essential to find creative solutions to be economically viable, effective and efficient while being environmentally friendly.

Why?

The ultimate goal is to maintain a rural environment that can be enjoyed by its present inhabitants. As a result is necessary people living in the villages and it is imperative that these areas enjoy adequate access to public services nearby, so they can meet their basic needs and allow citizen to arrive there.

As a result, we encourage imaginative solutions not only for those who live primarily in rural areas, but those who want to go to enjoy the area.

Sustainable mobility in rural areas:

If we want to go deeper on this point we must clarify some concepts that are always in our texts. Let's first agree on definitions. What is a rural area? How can be defined sustainability? How mobility can improve quality of life?

Rural area[2]: a definition based on population density and accessibility criteria

Two main criteria are used to define rural and urban areas: population density and accessibility criteria.

First, a commune is classified as rural if its population density is less than 150 inhabitants/km². Above this limit, the commune is systematically classified as urban. One restriction has nevertheless been introduced: whatever its population density, a commune located

[2] According to the definition given in the LAU2 (Local Administrative Unit – communes, municipalities, or similar) delimitation of rural areas.

in an urban centre is classified as urban[3]. MOG partners' areas do fulfil this population criterion: the lowest population density is 0,067 inhab./km² (UK: Shetland Islands) , while the highest is 119 inhab./km² (Poland: Podkarpackie) in the project area (average: 54,6 inhab./km²).

Distinctions between different types of rural communes are then made on the basis of the peripherally analysis. A rural commune is considered as "peripheral" if located at more than 45 minutes from the nearest city, with at least 50 000 inhabitants. Otherwise, the commune is considered as accessible.

4. Right of people to mobility:

Right to adequate, quality and safe mobility is one of the basic rights of EU citizens[4] which have been constantly declared by development and transport policies both on pan-European and national states' levels. Such mobility not only ensures equal economic and social opportunities for all (possibility to carry out economy activities, access to educations and jobs…), but also their social inclusion and access to other elements of quality of life. Ability to fully use such proclaimed right depends on geographical (e.g. configuration of terrain, distances to mobility destination), personal (e.g. income of someone to buy a car or pay for transport ticket, driving licence) and joint public elements (e.g. level of transport infrastructure development, number of transport lines and transport companies available in certain territory). As joint public elements depend strongly on economic parameters and political actors (e.g. number of inhabitants as a potential transport consumers and voters), it is evident that securing equal mobility rights is a much more difficult task in rural, less/sparsely populated areas. All this is even more true for groups who are additionally hindered by their physical, mental or social "handicap" (disable, youngsters, mental patients, woman in more patriarchal societies…), although some of them can be also privileged by favourable public transport options (e.g. youth during school days).

5. Sustainability: where social, environment and economic development met

Sustainability can be thought as the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising future generations to meet theirs. There are always three dimensions in sustainability: social equity, environmental protection and economic development in the present and in the future.

Sustainable mobility has to take into account these three dimensions comprehensively. A sustainable mobility solution is thus one that:

- meets societal transportation needs and provides accessibility to basic services for all social groups in a safe manner;
- is affordable, operates efficiently and supports economic development,
- protects, preserves, and enhances the environment by limiting transportation emissions and wastes; minimizes the consumption of resources; and enhances the existing environment as practicable.

6. Quality of life: quality of life as attached to dipole city-rural rural areas

A lot of resources have been spent in projects and programmes[5] aiming to develop rural communities. It is necessary to distinct two different concepts: Quality of life and Conditions of life.

Conditions of life are the objective criteria that allow assessing how easily it is to live into a certain area. There is some strength in rural areas: proximity with the environment, healthy food, healthy air, tranquillity and peace, activities of enjoying free time, that normally carry rural culture, strength human relationship.

[3] The new OECD-EC definition identified 828 (greater) cities with an urban centre of at least 50 000 inhabitants in the EU, Switzerland, Croatia, Iceland and Norway. www.oecd.org/gov/regional/measuringurban

[4] Strengthening passenger rights within the European Union 16-02-2005

[5] 347 million of euros only in FEDER programme during 2007-2013

Quality of life depends not only on the conditions of life, it also depends on the personal perception each inhabitant has of these conditions of life.

Accessibility is one of the major factors of competitiveness, quality of life and business attractiveness of mountain areas. It has strong impact on local economy and environment, but also on social inclusion of people. Imbalances in the accessibility across the EU, together with imbalances in education systems and current demographic trends, make territorial cohesion a serious challenge to the EU development policies.

7. Picture of mobility in rural, mountain and sparsely populated regions of EU [6]– Accessibility is one of the major factors of competitiveness, quality of life and business attractiveness of mountain areas. It has strong impact on local economy and environment, but also social inclusion of people. Imbalances in the accessibility across the EU, together with imbalances in education systems and current demographic trends, make territorial cohesion a serious challenge to the EU development policies.

Mobility is a complex system with many components that influence on it (like behaviour, quality of vehicles, and development of infrastructure…), that is why it is difficult to shift it into new, more sustainable mode. Main factors that make mobility unsustainable, and which are at the same time those who can convert it into more sustainable one, are: price, technology, conditions of supply and planning. As for price, road transport, both, personal and freight one, does not take into account all costs of negative effects that current patterns cause to both society and individual citizens with their families (environmental pollution, extensive use of valuable space for road infrastructure, lost working hours due to congestions, negative individualisation of society, costs of road accidents…). These costs and effects are present, except of congestions due to relatively low traffic intensity, also in majority of EU rural areas.

In the broad development and social perspective, support to transport infrastructure in rural areas has characteristics of public goods as it helps to prevent their territorial isolation. If such support is made to public transport by using internalisation of external costs of other, unsustainable transport modes, it simultaneously contributes both to economic growth and less pollution, which in total can ensure the quality of life and prevent rural exodus.

Current situation in the EU on the matter of public transport (in rural areas) can be divided into two groups: in new EU member states public transport was relatively well developed and accessible (although obsolete in terms of infrastructure) until two decades ago when it has started to decline as car and highways have been seen as a development priority and status symbol; it is currently still declining in spite of some attempts to reverse such trends. Rest of the Europe is on the other hand already for some time predominately car oriented, but has made in last 10-15 years number of serious attempts to reverse situation in the light of evident negative effects of current mobility patterns (congestions, environment pollution, increasing costs of cars & fuel for users, social exclusion of people not using cars). The current result is that car transport is predominant transport mode in the vast majority of rural EU.

Problem arising out of lower population density in all EU rural areas is that small labour market and low numbers of consumers prevent to deliver some private and public services in a cost-effective way. Decreasing or already declined public transport and increasing necessity of owning car as transport mean, limit the access of people without the car to those services. Most of all, peri-urban and rural area are characterized by higher number of driven kilometres per person as in urban areas (but only in old EU), which brings to a higher number of cars per person (and higher costs) and significant share of CO_2 emissions. Even in rural areas of France, only 9 to 16% of people in rural areas have access to public transport less than 1 km from their home.

When analysing situation across rural EU, one of strengths of rural areas that could lead to improvement of sustainable mobility are new reasons to visit country side have arisen in last

[6] This is the summary of the results from 13 studies from the territories members of Move on Green project, that represent 10 countries (Hungary; Austria; Greece; Latvia; Slovenia; Germany; United Kingdom, France; Poland and Spain)

decade (ex. increase of eco and ethno tourism, interest for (organic) local food). On the side of weaknesses, some of most critical ones are bad condition of transport network and obsolete technical condition of infrastructure and vehicles, while biking infrastructure is strongly underdeveloped. Sparse and mainly scattered population makes organisation and implementation of (public) transport more difficult and expensive. As a result of all listed factors, public transport attracts less and less people. In fact, only those who are forced to use it (pensioners, school pupils, people without car…), while 85% of population uses private cars.

Public transport is also ineffectively organized, with little integration among different networks and companies, and with insufficient respond and adjustments to needs of new (eg. biking tourists) or special groups (disabled people). All this, along with the insignificant promotion of public transport compering to "bombardment" by aggressive advertisements of car companies, led to a relatively low imagine of public transport as a transport of "poor" or those who are forced to use it. Consequent further decrease in number of users makes operating of public transport even harder due to higher operational costs per user.

There are, however, opportunities to overcome these weaknesses and to exploit strengths of the current situation in rural areas. Potentials of such areas (quality food, tourism attractions) are becoming increasingly popular among mainly urban people, attracting by new clients also new potential users of mobility services in rural areas.

Also development of new ICT and transport technologies make possible to better plan and organize transport suited to the characteristics and needs of rural areas. Biking is increasingly popular and can substitute part of short-distance car drives, while increasing costs of using cars (ex. prices of fuels) can persuade many people to use public transport instead of medium- and long distance car trips. Important change of current period is also that transport and mobility, respectively, is taken into account and integrated in spatial planning, and territorial units (local communities, even regions) now increasingly cooperate and coordinate planning and operating of transport networks and companies. Among important opportunities is also increased cooperation among EU regions, which enables them to exchange experiences and good practise.

Best practises of development or improvement of rural mobility presented in the study conducted by Euromontana organisation, bring solutions for number of these challenges of public transport. These cases stretch from PIMMS, eg. train stations in France where transport services are combined by also offering other services (postal, energy…) to decrease costs, cooperation among 13 public transport authorities in Auvergne region (France) in coordinating offer of public transport and simplifying access to network of public transport to Alpine buses in Switzerland where new touristic mobility services offer additional option for overall sustainable mobility in rural areas.

These practices show that innovative solutions combining strong political will, smart use of ICT technologies, good planning and coordination among various actors, connecting pure transport to other economic services, use of mobility experts, and economical motivation of users can bring effective and quality public transport in rural areas.

7. SWOT-Analysis – Summary

The project partners each submitted their own unique SWOT-analysis. With 13 different partners in this project, the answers were very diversified and as individual as the respective regions. It was however possible to identify and determine certain common issues for each of the elements of the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats).

The histogram after the SWOT-analysis shows the distribution of the individual aspects of each region to the common points that were identified.

