

THE VULNERABILITY OF TOURISM

1. Introduction

In general, when the issue of Romanian tourism is debated, we consider only its positive side, without trying to take a free and differentiated approach towards the direct and indirect effects of tourism.

But over the years, important scientists, specialists in the economy, sociology and geography of tourism, showed us exactly how tourism, besides its positive effects on social and economical life as a whole, has almost as many negative effects, being considered one of the most vulnerable economical activities.

The somewhat legitimate view, developed over the years on tourism as a passport of peace, a barometer of the political, economical and social state of a country is perfectly real. Yet these features of tourism must be looked at not only from the positive side, but especially from the negative one.

A such approach would show us the following:

- 1) There where tourism is practiced, meaning where touristic services are being offered, we are almost sure that it is a quiet zone, without any inter-ethnic or international armed conflicts, presenting favoring factors for tourism.
- 2) The appearance of tourism in a particular spot on the globe is a barometer of the political, economical and social state of that particular spot, but also of the places where tourists came from, or those they had to cross to get there.
- 3) Currently, tourism is one of the most vulnerable and exposed human activities, which in a matter of seconds can take you from ecstasy to agony, from an economical boom to a crash.

Thus, where there are military actions going on, tourism decreases to disappearance, because no person is willing to expose his life to dangers on his / her own expense and in his own spare time.

Revolts and political instability in an area or place have such an influence on tourism that it almost disappears in times like this. Acts of terrorism in any form directly and quickly contribute to the serious decrease of touristic movement in the area exposed to such events. We could take as examples the disastrous effects the guerilla and terrorism actions in Egypt and Turkey had on local tourism.

Natural catastrophes generated by the tornadoes, strong storms, earthquakes, floods and fires, massive snowfalls and avalanches, etc., each of these through the disastrous effects it generates in time, determinates the annulment of touristic movement in places exposed to such events for a shorter or longer period of time.

In most cases, these natural destructive phenomena can be described as surprising events, which cannot be anticipated, but the effects of which, on the economical, demographic or psychological plan are often long lasting.

Environmental catastrophes, with their direct and indirect consequences, due to some powerful polluting agents that became uncontrollable or directly provoked by interested persons, contribute to the decrease to annulment of touristic activity in the area, even if only temporarily.

We all know about the dramatic consequences that such events as: the pollution of some of the most famous beaches in the world, the infestation with chemical substances of water, soil or atmosphere on some beaches and health resorts had on tourism, transforming these places from happiness filled oasis into places of terror and death.

Food poisoning catastrophes generated by consuming infected or polluted foods is another important issue. Such cases are worthy of our attention as they occur all over the world, including Romania. We recall the case of Antrax empoisonment, which caused a lot of harm to Romanian tourism in July 2000, especially to the one in the Danube Delta.

The economical crises, through the chain effects generated, influence in radical manner touristical circulation, as well as the accumulations and investments in touristical objectives.

We cannot finish the presentation of these negative aspects without noticing the vulnerability of tourism towards the level of development of both the places the tourists came from and their destinations and not least towards the income level of tourists.

This last aspect is visible when we notice that from an analysis of the five groups of influential factors of tourism, which are the economical,

demographic, social and psychological, political and natural factors, we find the most important one to be the economical factors. Only these offer the tourist with the possibility of moving from the dream of a trip to the trip itself.

Practice so far fully proved that, even favored by demographic, social and psychological, political and natural factors, but without having the economical power to pay for the trip, they remain only a dream. Money, along with the other factors, offer the possibility of travelling, so to achieve the dream.

The vulnerability of tourism comes both from natural as from human factors, from the inside¹ as the outside, presenting a large propagation of the negative effects.

In view of the complexity of the matter in hand, we shall now take a closer look at the positive and especially negative effects the information has upon tourism.

2. Information and its effects.

Some human errors have fully contributed, by misinformation, to the decrease for a shorter or longer period of time of the touristic activity in some areas, with disastrous economical consequences.

A such regrettable case occurred in June 1999 in Romania on the Black Sea shore.