Table no. 2

SWOT analis

Strengths	Examples taken from the SWOT-analyses of the Project Partners
S1.) Current transport infrastructure There are adequate means of transport, the infrastructure is in a good condition, a certain level of service is provided etc.	• Services are flexible in the sense that they are planned around local needs. • Wide spread use of public passenger transport among youth and well organized school transport. • A developed network of roads and public transportation.
S2.) The position of the region (geographically, economically, etc.) The region is situated in a way that allows a positive outlook for the future; high tourist potential, developed industry, good connections to surrounding area, …	• The region has a very favourable geopolitical position, it is crossed by European development zones, transport corridors, it is located in their utilizable intersection. • Natural heritage and numerous touristic attractions; dynamics of tourism development.
S3.) Open for new ideas in transportation Sustainable transport methods, optimizing existing lines/routes, introducing new and customized means of transport etc.	• Openness to new forms of collective trips (carpooling). • Alternative services in off-peak periods are: dial-a-bus systems, citizens' buses (voluntary drivers), disco-bus, reduced taxi fares for young people (fifty-fifty taxi).
S4.) Plans and programmes being implemented There are or will be plans/programmes that will help the development of the region	• The ISEAL Program continues to operate in the province of Teruel (Spain)within the framework of the European Social Fund 2007-2013. This program is performing adapted transport. • Remarkable level of introduction of ICTs applied to mobility in the province, mainly through the "Transport on Demand" programme.
Weaknesses	
W1.) High level of individual traffic, unfavourable modal split	• Motorization rate higher than the national average; growth of the number of cars (new and used). • Dependency on one's own car.
W2.) Lack of information and cooperation Different operators unwilling to cooperate, no regional plans by authorities/public actors, missing coordination and discussion between actors, etc.	• Lack of co-operation among public actors and lack of wider/regional sustainable mobility plans. • Poor co-operation between the service providers. BP 8.2 Multimodal transportation Larissa-Volos (Gr)
W3.) Financial and economic situation, funding of public transport and infrastructure High costs for public transport, insufficient funding for infrastructure, global financial & economic crisis	• Excessive reliance on the public financing for the maintenance of regular lines in the territory. • Insufficient funding for the maintenance, renovation and expansion of the road network. • Economic crisis, lack of funding.
W4.) Demographic change, situation of the region Change in population, employment rate, age structure, scattered villages, low population density, etc.	• There is a great dispersion of the population and its distribution is very heterogeneous. Migration of working population from deprived areas.
W5.) Current transport infrastructure and accessibility No adequate transportation system, old and unreliable motor pool, not enough stops, unsatisfactory schedules, extreme weather, system focused on certain users (e.g. workers) etc.	• The majority of the roads were renewed 30 years ago. • The rural areas do not have a transportation system adequate to the needs of the population. Insufficient number of bus stops

	in the rural areas.
Opportunities	
O1.) New technologies, ways and means of transport Sustainable transport solutions (electric mobility, car-sharing, call-a-bus), local small-scale transport systems, flexible on-demand-systems, etc.	• Evaluate the possibility if introducing "transportation on demand" for under-populated areas. • Improving means of giving information on services/options.
O2.) New transport infrastructure Building of new roads, railroads, establishing new lines & networks of public transport, acquiring new buses/trains, infrastructure for electric mobility, ...	• Renovation of the bus rolling stock, introduction of smaller capacity vehicles. • The development of the roads crossing the border with the aim of the better availability of the region. • Further development of cycling infrastructure. •
O3.) Process of rethinking mobility and transport, new strategies, plans and programmes Environmental issues become more important, ecological footprint, soft tourism and soft mobility, traffic masterplans, European projects & policies etc.	• Trend to pool vehicles both by businesses and individuals.BP 1.1 Kombibus in Germany • Elaborating of mobility plans in order to serve isolated and long distanced areas with mostly elder people in need for regular or inregular transportation due to health reasons.BP5.3 Village caretaker (Hu) • Increasing awareness at European, national and regional levels of the importance of mobility policies, both at urban and rural levels.
O4.) Willingness of co-operation between different actors Countries, authorities, companies, citizens, …	• Opportunities for cross-border co-operation in the field of transport to finance projects of sustainable mobility through the ERDF under INTERREG (strategic mobility, etc.). • Creation of win-win partnerships to overcome the legally established Interurban Buses monopoly.
O5.) Increased public awareness of environmental issues / public transport etc. Awareness raising programmes & actions, political will for environment preservation, higher costs for fuel & cars, …	• Increasing and widespread interest on ecotourism, ecological agriculture and rural societies, in general, on the part of European societies. • Popularization of the environmentally friendly mobility to the general public.
Threats	
T1.) Demographic change, negative development of rural areas Shrinking population, migration, etc.	• Shrinking population – numbers of potential users declining. • Due to the increasing costs of production investors will leave the region
T2.) Financial issues and economic development Declining economic strength, global crisis, …	• The current bad economic situation is having a strong impact on financial there are fewer subsidies. • Limitations of council funding • Poor economic situation of the public means of transportation
T3.) Inefficient and uneconomical public transport Not enough passengers, cutting of funding for public transport, economic and enviromental concerns, …	• Low mobility demands in special rural municipalities. • Settlements scattered and sparsely populated making a total coverage of the country by public transport difficult both for economic and environmental reasons.
T4.) Rising level of individual traffic	• Development of activities & businesses in areas accessible by car (only). • Loss of public transportation passengers fort he benefit of passenger cars.

	• Little awareness of the population to use public transport. • Further strenghtening of such life style that supports individual car mobility and interest for mobility ‘’here and now’’;

Source: Policy guide lines of MOG project

Examples of BP linked with tourist [7]:

West Pannon regional bicycle rental system - HU

The purpose of the project is to increase the number of tourists and local residents who use bicycles by enhancing the attractiveness of bikes. Bikes were promoted and the cycling infrastructures have been improved. Now the regional bicycle rental system consists of 10+1 pick-up points; the network of tourist and cycling organisations has been reinforced thanks to the active cooperation of municipalities.

Nextbike: bike sharing system in rural territories in Purbach, Burgenland (AU)

The main objective of this bike renting system is to reduce harmful greenhouse gases, especially in rural, low-density areas. It makes public transport more attractive by offering a range of bikes to support multimodal mobility. The Nextbike project in a few words:

• Establishment of a network of bike rental stations at railway or bus stations to offer a possibility for complete public transport chains.

• High usability and easy hiring procedure

• Public access and bike availability round the clock

• Cheap rental fee.

Mountain Bike Maestrazgo Centre- Province of Teruel, ES

Developed in Teruel, the Maestrazgo Centre provides free access to practice mountain biking. The cycling trails start at a reception point, with a tourist office and different bicycle services. It offers:

• More than 100 km of marked routes with differing degrees of difficulty

• Two Reception Points that provide bicycle services and also a tourist office.

• Additional services to facilitate cycling: bicycle rental, car park, wash points, showers and toilets, etc.

• Several additional Information Points located in tourist offices, which provide users with information about the routes, tourist resources, accommodation offers, restaurants, etc

• A quality standard well recognised in the country.

Electric vehicle charging infrastructure around Lake Balaton -
Central Transdanubian Regional Innovation Agency - KDRIU, H

To date, most vehicles run on petrol or gas. Car manufacturers have recently launched cars operating with electricity and there is a lot of on-going research on how other energy sources, rather than fuel, such as solar energy and water, or electricity could be used for running vehicles. Due to rising oil prices, electric vehicles have become more and more famous. Thus, EON Hungary has started to install electric car charging stations around the country. EON wants to develop electric traffic at zero CO^2 emission and believes the 1st step for the democratisation of electric cars is the availability of charging stations, even in rural and remote areas.

Alpine Bus – Switzerland

[7] Best practices collections from Move on Green , available long version and shorter http://www.euromontana.org/en/projets/mog-good-practices.html

The Alpine buses aim to offer common transport where there is no public offer but where there is a demand, especially for tourism purposes. It functions in 10 areas of Switzerland. Services are developed locally by local authorities and local enterprises, with the support of the Alpine bus association. The development process of a new bus line lasts about one year and a half, from the emergence of the idea and of the partnership until the line is running. The objective of the association is to provoke a modal shift of transport: where people used to take their private car, they now have the possibility of using common transport instead. The environmental objective is therefore a priority to create new bus lines under the Alpine bus brand.

“The Mount Pelion Train” - Thematic rail transport to enhance the cultural identity of rural areas - Thessaly Region, GR

Through this initiative, the Thessaly region offers a true historical and cultural experience to tourists through a traditional Greek train ride. This is a purely thematic, tourist train ride that supports entrepreneurship and offers opportunities to people in many sectors, forming part of the backbone of a regional tourism strategy. It operates regularly from April to October and on demand throughout the rest of the year, depending on the weather. Traditional wooden wagons and modern, but with a traditional exterior, engines are being used to increase the cultural feeling of the ride.

Gauja River Tram: Water Bus - Vidzeme Planning Region, LV

The first river tram in Latvia offers its services on the Gauja River in the town of Valmiera. It runs at scheduled times, allowing both city dwellers and guests to explore notable sights of Valmiera from the Gauja River. One journey takes 30-40 minutes. The tram is made in Valmiera, it is eco-friendly and accessible to people with disabilities. This transport mode significantly facilitates tourism as it allows for quick and easy access to various attractions and tourist sites.

Aluksne-Gulbene narrow-gauge railway - Vidzeme Planning Region, LV

The Aluksne-Gulbene narrow-gauge railway offers rail transport services to dwellers in the Vidzeme region for their daily mobility, as well as to interested parties who want to enjoy the trip and view Vidzeme’s most scenic places. It is a great example of how traditional transport services can be combined with tourism elements, thus keeping the national cultural facilities in operation.

“GoOpti” Service of transfer from countryside and cities to the airports and vice versa, SI

“GoOpti” service helps passengers to travel from the different airports in Slovenia, Italy, Austria and Germany to the main Slovenian cities (Ljubljana, Maribor, Bled, Bohinj…). Booking is available on-line, in advance (from several months till a few hours).13 shuttles, 1 bus, an excellent web service and promotion allowed the company to transport 40 000 passengers in 2013, after 2 years of exploitation for a very affordable price (from 9 to 200€ for VIP transfers).

8. Conclusions:

Available means of transport in rural areas are essential for keeping people of all ages leaving there and looking after the environment and the territory. This is the reason why, first of all the time table of the public transport must be made thinking in the people living there, because they are the essential piece of this puzzle. On the second point, it is important make it available for tourist, because they are interesting too as economical income, territorial marketing and potential inhabitants. Transportation and travel can be discussed without taking tourism into consideration, but tourism cannot thrive without travel. Transportation is an integral part of the tourism industry. It is largely due to the improvement of transportation that tourism has expanded. The impacts on the ecology, degradation of destination sites, tourist experience, and economy has called for a better management of resources. In biodiversity-rich areas, opening of sensitive and fragile areas through improved infrastructure and service may prove detrimental to the ecology of the place. In the light of such issues, it is important to re-think the role of transportation in areas such as these. Though careful planning of the components of the destination is done to en sure sustainability, transportation is seldom considered in the process and due to this a number of biodiversity-rich areas have been destroyed due to the easy access. [SORUPIA, 2005, p. 1767 – 1777]

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BODOȘCĂ ȘTEFANIA LUCIA[1] Present-day topics

DIGITAL WORLD, TOURISTS AND RURAL TOURISM

Abstract

The digital world it is the latest high priority in tourism research nowadays and the social media marketing comes with low costs while reaching millions of future tourists. Even with a low key presence on the social media sites and without sophisticated content a specific region can gain an identity and recognition. Rural tourism operators do not dispose of a great budget allocated for such activities and in many cases they do not offer internet services, but with the help of tourism bloggers and reviews an increase in acknowledgment of the touristic destination is possible. Our present research analyses the advantages offered by the digital world, the inconveniences and with the help of 30 tourist interviews some proposals and appreciations are made.

Key words: digital world, sustainable tourism, electronic world of mouth, social media, rural tourism

1. Introduction

Rural tourism destination image (TDI) represents a great influential criterion in the tourists' decision and the competition that arises between regions is understandable(Cooper et al., 1993; Beerli and Martin, 2004b) as a better image for a destination has stronger probabilities in being chosen. Traditionally the destination image it is projected in the eyes of tourists with the help of brochures, where pictures alongside descriptive textsis inserted, TV spots, television documentaries, books,newspaper articles, school lessons, stories of friends' experiencesand nowadays on the internet. We now deal with web 2.0 known as well as social media, and which evolved from web 1.0 when an interaction between users was not available. Chalkiti&Sigala, (2008)emphasize that the present form web 2.0 creates new advantages for the tourism companies that want to expand and share their knowledge with all the parts involved (customers, suppliers, various partners).

Tourism customers interact with different sources of information like: the word of mouth, press reports, blogs, advertising in travel agencies and with which they develop a set of expectations and some beliefs about the destination they intend to visit(Buhalis, 2000).The effects that rise on tourists regarding the tourism destination image are of two kinds emotionally and logical(San Martin, Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008). Several authors argue that one important aspect in tourism management and destination marketing is the creation of a positive image (Konecnik, 2002; Molina, Gómez, & Martín-Consuegra, 2010; Nicoletta, Servidio, 2013).

This paper discusses the impact of a good marketing with the help of the tourism blogs, the challenges that have emerged with the internet era for the tourism entrepreneurs in rural

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tourism. The paper includes a section about on-line platforms and the case study,the analyze of the 30 interviews realized in the Durauregion by using the cross cased analysis.

The conclusions present the arguments in favour of using a media channel, an optimal choice for the future of a rural business as tourists are emotionally influenced by pictures and real presentations of a region.

2. Literature Review

Facebook and other social on-line networks are the platform that millionsof persons use it daily and represent a considerable opportunity for tourism operators on one hand and for tourists on the other hand. According to The ICT Development Index (IDI) provided by the International Communication Union (2013), Romania finds on 55th place considering the international bandwidth, how developed the backbone is andthe broadband infrastructure.The number of internet users at 30 June, 2012 for Romania is approximately 9.6 million users which accounts a 44.1% of total population from which 5.4 million users used Facebook by December 2012 (Internet World Stats). Worldwide the leading social media channel is Facebook with 1.4 billion members(Statistic Brain, 2014) andthisoffers great transfer of information regarding the location preference, tourist behaviour, attitudes and even the group with whom the user shares their experiences.Social media brought meaningful transformation in the amount of information and personal experiences the users choose to share with a broader public.

Buhalis (2003) appreciates as well that the internet through all the multi-media applications offers tourists and destinations new means of communication that have less costs for search and distribution. Destination branding with the help of marketing is what a region/destination needs in order to have a unique identity that differentiates it from others. Skinner (2008) emphasizes that branding a place associates with promotional activities with the help of marketing communications. In order to increase the popularity of a destination the creation of an image represents an important factor(Hsu et al., 2004) and with the digital world the steps to be fulfilled are fewer. Our research is backed up by Reid and Bojanic (2006); Del Rosso, (2005); Hotels, (2005) that recognize the influence of reference groups, persons who have a blogon future clients and their marketing potential for the tourism industry.

Tourism lives through images, photographs, videos etc. and when a story is told about a particular place either with the help of a website or blog the tourist resonates more and finds himself under the influence of what is presented.The analyse of the on-line platforms is considered the top priority in the tourism research nowadays as the effects(Williams, Stewart, Larsen, 2011; Xiang, Gretzel, 2010) that come along are not at all neglected and they can become the engine and important resources for different activities connected to tourism. In general those that receive a great acknowledgement for their personal opinion on a specific region that they have visited, and on which they offer self-made pictures and evaluations of specific accommodation places, restaurants, amusements facilities have an active on-line use on their sites/blogs/Facebook accounts and present e-literacy skills and are not endorsed by a tourism company. They become reliable if they become followed, if their content is honest, their review provides an overall analyse of the destination with pro and cons as this distinguishes them from a marketing campaign or tourism agency. Leisen, (2001) appreciates that tourism destination image forms in time with the help of different pieces of information that are gathered from various sources.

3. Rural tourismand Marketing implications

Rural tourism represents a sustainable development tool for the rural areas and recent researches show an increase in outdoor activities, desire for spending time in a polluted free space, relaxation, socialization/learning, novelty (Nistoreanu et all., 2011; Figueiredo,2004; Kastenholz, 2010).

However in order to have success with a sustainable marketing strategy there should be a participation of all those involved in the process so that the experience delights the tourists, arouses emotions, makes sense and appeals to the senses andstays in mindlong over the actual experience having as well the potential to transform the participants(Kastenholz, Figueiredo, 2010; Mossberg, 2007).For creating a destination image that differentiates the specific region from other competing ones a tourism marketing management model might offer the winning strategy (Vela, 2009). Molina et all (2010) appreciates that several changes have been made to the type of information a tourist uses, that the behaviour of a consumer of touristic products has evolved andadifferentiation in the promotion of a rural tourism business is necessary as the number of destinations is higher than it was fifteen years ago. The businesses Bed and Breakfast type that activate in rural tourism do not dispose of internet access or the resources from the urban area. At national level in Romania several projects are on the roll and one of them is “The national program of rural development 2014-2020” that represents a step for a sustainable development as well as the European congress for rural tourism –Eurogites which was organized in 2012 in Piatra Neamt city with the main subject the Innovative tourism- A new life for the rural regions.

4. Case Study

For this particular branch of tourism tourists have the intention to travel to view something familiar, an idyllic image.Several press coverage in national titles have put forward the attention on the rural tourism in Neamt County but tourist devour this days other types of publications (Vacante la tara, RevistaSatul, FPTR Voyage Voyage). The number of published publications has decreased while the number of online journal has encountered an ascending path.The recognition of a region comes in time and the identity and the sense of belonging can be evidenced with the help of the testimonials of other tourists. A high proportion of visitors are those who choose the weekend and our study interviewees are couples with age between 20 to 28 and families in their thirties and forties with one child or two.

Research Methodology

Data collection

For our present research we used the interviews of 30 tourists that were in the regionNeamt, village Ceahlauduring the period of one month 15 January-15 February 2014. The interview questions were designed on existing literature(Quivy, Van Campenhoudt, 1998). They lasted between 5 to 10 minutes in which the main scope was to discover what on-line services they used and if that were an influence in the choice they made. One of the premises of our research was that we will find nonuser of Internet, and which confirmed. We try to answer to the following 3 question: 1. Do they use other reviews or any kind of social media to inform and take a decision about future destination choice? ; 2. Do they know any tourism bloggers?; 3. How pertinent is reading a tourism blog and if they information found there are true?.

The total interviews sums 20 questions and was divided in 3 sections: one that referred to their knowledge about internet platforms, the second one collected data about the decision making habits while the third one was designed to learn about demographic information such as age sex, annual income, family status and education.

Research Findings

During the interviews there were taken notes and after that they weretranscribed, checked for clarity and in some cases the key thoughts were summarized. According to the Centerof touristic information "Gheorghe Iacomi", Piatra Neamt the Durau resort,which is recognized as a holiday destination suitable for rest and treatment of anaemia asthenic neurosis, sums a number of 41 B&B legal facilities in the area. A cross cased analysis was used for our interviews and Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the persons interviewed. Out of 30 persons 14 are male while the rest are female. The descriptive analysis showed that 20% are married and 80% have higher education studies. A great percent of the respondents 83.3% have the annual income under 25000 RON.

Table 1Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percent%
Gender		
Male	14	46.67
Female	16	53.33
Age		
Under 18	4	13.33
18-30	19	63.33
31-45	7	23.34
Education		
Primary school	2	6.67
High school	4	13.33
Graduate	24	80.00
Annual income		
No income	2	6.67
Under 25000 RON	23	76.67
25000-35000RON	4	13.33
Over 35000RON	1	3.33

Source: Author

The respondents offered several sources of information as the deciding factor in their selection of the destination. There was extracted a number of 6 common motivations: distance and accessibility, landscape, relaxation and socialization, green and eco-activities. A number of 7 tourists read blogs in general, before a hike or day trip to the mountains. For this particular destination 3 tourists reported that they have read several coverage's of various tourism bloggers. A greater number of respondents, 12 affirmed that they read reviews about B&B and they took it in consideration. They interact with other tourists on forums or tourism blogs to comment afterwards about their personal experience. The blogs that offer pictures are the best appreciated as they influence in a higher scale the perceptions about the destination. The relationship between the information used for choosing a destination and selection of the destination can be demonstrated with the responses of our respondents. The frequency in the responses of the interviewed tourists that are influenced by the social media/blogs is a percentage of 16.67%. Such a low degree of the percentage is explained by two motives: a small number of questioned tourists and the fact that a number of 9 persons were in a group trip. A number of 12 persons read blogs and use social media channels for staying update with offers or promotions before taking the decision to choose a destination. In terms of accuracy of the information offered and pertinence of the blogs and social media channels a percentage of 26.67% declare that they find it true and reliable as there are presented pros and cons when describing a personal trip. The findings support the research of Molina and Esteban(2006) that appreciated the interest and tendency of tourist to resort to impersonal information sources such as internet, guides etc.

Research limitations/implications

The number of respondents is relatively low and the findings concentrate on their answers which makes it difficult to get an in depth analyse of the pheromone social media and its impact of the destination image and selection. Otherwise the research provides data that the attractiveness of a destination can be formed and induced by tourism blogs and social media channels. A further research is needed for different destinations and the present results allow uscoming up with the proposal of taking in consideration the role of tourism business engagement in the on-line content.

6. Conclusions

The possibility of sharing in real-time any tourism experience allows users to stay connected and to create a virtual identity (Munar, 2010). Several authors highlighted that rural operators do not turn that often to the use of on-line promotion channels (Boyne and Hall, 2004) and the low spread in the on-line blogs or social media channels of the region analysed confirm the previous studies. The on-line platforms offer the possibility of improving the image, the impact on decision making process and a particular trust and reputation is created with the help of on-line bloggers. Even if the rural tourism is characterized as a conservative and change resisting (Champion & Hugo, 2004)the use of social media platforms and tourism blogs represents a new form of promotion the tourism which involves very low costs and no burdens for the tourism operators. One of the advantage that social media brings in front is a diminution of the uncertainty and strengthens the desire of changing information while the tourists can have the sense of belonging to a virtual travel community (Gretzel et al., 2006 ; Wang et al., 2002).