2.1. The importance of information.

In the actual context of development, there is almost no normal living without information, because they teach you, they mould you for social life, they help you find your way about, control your life and actions, and so on.

Information is about communicating. It can be in the form of television or cinema images, computer multimedia, the letters of books, newspapers, commercials, so on.

Information is or should be scientifically correct, generating positive effects when well-intended. It can generate negative effects though, when it

¹ In case of an unreasonable development, such as direct pollution of the environment, as well as of the local traditions and habits, and so on.

is false information, which in fact is not information at all, because it does not obey to some important restrictions.

Thus, false information can consist of many things, such as: exaggerating, intrincating, diversifying information, cutting off reality, introducing fiction and distorting information.

2.2. Information and tourism side effects.

Generally speaking, tourism is a complex activity with major implications in various fields and it necessarily implies the next:

a) the person who is travelling, meaning the tourist, who chooses for the achievement of his own needs, the itinerary of the trip, its extent, nature, services and so on.

b) actions and elements connected for ensuring the necessary conditions for the achievement of the trip.

Thus, in the development of touristic acts come together tourists, travel agencies, touristic services providers (transportation, accommodation, treatment, entertaining, feeding) and the visited communities.

Each of these and all together need information in order to achieve their goals, and these must be accurate, not false. We may even affirm that tourism cannot exist without information.

Thus, tourists need a big amount of information especially about: the place they will spend their vacation and extent of their stay, the price of the trip and the elements (services) it includes, the conditions for travelling (about transportation, accommodation, food, treatment, entertainment, and so on), the history and culture of the place they are going to, and so on. Some of these information are offered to tourists before the trip starts, in the preparation and contracting phase, and some others while the trip is taking place.

Tour operators must possess information both for tourists (regarding the motivations of the trip, places where they want to go, amount of money available and what for exactly) and on touristic services providers, regarding quality, and costs of the touristic destinations.

Touristic services providers also need and use a great amount of information regarding potential tourists, travel agencies (they intend to work with), other providers, their prices and quality together with the structure and size of the offered facilities.

Between all the elements inside tourism there is a strong flow of information circulating in both ways.

Practice so far has proven how, when one of the elements has offered incomplete or inaccurate information, the negative consequences on the activity have been immediate.

Inaccuracies – from both sides – have always had disastrous consequences in tourism.

In order to confirm the above statement, we offer three examples, which unfortunately affected Romanian tourism, on either short or long terms:

1. The Kosovo case. It is well known that during the military conflict in the spring – summer of 1999 from Kosovo – historical region of Serbia – appeared some information in some countries, including Romania, which instructed people that the effects of pollution as a result of the bombing going on, mainly chemical pollution, were major, and that they would be most serious in the area of the Romanian and Bulgarian sea shore. These information were intended mainly for the biggest tourists generating countries for the Black Sea shore area. The tendentious information being received, its effects were felt immediately, and these were the drastic decrease in number of tourists on the sea shore.

In this case of misinformation were involved some of the Romanian television stations and publications, without prior analysis of the real situation in the area, an analysis which would have shown us that:

- a) the attacks against Kosovo and Yugoslavia started mainly from Italy (where the planes took off) and in a very small measure from plane carriers;
- b) the distance separating the targeted areas – meaning Kosovo and Yugoslavia – and the Italian sea shore of Adriatic with its well known resorts, such as Rimini, Ancona, and its touristic attractions: Venetian, Verona and even Rome is considerably smaller than the distance between the target area and Constanta, Mamaia, Varna, Golden Sands, etc.
- c) at approximately the same distance from Kosovo and Yugoslavia, or even smaller in some cases, we find well-known touristic regions and cities from Greece and Turkey. The same goes for Croatia, Slovenia, Austria and Hungary.
- d) yet all of these places except Romania and Bulgaria were supposedly not affected by the bombing of Kosovo and Yugoslavia. What this is all about is quite clear.

2) The case of northern and southern Romanian Sea shore pollution in June 1999.