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MOISE CÎNDEA[1]
GABRIELA CIURARIU[2]

Present-day topics

MANAGEMENT CONTROL AND ITS ROLE IN ENTERPRISE

Abstract: *The purpose of management control in large enterprises, was to develop and ensure their effective management. As a tool of management, management control is at a distinct level of company hierarchy, namely the financial direction, being the guarantor of economic and financial balances. If we accept the idea that financial accounting information is the instrument best adapted, we see that makes direct management accounting methods integrate both in organization and in its methods and systems.*

Key words: *management control, transfer of autonomy of decision, internal audit.*

1. Introduction

Management control rests on the simple accounting solutions. Financial indicators have systematically determined, normalized to be directly related to relevant accounting reality.

Management systems that depart from accounting has a dubious and uncertain information that may lead to erroneous decisions. We believe that developments must be assessed first seen in direct correlation with the indicators obtained from books. Other measurement systems should be used only in addition to economic and financial management system, evident whenever management accounting can provide useful indicators of decision making. With integrated systems, accounting and computer science should be valued as much as possible in defining the rules of management and information handling processes. Structured treatment of financial accounting information requires a minimum of care to achieve the desired quality and to avoid complex and expensive solutions. "Lack of participation in defining rules management accounting shows that 75% of managers and accountants DG presents the results of around 70% are asked for directions to provide operational management information" [3, p. 236].

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2. Organization and management to exercise control in enterprise

Organization and implementation of management control in an economic organization subscribes, and influencing factors relating to company size, specific activity, competence management team and not least corporate culture. One can say that there is no standard model applicable to any business.

How to implement management control, as mentioned, vary by firm size. Management control is usually located at the headquarters of the parent. This way of organizing centralized management control, requests for information received from subsidiaries, branches, representative offices, or other substructures necessary to achieve the strategy development and tracking group. Geographical dispersion, have often difficulties in organization management control so that it is necessary to delegate a large part of responsibilities to subsidiaries or other divisions. In this way a transfer of autonomy made the decision to subsidiaries or units, only retaining control headquarters commitments.

Although there is no standard model to be applied in all enterprises, exercise management control relevant to the group of companies belonging to the same holding is appropriate to use information systems and management control procedures standardized for all structures in the aggregation of information at group level. Report (Reporting) is the process of relaying the information to its principal or service charge of centralized accounting and financial data of the group. It takes the form of a standard that group retransmit certain information, such as monthly turnover, expenses and specific revenues, product costs, rates of economic performance, financial and commercial, etc..

The SMEs, most often, management control is organized in the service of accounting, or financial. In many of these information system is less developed and not held a real management accounting, management function is performed by adapting the financial accounting needs some information of the manager. Internal control, internal audit called, organized by the management with responsibility to ensure protection of heritage and quality of information.

Internal control as applied to the instructions of management aims to improve business performance and application procedures are exercised by the operations, ensuring the validity of the registration and control of execution of operations. Organization of internal control is based on general provisions, establishing the separation of staff duties, conditions of access to goods and resources company, overseeing operations. Evaluation of internal control is essential phase of any financial audit at the end of which a professional foreign company makes a reasoned opinion on the information presented in financial statements (balance sheet, profit and loss account, the picture changes in equity, cash flow and annexes).

Between the two functions, internal control and management, there are similarities but also differences. Thus, both have a universal character because it works covers all activities of business and management in addition to the company, without having decision-making power. But the two forms of control objectives are different: if aimed at applying audit procedures intended to protect company assets, compliance with government, ensuring fidelity and accuracy of accounting information and compliance with internal rules and procedures for quality and environmental protection., Control management is providing the enterprise information system design and particularly interested in the results of the company, actual or forecast. The auditor carries out its mission during the year, after a planned periodization, which take into account certain risks, but management control is dependent on the results of enterprise activity and the reporting periods, often Lift DG priorities. In a firm, the two functions, internal audit and management control are complementary. Thus, in all its actions, internal control has contributed to the achievement of management control, because internal audit is to ensure the quality of information used by management controller. In addition, internal audit reports provide management controller information relevant to the assessment of enterprise operation processes to develop its projections. In turn, in carrying out its duties, the internal auditor may report to their information management control weaknesses in order to establish.

3. Exercise management control

In large enterprises, the exercise of management control is done by professionals involved in management controller function. He is responsible for designing the information system to serve the basis for decisions and must be an "animator" of policy makers and operational staff, and more specifically to incite them to achieve performance. In the design of information system management and control participation in defining the structure of the company, this is the definition of information system functions in terms of mission, objectives and functions. For example, controller design management of the company's budget process by developing procedures, drawn up dashboards for operational staff, establish standards and ensure their periodic review, proposed schedule of responsibilities, controls the execution of budgets etc. In fact, the management controller is responsible for the proper functioning of information system used to making decisions in an enterprise. If a certain part of time management controller working alone (in large companies, management controller can work with department staff specialist), yet he is in contact with other members of the organization: He attends in a privileged on his or her supervisor or general manager, but had contacts with people outside the company or operational managers. In other words, management controller is a privileged, which explains the role of animals in the company that convey an important behavioral component to the individuals that make up the organization. As an animator, management controller must ensure [1, p. 32]:

• responsibility of the tools available to appropriate management;

• the possible formation of these charge;

• stimulating them by self (which means that the tools are provided and to self), assisting in decision making.

In this respect, the management controller can influence corporate culture consists of all specific values and attitudes of staff of an organization that values "appear and are built progressively in the community and reflecting the experience of the group. But these values can be manipulated, that model" [2, p. 25], such control is performed by corporate culture. Therefore, "essential under management controller today is communication. Managers and operational staff appreciates above all qualities such as intellectual curiosity, availability, flexibility of thinking, the ability to work as a team" [3, p. 101].

DG attached or subordinate to Chief Financial Officer, controller is the person able to provide management accounting information quickly and reliable management control, he coordinates a significant overall functional services (or activities if the organization is small), such as general accounting , accounting, budgets and plans, statistics, internal control, IT, business studies. A sketch of the professional profile of management controls can be summarized as follows: "He must prove to merit confidence and rigor (internal control), to combine the power accounting (budget) and technical (computer), have knowledge of mathematical and economic (statistics, studies) ". In exercising their information and decision assistance to managers, management controller may be in a critical situation from different charge or may be ignored by them. On the other hand, the controller should adopt an attitude of operational staff to make this a real person in the business correspondent of his, something that includes both training and orientation behaviors.

4. Conclusions

By his presence, management controller must motivate managers and operational staff in achieving performance and thus realizing the role of animals within a business organization. So management controller has a special position in an enterprise or "an important and difficult" (Boisselier, 1999), which require the professional competence and certain human qualities. But exercise management job controller creates a character less frustrated because management controller is the person providing quality items without the decision to decide, which may lead to two impasses: one in which the controller or replace the manager responsible the deputy became suspicious (counselor) or.

In general, it is considered that a person does GE career in management control, but a transient function, seen as a "step between two successive promotions, she alternates the role of counselor in the decider and professional life of an administrative framework. Thus, a department responsible for technical management can become a controller of a division, then to receive a foreign subsidiary management. During this journey varies depending on company policy and individual qualities "[4, p. 28-30].

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GABRIELA CIURARIU[1] Points of view

PROFITABILITY ANALYSIS BASED ON INCOME STATEMENT

Abstract: *To survive and prosper in the new global economy, companies must improve their performance and achieve a high quality of products to qualify as a world-class enterprises. In this context, it must, on the one hand, analysis of performance factors generating and effects exerted by these human factors, strategic, contextual, structural and technological efficiency of economic activity of the enterprise and, on the other hand, identifying ways to improve performance.*

The globalization of markets, the increasing complexity of customer needs, the impact of information technology and intellectual capital are interrelated phenomena whose manifestation poses new challenges for businesses. Although with fewer financial resources, human and technological compared to large enterprises, small and medium enterprises have the advantage of flexibility, rapid response and a capacity for innovation.

Key words: *financial performance, accounting standards, profit forecast.*

Change and innovation implies a systemic vision of the company and the determinants of performance-based vision system operational and management information system, including mutations in the adopted strategy and management practices, and operational information, based on the principles of consistency and adaptation to the environment.

In this context, enterprise performance goals aimed at multiple levels, including individual (worker, consultant, policy makers) working group (team, administrative unit), organization (enterprise). Also, the performance can be approached from multiple perspective: functional (marketing, production, accounting and finance) and process (supply chain management, customer relationship, management innovation). Performance can be measured quantitatively (financial results, indicators of productivity) or qualitative (strategic flexibility).

1. Financial components of return

Enterprise productivity and efficient use of capital leads to economic results when production is sold, resulting measured by gross surplus of exploitation. Figure 1 highlights how a fraction of EBE remains available to shareholders.

[1] "Petre Andrei" University, Iasi, Romania, gciurariu@yahoo.com

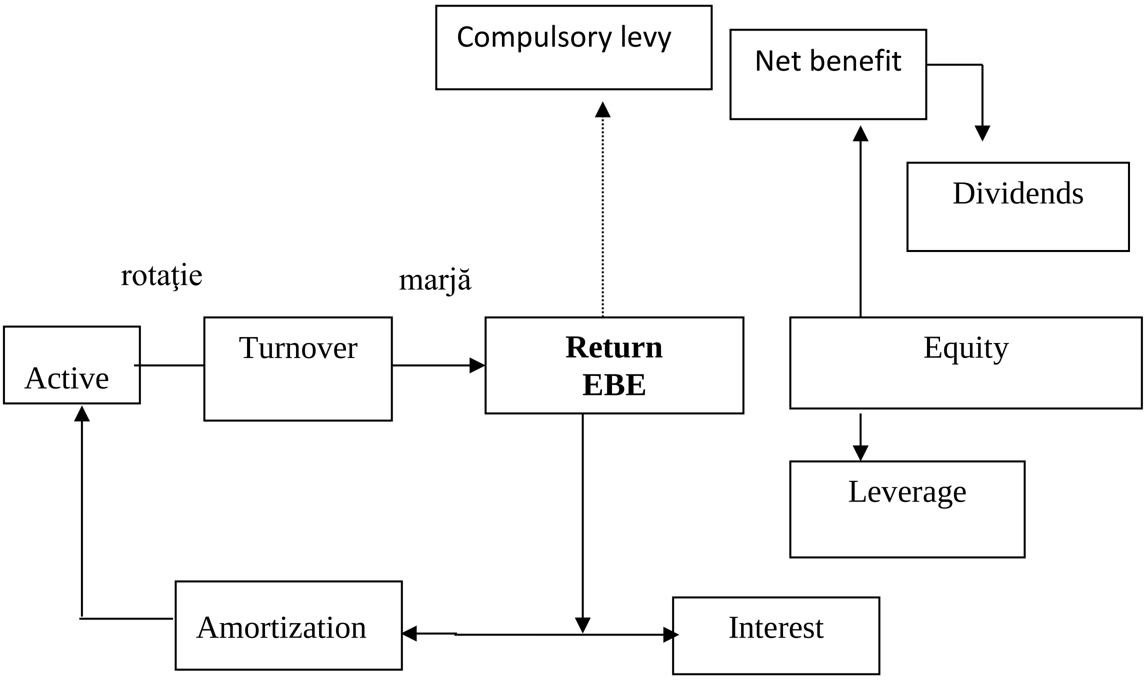

Figura 1 Financial components of return [3, p. 251]

The difference between the concepts of economic and financial profitability "resulting from that debt is likely to reduce the amount of capital invested and, equally, the results in interest expense"[4, p.26]. Thus, cost of equity and debt is directly influenced by the more so, as the interest is tax deductible expenses and reduces the tax paid. From a purely financial point of view and an approach flows of the financial asset profitability relies in part on monetary surplus distributed. This highlights the diversity of viewpoints on profitability reflecting various objectives (sometimes divergent) social groups interested in the results of the company: managerial perspective (using self-financing to maintain business company) and the shareholders (who receive dividend payments for their placement) .

Profitability is directly related to changes in economic activity (economic risk), more reliance on debt also affects profitability (financial risk). The concept of return is inseparable from the risk-return risk is inseparable couple, adding a specific size indebtedness any economic activity.

2. Factor analysis of the result of exploitation

Diagnostic analysis of the operation result is geared towards highlighting this indicator generating causes of variation from one year to the next, these cases constitute premises of weather exploitation income in the future. Factor analysis of the operation result is based on the following model:

$$R_{\exp l} = V_{\exp l}(1 - \frac{Ch_{\exp l}}{V_{\exp l}})$$

$R_{\exp l} =$ operation result;

$V_{\exp l}$ = operating income;

$Ch_{\exp l}$ = operating expenses.

Using the data from Table 1, we proceed to the exploitation factor analysis result based on the data from the income statement of S.C. ALFA.

Table 1 Factor analysis of the operation result in S.C. ALFA (RON)

Explanations	Absolute changes			
	N+1/N	%	N+2/N+1	%
Changing the result of exploitation, of which:	949997,00	100,0	2404456	100,0
Influence income	337797,68	35,6	356214,77	14,8
Influence of a lion revenue expenditure	612199,32	64,4	2048241,23	85,2

Changing the operation result in the SC ALFA in the current financial year compared to the base is given by:

$$\Delta R_{\exp l} = V_{\exp l1}(1 - \frac{Ch_{\exp l1}}{V_{\exp l1}}) - V_{\exp l0}(1 - \frac{Ch_{\exp l0}}{V_{\exp l0}})$$

Quantifying the influence of these two factors (operating revenue and expenses respectively a lion revenues) leads to the following relations:

$$\Delta V_{\exp l} = V_{\exp l1}(1 - \frac{Ch_{\exp l0}}{V_{\exp l0}}) - V_{\exp l0}(1 - \frac{Ch_{\exp l0}}{V_{\exp l0}})$$

$$\Delta\left(\frac{Ch_{\exp l}}{V_{\exp l}}\right) = V_{\exp l1}(1 - \frac{Ch_{\exp l1}}{V_{\exp l1}}) - V_{\exp l1}(1 - \frac{Ch_{\exp l0}}{V_{\exp l0}})$$

During N-N + 1, the increase in operating results of 949,997 (RON) reflected in the proportion of 35.56% of revenue, while in the next period, the contribution of the latter drops to 14.82%. The other factor, qualitative - 1 leu revenue expenditure had positive influence on the analyzed indicator predominant (64.44%, respectively, 85.18%).

In order to forecast the outcome of the operation using the previous model can proceed either increase revenue or reduce costs 1 leu revenue.

3. Factor analysis of gross profit

Factor analysis of gross profit is based on data from the profit and loss account. As a result of the fact that the activity of the SC ALFA include, in addition to the operating and sales of goods, other financial and extraordinary activities, to consider modifying gross profit and forecast its development in the next period, use the following calculation models:

Option I:

$$Pb = Rcr + Rex = (R\exp l + Rf) + Rex$$

Option II:

$$Pb = Vt - Cht = \left[(V\exp l + Vf + Vex) - (Ch\exp l + Chf + Chex)\right]$$

According to variant I, variation in gross profit is explained by the following factors influence mayors:

- Current result;
- Extraordinary result.

As secondary factors influencing the gross profits fall operation result and financial result. Quantifying the influence of these factors on indicator analysis leads to the following relations:

ΔRcr = (Rcr1+Rex0)- (Rcr0+Rex0) in which:

ΔRexpl = Rexpl1- Rexpl0

ΔRf= Rf1- Rf0

ΔRex = Rex1- Rex0

In version II, modification gross profit is due to the influence of the following factors:

- Change in total revenues (ΔVt);
- Change of total expenditure (ΔCht).

On the second level factorial decomposition, are secondary factors that influence gross profit, respectively:

- Operating income (Vexpl), financial (Vf) and extraordinary (Vex);
- Operating expenses (Chexpl), financial (CHF) and extraordinary (Chex).

Based on balanţiere method, determine the influence of these factors on gross profit. In Table 2 are systematized two factorial analysis models ALFA gross profit society, based on the data in the profit and loss account for the financial years N + 1 and N + 2.

Table 2 The results of the factor analysis of gross profit SC ALFA during N + 1-N + 2 (RON)

Option l Result for the year (gross profit) for the current period (Pb1*)	2806091
Result for the year (gross profit) of the reporting period (Pbo**)	462425
Change year earnings (gross profit) (ΔPb), of which:	2343666
- Influence the outcome of the current financial year (ΔRcr), of which:	1722391
- -Influence the outcome of the operation (ΔRexpl);	2404456
- The influence of the financial result (ΔRf)	-682065
- Influence extraordinary result for the year (ΔRex)	621275
Option II Result for the year (gross profit) for the current period (Pb1)	2806091
Result for the year (gross profit) of the reporting period (Pbo)	462425
Change year earnings (gross profit), (ΔPb), of which:	2343666
- Influence of total income (ΔVt), of which:	4954483
- Influence of operating revenue (ΔVexpl)	3320353

- Influence of financial income (ΔVf)	1384941
- Influence of extraordinary income (ΔVex)	249189
- Influence of total expenditure (ΔCHt), of which:	-2610817
- Influence of operating expenses (ΔCHexpl)	-1579804
- Influence of financial expenses (ΔCHf);	-1403099
- Influence of extraordinary expenses (ΔCHex)	372086

* Pb1 means gross profit for the financial year N + 2

** Pbo is the gross profit recorded in N + 1

Factor analysis of gross profit in the period considered leads to the following conclusions:

• Gross profit increased by 2343666 (RON) in year N + 2, compared with the previous year was mainly due to earnings ratio of 73.49% current extraordinary result with a contribution of only 26.51%. Among the secondary factors (version I), it is noted positive influence solely due to the operation result (2404456 RON materialized in the increase in gross profit), while lowering financial result (due to the increase in financial expenses faster pace compared with revenues same category during N + 1, N + 2) had negative effects on gross profit (causing its reduction with 621275 RON);

• In the second variant, it is noted positive influence due to total revenues (which causes an increase of gross profit of 4954483 RON), while under the influence of total expenditure, gross profit decreased during the same period with 2610817 RON;

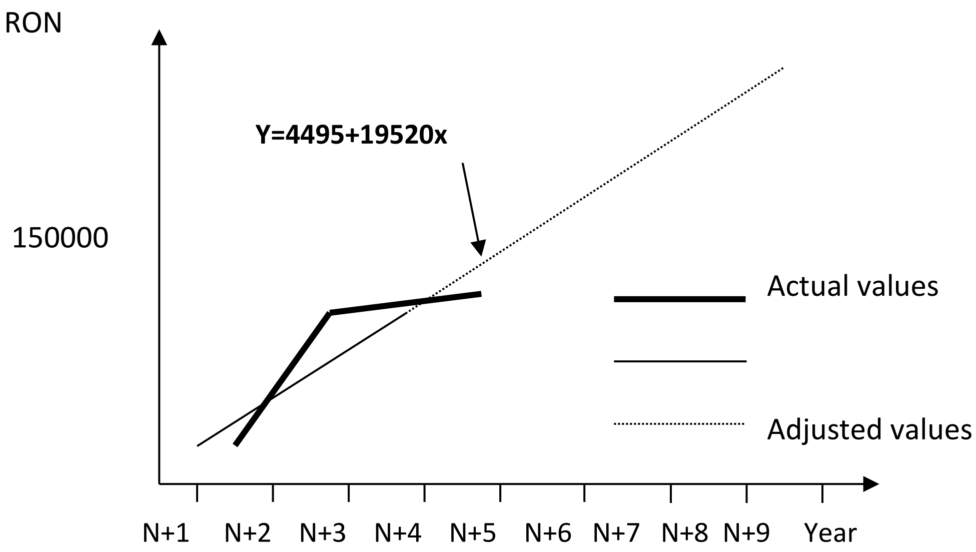

Figure 2 Forecast gross profit by adjusting polynomial SC ALFA

• the secondary factors, the most significant influence lies operating revenues (which have a share of 67% of net profit growth under the influence of income); follows, in order of importance, financial income (27.95%) and extraordinary income (5.05%). The categories of expenditure, is distinguished by extraordinary expenses positive impact by reducing the previous year, have resulted in an increase in gross profit by 372086 RON. The other two categories of expenditures have been increased for the period N + 1, N + 2, thereby reducing gross profit.

4. Forecast net profit

In practice management, net profit can be estimated by several methods:

- Analytical calculations on production, sales and expenses. In each economic agent shall develop a strategy for production (volume and range structure), a sales strategy (markets, quantities, values) and expenses in connection with the first two;
- Synthetic calculations (average rate, rate of return). It is a common method due to the fact that requires a relatively small volume of data and the calculation process is relatively simple;
- On the coefficients of leverage (economic and financial risk).

In the company ALFA method for forecasting net profit synthetic calculations lead to the results summarized in Table 3. The assumptions underlying the forecast are:

• S.C. ALFA estimates annual turnover growth of 8%;

• annual increase variable costs 1000 lei turnover is 3% due to higher prices of raw materials and utilities;

• change the structure results in that financial results in weight loss operation result by 0.2% per year and 0.03% exceptional result.