Exactly in the period when potential Romanian, but also foreign tourists were about to get their tickets for the seashore, in a way that cannot be defined as coincidental or disinterested, on some TV stations and in the pages of some publications began a campaign announcing without discernment that the Romanian sea shore is filled with polluting materials, together with some striking statements of some alleged tourists.

There are some facts which, although well known, must be recalled at this moment:

- a) in any place in the world where there is human activity, there is pollution;
- b) almost every seashore in the world -- of course, in different proportions -- is polluted. Some of them, meaning those which are situated in the vicinity of military or biological testing areas or those close to polluting industrial areas are even more polluted than the rest. Yet they remain opened for tourism.
- c) the Romanian seashore has been polluted with polluting materials at some moments and on specific locations, but never has the situation degenerated or has been lost control of, as was the case with some of the other seashores in the world.
- d) in June 1999, in approximately two locations on the seashore, one of which close to the area known as "2 Mai", some small polluting materials polluted areas appeared, but the situation has been put under control, and the consequences removed. On other few locations, a larger than usual quantity of brown algae appeared, which misled some people, who immediately started a violent attack, saying that the entire Romanian shore was polluted.

In reality, the beach and the connected areas around the resorts of Neptun, Olimp, Saturn, Venus, N&S Eforie and even Mamaia have never been touched, although the "information" said otherwise.

The causes leading to such a situation are easy to see and they have nothing to do with professionalism or the minimum amount of patriotism any Romanian should have for his country.

3) Finally, the third problem we wish to analyze is that created by the false and tendentious information which claimed that vacations in Greece, Turkey, Italy would be cheaper than those spent in Romania, either on the seashore or in the mountain resorts.

Such statements were recently made by a number of publications in Romania, as well as by some TV and radio programs, which all contribute to the spreading of an obvious lie. They base their statement on the following:

- a) starting from false pre-requisites and incomplete and incomparable data, they arrive at false conclusions;
- b) not taking into consideration the indirect expenses that any tourist does during his or her vacation, and which surpasses many times the direct expenses;
- c) the motivation of travelling abroad is not always related to its cost, but to its exoticism, tourist's hobbies, and the desire to meet other cultures.

The analysis of some comparable statistical data related to the accommodation prices per day for a tourist in some resorts in Romania and abroad show us a normal situation.

Do these people who make such statements know how many indignities and offenses are the Romanian tourists subject in order to get a travelling visa? The necessary file for the embassy alone costs over two million lei (consisting of new passport, old passport or certificate from the office of passports, legalized copy from the employee's card, certificate employer, bank account certificate of at least 500\$, copy of the house papers, car, land, photos). Then there are the expenses for the visa taxes, medical insurance, transportation, interview at the embassy, border-passing taxes, and so on. Now we understand how it happens that the cost of travelling abroad is extremely high.

Finally, on the same line of misinformation we found certain information referring to the sun eclipse on 11th of August 1999, when the so-called effects of pollution from Kosovo, the seashore pollution case and so on were re-discussed. Thus, what was thought to be a success of the Romanian tourism in 1999 proved to be almost a complete failure.

4) Who is responsible for what happened? We, the Romanians, never understood that we are in a fierce competition with other countries and with companies from abroad and in such a battle there is no time for moral issues. The direct interest of large travel agencies from abroad always comes first, and for that purpose, modifying reality to take over clients is not a problem.

That there are companies and associates outside our country willing to limit Romanian tourism is something that we cannot doubt. It seems they found sufficient elements to sustain them from inside our country, elements becoming aggressive when motivated financially.

First of all, for transmitting false information, unverified and not sufficiently analyzed in the described context, or which rely on deductions, are guilty all those who, in the written press, on radio or TV, spread such information, as well as the institutions to which they belong to.

Second, there is the direct guilt of lack of interest or pale, superficial involvement of the representatives of tourism, of various institutions in tourism, of the companies owning hotels, companies which had great losses because of these misinformation.

In a decisive manner, immediately and altogether, all of these factors should have sued all those who, intentionally or not, broke the rules of media deontology. Had the guilty ones been found and punished, such events would become improbable in the future.

References

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