Table 3 Forecast net profit at SC ALFA average rate method over the period N + 3- N + 5 (RON)

Nr. crt.	Indicators	N+3	N+4	N+5
1	Turnover	16727031	18065193	19510408
2	Variable expenses	10657293	11564071	12489197
3	Gross margin (1-2)	6069738	6501122	7021211
4	Fixed expenses	3356421	3356421	3356421
5	Result of the operation (3-4)	2713317	3144701	3664790
6	Financial result	508476	583027	685316
7	Extraordinary result	265091	306294	355851
8	Gross profit (5+6+7)	3486884	4034022	4705957
9	Income tax	871721	1008506	1176489
10	Net profit	2615163	3025516	3529468

Determination of budget indicators for the year N + 3 from the assumptions above, is based on the following calculation:

- Turnover:

15487992 x 1,08 = 16727031 (RON)

- Variable costs 1000 lei turnover:

$$I_{CV}^{t} = \frac{CV}{CA} \cdot 1000 = \frac{9821457}{15487992} \cdot 1000 = 634{,}13 \text{‰}$$

$$CV_{t+1} = 16727031 \cdot \frac{637,13}{1000} = 10657293 \text{ (RON)}$$

- The share of the financial result in the operation result:

In the year N+2: $\frac{437486}{2310114} \cdot 100 = 18,94\%$

In the year N+3: $18,94\% - 0,2\% = 18,74\%$

$R_{f\ t+1} = 18,74\% \cdot 2713317 = 508476$ (RON)

- Share the extraordinary result in the operation result:

In the year N+2: $\frac{226421}{2310114} \cdot 100 = 9,80\ \%$

In the year N+3: $9,80 - 0,03 = 9,77\ \%$

$R_{ex\ t+1} = 9,77 \cdot 2713317 = 265091$ (RON)

In Figure 3, is presented net profit forecast to S.C. ALFA, exponential adjustment method.

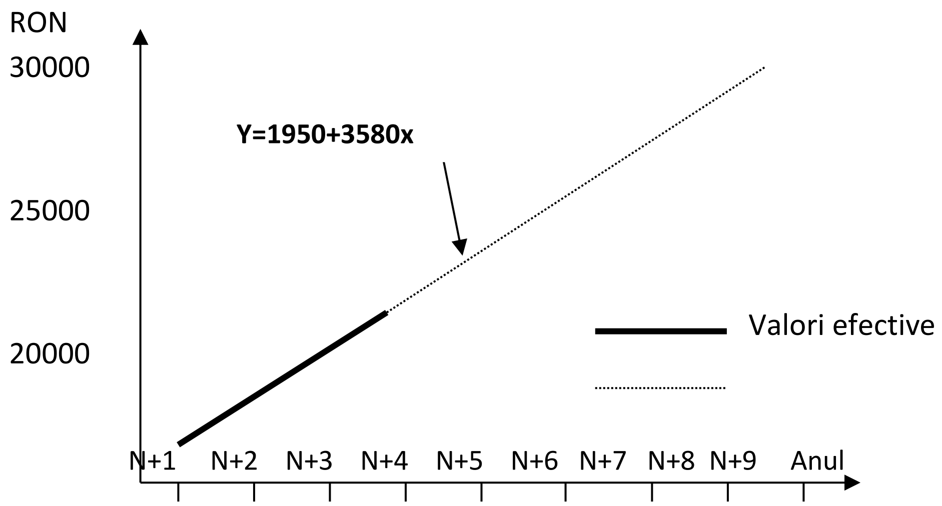

Figure 3 Forecast net profit in S.C. ALFA exponential adjustment method

5. Conclusions

Profit analysis forecasting models based on exponential adjustment principle is characterized by a high degree of utility in that they allow continuous updating of information, which significantly reduces the degree of error.

In the current economic conditions, increased business complexity (high uncertainty and risk) generate strategic stakes related to company performance, its desire is to reach the level of efficiency, productivity and competitiveness meant to ensure its global market penetration .

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Points of view

PERSPECTIVES ON SUSTAINABILITY OF THE EUROPEAN WELFARE STATE

Abstract

A current dimension of seminal welfare state problems is the „fiscal crisis", the situation when the budget of a country becomes unsustainable. From this perspective, the European crisis pertains, first of all, to durable development and the solution seems to be the reduction of expenses. The dilemma of the governments is how to limit the negative consequences of this reduction, along with meeting the needs of protection and improvement of social policies. In the present paper, we intend to conduct an analysis of the deprivations faced by the population of EU countries and some of the limitation measures which have or should have been adopted by national governments. In addition, we intend to check whether there is a link between social protection expenditure and labor productivity in the states taken into account and provide an interpretation of the results, if possible, oriented towards the old continent's economic sustainability.

Keywords: welfare, social state, social protection, labour productivity

1. Premises of the evolution of social policy in Europe

It seems that the European left and right wing parties both became aware of the notion of "fiscal crisis" with respect to the level of revenues since the upper limit of what people are willing to pay was apparently reached. The new labour party representatives in Great Britain seem to have taken this idea from the conservative party before them[3]. However, when the modern social-democracy was launched, considering the novelty of ideas promoted by the new labour party representatives, the availability of resources for citizens in need still laid at the basis of social problems that they were trying to solve. They, as well as the other social-democratic parties on the continent established their priorities within a framework of budget planning, traditional to some extent and compatible to the state of welfare. Although there was no major fiscal crisis in Europe during the promotion of these centrist ideas, A. Giddens admitted that there had been serious challenges on the sustainability of fiscal policies of certain states[4], which would be confirmed in the following years. If the crisis of the social welfare system goes on and we believe it will, systematic close down and real atrophy of all programmes of European social work could follow. Thus, the organization of this system and some of the major crises meant to lead to its restructuring are worth analysing[5]. It is extremely important to consider the existing European policy in this field, as well as its dynamics which could foresee a future deeper crisis. In this sense, the most discussed scenario up to now, which was made against the background of globalization, is extremely interesting due to its complexity. If globalization and increasing international interdependence are truly main factors of a diminution of European social welfare and if

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[3] Public expenditure as ratio of the national revenue more or less reached the acceptability threshold: T. Blair and G. Schroeder, *Joint Declaration*, London, June 8, 1999

[4] A. Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right. The Future of Radical Politics*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 153

[5] Pierson Paul, *Dismantling the Welfare State? Reagan, Thatcher and the Politics of Retrenchment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994. See also: *The New Politics of the Welfare State*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001; *European Social Policy: Between Fragmentation and Integration*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995 (ed. with Stephan Leibfried); *Three Worlds of Welfare State Research*, Comparative Political Studies, 33(6/7): 791-821, 2000

globalization is continuously in progress, then globalization tendencies could genuinely acquire systemic connotations[6] that will not limit to the effects we experimented to a greater or lower extent insofar.

"The challenge is to adjust what works globally, at a national level. We need to make global economy work for ordinary citizens"[7], as Bill Clinton said. Starting from the aforementioned considerations, in this article we will make an overview of the premises resulting from the implementation of social investment policies in European countries. Thus, we will be able to assess the perspectives of a so-called common orientation, on a socio-economic direction of EU member states.

It is widely acknowledged that traditional European social democracy generally focused on its classic purpose of redistribution by means of massive social transfers. However, the parties adhering to this doctrine responded to the pressure exerted by world economic competition by means of lowering taxes, yet budgetary expenditure was not significantly or proportionally diminished every time. By acting so, governments failed to balance the public budget; in exchange, they obtained better results in the field of social protection. But on the other hand, modernized social democracy either gave up the purpose of a higher quality of the social products provided or replaced them by aids for certain, less numerous, underprivileged categories. Therefore, this doctrine as followed by the governments that implemented it was capable of harmonizing public finances, by cutting expenses and the simultaneous reduction of taxes particularly in the area of investment so as to avoid capital migration[8]; yet, it continued to observe redistribution, particularly through indispensable social services.

By analysing indicators such as the rate of material removal from the perspective of diminution of social services granted, we reached pretty unpleasant conclusions. The degree of material removal is extremely higher in countries in which the highest percentage of poor population was recorded and work intensity is low. At the level of EU 27, even since 2009, approximately 17% of all EU citizens were mainly considered to be underprivileged and their living conditions were seriously damaged by the lack of resources. At the level of the year mentioned, the highest ratio was in Bulgaria (70%), followed by Romania (53%) and Letonia (45%) and the lowest in Luxemburg (3%), Norway, The Netherlands, Sweden (6%) and Denmark (7%).

[6] Hicks Alexander, *Social democracy & welfare capitalism*, Cornell University Press, Cornell, 1999. For details, see chapter VII of this work, „Course and causes of the crisis".
[7] The ideas were taken from the Australian publication *The Bulletin*, October 6, 1998.
[8] W. Merkel et. al., *Die Reformfähigkeit der Sozialdemokratie. Herausforderungen und Bilanz der Regierungspolitik in Westeuropa*, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden, 2006, p. 387.

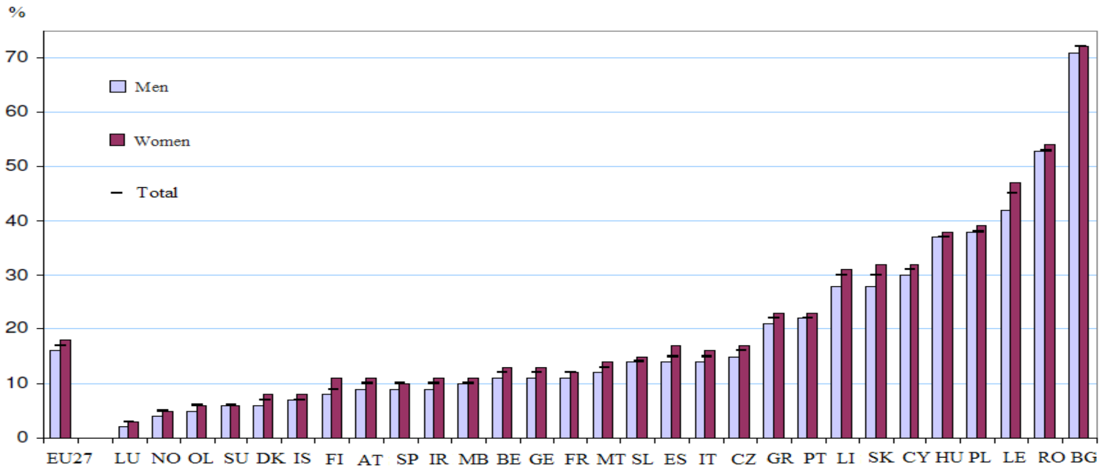

Figure 1: Rate of material removal in EU (%), year 2009

Source: Eurostat EU-SILC, 2010

The strategy Europe 2020[9] promotes social inclusion, especially by reducing poverty, aiming at overcoming the exclusion threshold for at least 20 million people in EU27[10]. The ones with available revenue are in danger of poverty, i.e. below the threshold of 60% of the available average national revenue obtained after social transfers were made. It is important to mention that, in this respect, at least 4 out 9 people that cannot easily afford to pay rent or bills, heat their flat well enough or deal with unexpected expenses, eat properly, etc. Also, it is important to add that the people living in households with lower work intensity are aged between 0 and 59 and belong to families with adults working less than 20% of their potential[11].

All these are warnings for authorities and the civil society since we strongly believe that the future cannot only impose itself by means of the will of a social category, but be built around a solidarity based on dialogue. Work instead of social care, investment in retraining and the help awarded to people that are unable to carry out a productive activity are modern answers to the existing challenges. Another approach is based on the stimulation of companies to free actions to a collective property trust, set in the name of the workers. Thus, workers are not deprived of the rights of direct shareholding and have access to associated profits with property rights on the shares of the companies held, and payments are determined by union leaders and company managers in their capacity of board members[12].

According to the liberal model, public charity is considered to be the reason for the occurrence and maintenance of idleness, demotivating people to engage in productive work. In the

[9] The official document is entitled *Europe 2020. A European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*, COM(2010) 2020 final, Brussels, March 3, 2010, available on: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:RO:PDF

[10] According to Eurostat, at the level of 2011, the number of people in EU 27 on the verge of poverty reached 120 million, which is approximately 24% of the total EU population, the highest percentages being encountered in Bulgaria (45% of the population), Romania (44%), Letonia (34%), and the lowest in The Netherlands, Sweden, The Czech Republic, all holding 15%, Luxemburg and Denmark, both holding 16%. Thus, we notice a pretty rapid growth of material removal at the level of EU 27, from 17% in 2009 to 24% of 2011.

[11] See the report *Updated joint assessment by the Social Protection Committee and the European Commission of the social impact of the crisis and of policy responses* (2009) available on http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=758&langId=en

[12] Norman G. Kurland, Michael D. Greaney, Dawn K. Brohawn., *op. cit*., 1998

work, *Essai sur le principe de population*[13], Th. Malthus stated that to foster the poor is to encourage unproductive activities to the detriment of a better use of the workforce. But on the other hand, John K. Galbraith claims that "In a perfect society, no one can be left aside, no one can be apriori condemned to starving, consciously deprived of a shelter, of the possibility to get medical treatment or other. An economy and a healthy political strategy cannot tolerate these things. To benefit from assistance should not be a social trauma because they suffer well enough without being pointed a finger to"[14].

Although it does not go as far as liberalism, modernised European social-democracy aimed at reducing social work or maintaining it to a level as low as possible for as long as possible and simultaneously activate policies of the labour market. Activation measures would translate especially through the strong highlighting of individual duties to accept any offer of employment as a result of training or re-qualification programmes. Despite all these, expensive investment in human capital is generally hard to take and in their compensation, deregulation had the main role in facilitating people's integration on the labour market. This clearly shows the distinctive features of the new inclusion policy, well implemented by the three Blair governments in Great Britain, between 1997–2007[15].

As far as post-communist countries and others are concerned, a series of studies points out to an increased support for the implication of the state in the provision of welfare[16]. According to them, the population herein would rather have the state solve the major problems of society and redistribute resources within it. According to P. Sztompka, the call for governmental support, rather than the use of one's own forces alone draws on the communist block culture and represents a reminiscence of a period in which the state was the only agent that had the role of managing social resources[17]. But on the other hand, the state of welfare that applied to most Western countries induced a similar cult of dependence that unfortunately needs reforming.

2. Considerations on the sustainability of social protection expenses

To have an overall image and from a comparative perspective, the graph below shows the expenses incurred by European countries for social protection in absolute measures and evolutive perspective in 2000 and 2008, respectively.

[13]Thomas Malthus, *Essai sur le principe de population*, 1798, translated by Pierre Theil and published in 1963, Ed. Gonthier, Paris, available on: http://www.gstblog.com/upload/Robert-Malthus-Essai-sur-le-principe-de-population.pdf

[14] John K.Galbraith, *Societatea perfectă (A Life in Order to Fulfill a Perfect Society)*, Eurosong & Book, Bucharest, 1997, pp. 30-31. Also see: Demoustier, D, *L'economie sociale et solidaire. S'associer pour entreprendre autrement*, La Découverte et Syros, Paris, 2001; Bidet, E, *L'économie sociale*, Le Monde, Paris, 1997

[15] See Wolfgang Merkel and Alexander Petring, *Social Democracy in Power: Explaining the Capacity to Reform*, Routledge, London, 2008, p. 142

[16] Kluegel James, Mason David, *Market Justice in Transition*, in Mason David et. al (coord.), *Marketing Democracy: Changing Opinion about Inequality and Politics in East Central Europe*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, New York, 2000, pp. 161-178

[17] Sztompka Piotr, *The Core of Post-communist Transformations*, in Boje Thomas, Bart van Steenbergen, Sylvia Walby (eds.), *The European Societies: Fusion or Fission?*, Routledge, London, 1999, p. 205.

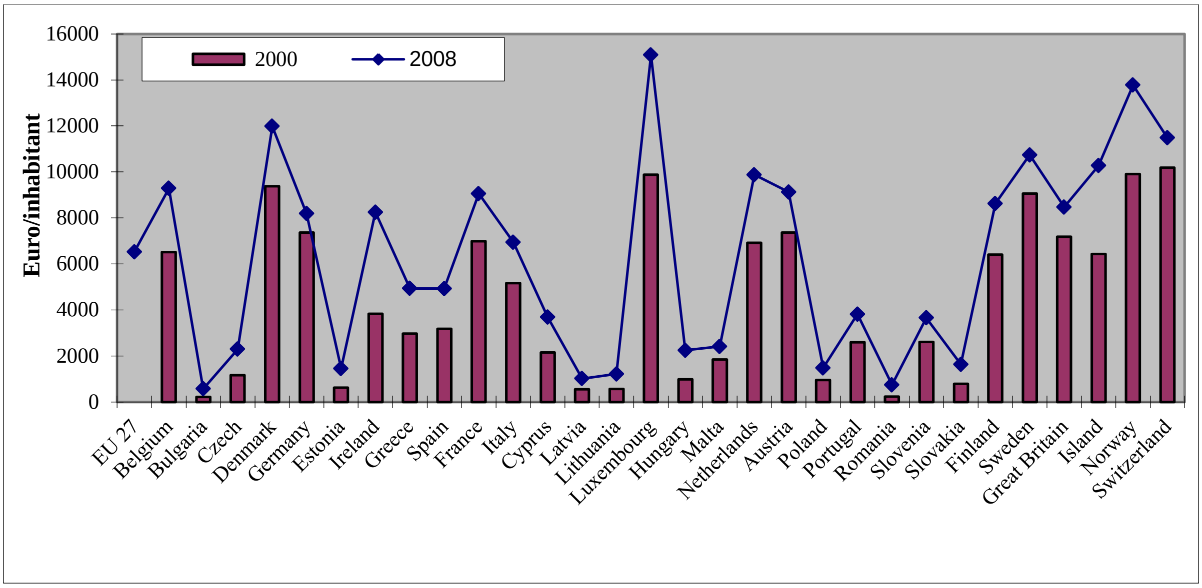

Figure 2: Public expenses incurred by social protection in Europe (Euro/inhabitant)
Source: according to Eurostat data, 2009

Somehow in contradiction with the positions of modern political-economic doctrines, there is a generalized increase of social protection within the interval mentioned. If we only have in view some of the “colours” of the party leaders that governed in important EU countries, namely G. Schröder and A. Merkel in Germany, T. Blair and G. Brown in Great Britain, etc., the graph above expresses the degeneration of these parties’ policy, previously forced by the frightening perspective of wide demonstrations that could be felt since 2005 in France and whose leaders did not want to face them.

Starting from the data provided by Eurostat on the variables, public expenditure for social care, as well as work productivity rates in the graph below, in what follows we will conduct an analysis of the main components, i.e. of regression and correlation, by testing the *hypotheses*:

H 1: There are strong relations between the two variables considered.
H 2: There aren’t any relations between the two variables considered.

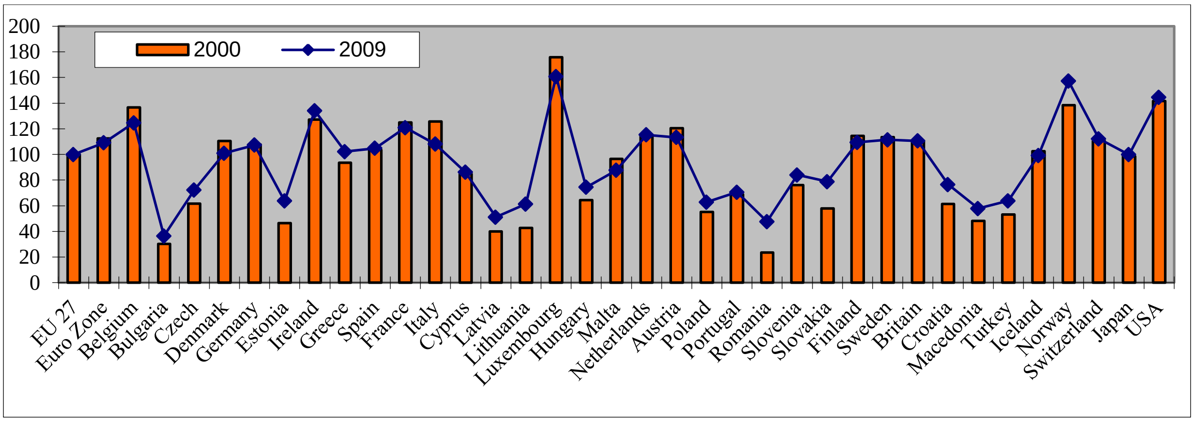

Figure 3: Work productivity (in PPS)[18] per employed person (EU 27=100)
Source: data processed according to Eurostat and OECD statistics, 2010

[18] Work productivity is expressed in PPS (Parity Power Standard), where the EU 27 average = 100.

In *Model Summary* table, we notice a value of the R indicator of 0.923 and R square of 0.851 which means that there is a strong connection between variables, i.e. between the dependant variable (work productivity) and independent variable (expenses for social protection), respectively[19].

Table 1

Model Summary			
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.923	.851	.845	12.460

Independent variable is *Social protection* (Euro per inhabitant).

Moreover, by correlating the variables analysed, Pearson, Kendall and Spearman indicators obtained values of 0.923; 0.783; 0.912 which shows a strong interdependence between them, their levels reaching the maximum value of a unit. Consequently, hypothesis 1 as formulated above is confirmed and hypothesis 2 infirmed.

Table 2

Pearson correlation index			
		Labour productivity	Social protection (Euro per inhabitant)
Labour productivity	Pearson Correlation	1	.923**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	27	27
Social protection (Euro per inhabitant)	Pearson Correlation	.923**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	27	27
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 3

Kendall and Spearman correlation indexes				
			Labour productivity	Social protection (Euro per inhabitant)
Kendall's tau_b	Labour productivity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.783**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	27	27
	Social protection (Euro per inhabitant)	Correlation Coefficient	.783**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	27	27

[19] We mention that R values, R square and Pearson, Kendall and Spearman correlation coefficients may have values between 0 and 1, expressing a perfect link between variables if their value is 1.

Spearman's rho	Labour productivity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.912**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	27	27
	Social protection (Euro per inhabitant)	Correlation Coefficient	.912**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	27	27
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 4

ANOVA					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	22177.244	1	22177.244	142.842	.000
Residual	3881.422	25	155.257		
Total	26058.667	26			
The independent variable is *social protection* (Euro per inhabitant).					

With respect to regression and the correlation of the variables analysed, in the ANOVA table, the value of the indicator *Significance level (Sig.)*=0.000 suggests the perfect relation between the variables considered with a dependence probability of more than 95%.

Still, if in the interval considered an increase in social aid was recorded, it would have been normal, according to the strong relations between the two variables, for labour productivity to increase, as well within the same interval. The fact that it did not happen as planned makes us reach various conclusions: the increase of social work expenses will not lead to a higher labour productivity, but to surplus obtained through productivity which is immediately spend on social protection.

3. Conclusions

We thus conclude that the perspective of a political-doctrinarian alignment of EU member states is possible and feasible, by means of a consensus of action oriented towards modern doctrinarian principles stated in the first part of the paper so as to increase economic growth in the long term. Against the background of the social state's present crisis, absolutisation attitudes on the measures that need to be taken for re-launching are displayed without much reserve by the liberals, socialists, supporters of keynesianism, etc. The remedy, as resulting from our analysis, lies in the combination of certain policies in their arsenal. The results obtained prove that solutions may be provided and the path to be followed starting from similar hypotheses, however, needs to consider and adapt to the institutional construction of each economic space addressed. In our opinion, the most important strategies for social work are those that consider the reinsertion of individuals in productive economy, individuals that, from various reasons, are no longer part of it, but who possess or may acquire the necessary skills and abilities to become active and independent participants on the labour force and in society. Measures include unemployment aid awarded under certain conditions, assistance for requalification, continuing professional development, etc. In agreement with the modern political vision, we need to mention that an extremely important element is that these social aids need to be accompanied by obligations: the individual should engage in social assistance based on reconversion in the work field or accept, after being retrained, reasonable work places.

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Points of view

THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY AS A WAY OF ENHANCING ORGANIZATION PERFORMANCE[3]

Abstract

The organizational management, organizational performance and other topics related to the concept of the organization are areas of interest for researchers, whereas our world is concerned with the way in which organizations function (as holistic systems), in order to study their behavior according to certain variables. A new research method has emerged within organizational sociology – the appreciative inquiry - which aims to pursue the 4 D phases: the discovery, the dream, the design and the destiny. The appreciative inquiry aims to co-transform the positive parts of individuals and organizations into the main features and vectors of evolution.

In this paper we aim to focus on the appreciative inquiry as a way of researching organizational behavior in order to enhance performance, in the benefit of both employees (individuals) and organizations (institutions, entities).

Keywords: *appreciative inquiry, organizations behavior, performance.*

1. Introduction

The term *appreciative inquiry* was launched by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivatsva in „Appreciative inquiry in organizational life", a work which was published in 1987. Etymologically speaking, the *appreciative inquiry* involves, on the one hand, the inquiry, which is the action to explore or discover and the other hand, to appreciate involves valuation.

The appreciative inquiry was given several definitions, including:

- the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations and the world around them [Cooperrider, Whitney, 1999, pp. 245-263];

- a theory and practice for approaching change from a holistic framework. Based on the belief that human systems are made and imagined by those who live and work within them, the Appreciative Inquiry leads systems to move toward the generative and creative images that reside in their most positive core – their values, visions, achievements and best practices [Watkins, Bernard, 2001, pp.,xxxi-xxxii];

- the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate and heighten positive potential [Cooperrider, et. al., 2000];

- a form of progressive discovery of what works in organizations, communities and individual experiences and also gradual development of individuals' potentialities,

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communities and organizations, in order to fulfill the objectives they set themselves [Sandu, 2009], [Ponea, Sandu, 2011, pp. 147-157].

The appreciative inquiry comprises four phases:

- discovery: the identification phase of positive stories and spreading thereof across the organization;

- dream: the phase where people describe their wishes and dreams they have about work, the motivations, labor relations they have with the other members of the organization;

- design: during this stage the system's management infrastructure is designed which is required to support the system;

- destiny / delivery: the support, maintenance, adjustment and development plans of what was projected are implemented during this stage [Sandu, 2012, pp. 139-144].

Efficiency and effectiveness in organizations is vital. For this reason the involvement of the people within organizations to discover the aspects which work well is one of the most important issues of the *appreciative inquiry*. It is a well know fact that today the access to information can make the difference between success and failure in business. For this reason, we consider appropriate to talk about the fact that through the appreciative inquiry the chances that an organization becomes increasingly strong and provide to the beneficiaries of its services reliability can increase. Quoting Bushe, Cojocaru, D., stresses that the appreciative inquiry is an intervention in three stages, namely:

- the appreciative discovery;
- the appreciative understanding;
- the appreciative amplification [Bushe apud. Cojocaru, 2003, pp. 203-207].

2. The organizations as social systems

Innovations in the new technologies are part of everyday life. The new technologies aim to increase the efficiency and effectiveness in organizations in order to be more competitive in the market, to provide prompt responses to customer needs, an so on.

Behind every organization there is, of course, a team of people who aim to ensure its smooth running, to provide reliability and to provide sustainability in time in exchange of material benefits. Since providing a unanimously accepted definition for the word organization is difficult, especially in our society, we believe it is the sum of individuals and resources that seek to achieve a goal. From the sociological point of view, the organization is a social entity, consciously coordinated with identifiable boundaries that operate on a continuous basis to achieve a common goal and whose members are aware of [Robbins et. al., 1987, p. 5] or complex social structures that have inputs and outputs of different types and different ways to turn the first one into the last ones [Furnham, 1997, pp. 6-7]. Because organizations are considered to be systems, we believe it is appropriate to emphasize that the system is a set of elements that experiences interaction relationships [French, Bell, 1999, p. 87]. As we previously stated, within organizations there are individuals sharing a common goal; most of the times this goal is, on the other hand the organization's survival through time, and on the other hand the financial capital and reliability capital [Trifu, Terec-Vlad, 2013, pp. 48-50].

3. The performance of an organization – as a final use of the appreciative inquiry

As we have seen, the sociological method proposed to determine the quality of the organization members and the relationships between them to determine the functional structure of that entity is based fundamentally on the issue of personal, subjective view of the psychology and personality of each member of the organization.

The art and skill of organizational management is to succeed to perceive from the discussions, opinions, and even predictions of these members, the direction that is being investigated and the direction where it heads the transformer vector (if any) that characterizes the entity at a given moment in time.

It was seen, especially in the opinion of Van der Doricke Haar, that we valued most in this situation, that free discussions applied within functional departments (resembling the brainstorm method used in the decision theory) to focus on unleashing the creative energies of the staff and support and guide all the activity of the organization on the positive, beneficial aspects of the entire activity, both endogenous (activity of divisions, departments) and exogenous regarding the relations of the entity with the competitive environment (business) and the natural surroundings.

In fact, the organizational performance should be seen as its ability to withstand a specific market and be successful. This latter aspect can be measured by comparing the specific outputs of the entity (organization) to the expected outputs. This is an issue that should, of course, indicate a ratio greater than one, where the effective (real) output > intended objectives.

The literature and we mention here Richard alone (one of the authors most recommended in this field) and the collaborators saw organizational performance as comprising three basic elements of economic performance, namely:

1. The financial performance including the size of profits, the returns on investment, the return on assets, and so on.
2. The performance of products on the market, the size of sales, the market share, and so on.
3. The gains of shareholders represented by their total income, the economic value added [Richard et al., 2009, p. 718-824].

Moreover, lately, to assess organizational performance, the so-called balanced scorecard is utilized, including several dimensions that should be taken into account to fully understand the analyzed economic concept.

The term was introduced to align the practical business activity to the organization's strategic vision formulated, in this case, on the use of the appreciative inquiry method [www.balancedscorecard.org-Balanced Scorecard].

We make this statement taking into account that besides the three major purely economic components, as stated above, it also includes the following aspects:

- The Customer Service;
- The social responsibility which synthetically aims at [http://corporate-citizenship.com/]: understanding what is happening around oneself; thinking of a strategy to for appropriate action; actions that lead to improved individual performances and especially organizational performances; creating and strengthening both individual and inter-organizational partnerships;
- The *stewardship* of the staff which generally translates into responsibility for the sustainable development shared by all those whose actions have an impact upon performance and is singled out both as values and practices at staff, organizations communities' level.

These additions provide, indeed, a multidimensional character to the concept of organizational performance and we believe they are appropriate to highlight the contribution of the sociological method of the appreciative inquiry – through the process of the 4 Ds – to the existence and functioning of this entity. We deal with specific aspects of the human activity, the personality of individuals and how they socialize within the organizational system for achieving the desired results and goals of that organization.

We can thus understand that the organizational assessment is a systematic process of obtaining valid information (data) concerning the organization's (entity's) performance, as well as the factors that influence or can influence this performance in the specific economic environment. In this context it should be noted that the presence of the ethical elements is fundamental especially in our society since ethics within organizations can make the difference between success and failure [Terec-Vlad, Trifu, 2015, pp. 84-87].

4. Conclusions

Organizations are obliged to continually adapt, to perform, to enter into relations with other competitors and also with other entities in the economic, social, political, cultural environment if they want to survive and continue their work both in their selfish interest (to use the expression of Adam Smith) and the interest of the community (as a result of the supply-demand game of a specific market).

To achieve this, skills, knowledge to administer the work of that organization (entity) are required and therefore to perform, which is given by the human factor, by individuals, employees, managers and shareholders.

As a result, we believe that one can imagine and achieve a direct link of cause-effect between the appreciative inquiry (analysis) and the organizational performance.

We make this statement based on the fact that, however, in its essence, we are dealing with an inquiry as an approach of sociological methodology which can achieve not imperatively, but free-consented, voluntarily and with high sincerity in approaches and answers (we refer in particular to the first two phases of the inquiry, Discovery and Dream, those which need to point out facts, desires, aspirations, and so on) but out of which one must retain the positive, motivating aspects and which must give actions a meaning to be followed and performed within the organization.

What we believe is that the *appreciative inquiry* is very useful as a tool for analysis and sociological method in any type of organization, but it must be in conjunction with the other issues that we have highlighted in the last part of the work namely the ethical, social responsibility aspects and the stewardship of employees. The reason why we highlight these aspects is because working on the cohesion aspect of the team, (which can be even called socialization during the periods meant for it), one can get to strengthen beliefs in the positive and powerful aspects of the entity and thus the design and implementation of tactics and strategies agreed upon may easily lead to achieving the desired economic results which can exceed the planned and expenses incurred.

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