

COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE COMPETITIVENESS OF TOURISM IN ROMANIA AND THE EU

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

At the level of the European Union, tourism occupies an important place, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises, and its contribution to the development of the economy differs greatly between the different areas of Europe. In rural areas located at a considerable distance from urban centers, tourism is often the main source of income for the population in that area and the main sector that can ensure adequate employment.

In a market economy, achieving high levels of competitiveness is mainly the responsibility of companies, but public authorities can, in turn, support this process by ensuring a favourable economic environment. In the specialized literature, there is the opinion that the policies that have the direct aim of increasing "competitiveness" overestimate the effect of external competition on the generation of economic growth, which seems to be much more strongly influenced by internal factors and other economic policies than those that directly aim improving competitiveness.

The tourism and travel industry represents a sector with its own identity in a dynamic evolution. At the level of a country, the upward evolution of this sector contributes to the increase in the level of employment, the increase in the national income and can improve the balance of payments.

The situation of a national economy is revealed by the analysis of factor determinants that show the position of a country from the perspective of the production factors it needs to compete in a certain industry. In contrast to the traditional theories of classical and neoclassical origin that gave the greatest importance to the endowment with natural factors of production, the modern economic theory of competitive advantages shows that the determining element for a country to be competitive consists in the creation and innovation of new factors or the improvement the existing ones.

Keywords : competitiveness, tourism, national economy

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INTRODUCTION

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A competitive country creates its wealth through work, talent and organization and thus comes to possess a productive and creative potential that makes it independent of material resources. This statement is supported by the example of the most competitive countries in the

world. All these countries are constantly creating wealth, not only in terms of the financial earnings of their citizens, but also in terms of social, educational and political infrastructure. (Croitoru, 2011, Volume XVIII).

The territory of Romania presents a wide variety of historical cultural values - folk art, ethnography, folklore, traditions, historical vestiges - a harmonious natural setting, with a varied and picturesque landscape background. All these are values of Romanian rural tourism in a special way.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The methods used in this study were different: the historical method, the comparative method, the sociological method, the logical method and the analytical one, their aim was the systematic analysis of the information selected from the sources studied in order to develop personal points of view and conclusions about the stated objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

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When this happens, a cycle of wealth is initiated that leads to an upward spiral of competitiveness. Without this generation of wealth and its decentralization to the whole society, a downward spiral occurs, the result being that non-competitive countries become even less able to compete on the global market. So, behind competitiveness is hidden a simple truth: competitiveness means more than being rich, it means a systematic process of wealth creation.

In one of his fundamental works, "The competitive advantage of nations", Michael Porter (1982) (Porter M., 1990, p. 72) synthesizes a model capable of explaining how national economies influence the ability of firms to identify and maintain competitive advantages on international markets. In this context, Porter's model identifies the determining factors of competitiveness, starting from the existence of four categories of elements, which form the already famous "Porter's diamond":

- ✓ Endowment with production factors: human resources, natural resources, technical, market knowledge, capital and infrastructure.
- ✓ The conditions of the request, respectively, its level and structure, its degree of sophistication, the ability to formulate anticipatory needs.
- ✓ The supplying and adjacent industries, through their level of development and competitiveness.
- ✓ The strategies and organizational structures of the companies, the competitive climate (rivalry between them).

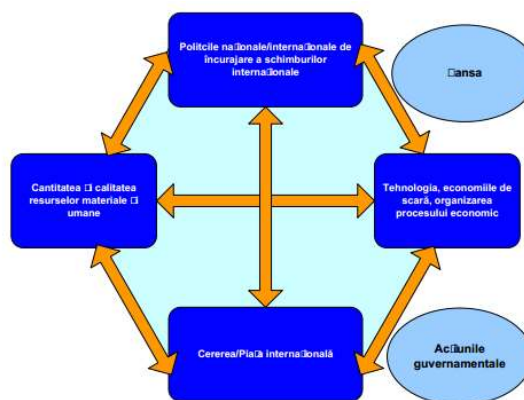


Figure 1 Determinants of national competitive advantages

The situation of a national economy is revealed by the analysis of factor determinants that show the position of a country from the perspective of the production factors it needs to compete in a certain industry. In contrast to the traditional theories of classical and neoclassical origin that gave the greatest importance to the endowment with natural factors of production,

the modern economic theory of competitive advantages shows that the determining element for a country to be competitive consists in the creation and innovation of new factors or the improvement the existing ones.

The international competitiveness of a national economy depends decisively on the strategy, the structure of companies and the promotion of competition, on the way they are organized and managed, on the objectives pursued and the strategies applied. Competitive advantages can arise from the differences between countries present in the training, objectives, work style and approaches of managers and from the way in which these differences are fruitful by coordinating the company's objectives with its stakeholders (owners, shareholders, workers, managers, etc.). An important role in this respect belongs to the legislative framework, which through its regulations can encourage the existence of a competitive market on the internal level. Competition between companies proves, most of the times, to be more beneficial to everyone than cooperation strategies.

From a methodological point of view, the Tourism Competitiveness Index (ICT) aims to evaluate the elements that ensure the development of the tourism sector in different countries through three categories of variables that affect the competitiveness of tourism at the global level.

These categories are evaluated by means of three subordinate ICT sub-indices:

- ✓ the legislative and regulatory framework affecting the tourism sector.

The elements evaluated within this sub-index refer to those aspects that depend directly or indirectly on the political climate and institutional environment specific to each country;

- ✓ environment and infrastructure;
- ✓ the natural, cultural and human resources involved in tourism activities.

Each of these sub-indices is composed of a number of pillars that define the essential elements in the analysis of tourism competitiveness. These elements are: specific laws and rules; environmental sustainability; safety and security; health and hygiene; the priority given to tourism; air transport infrastructure; land transport infrastructure; tourist infrastructure; IT&C infrastructure; price competitiveness; human resource; affinity for tourism and travel; natural resources and cultural resources. To these is added a last component that has become more and more important in the last period - climate changes. Each of these pillars is, in turn, made up of a number of individual variables. The data set used to estimate these pillars includes both the data obtained from the annual statistical surveys carried out by the World Economic Forum, quantitative data obtained from sources accessible to the public, from international organizations and from institutions and experts in the field of tourism. Also, the statistical study is carried out among the executive directors and business leaders who make decisions in this field. In addition, the ICT methodology is not limited to giving scores and points to the tourism sector in various countries, but aims to create a common evaluation framework that allows the comparison between the performances obtained in this field.

In the ranking made on the basis of ICT, in 2011, Romania ranks 63 out of 139 countries, in evolution compared to the previous ranking, made in 2009, when it was in 66th place. Switzerland ranks first, and the last – Chad. Romania obtained the best score on the safety and security pillar, 5.1 points out of 7 possible, this score being somewhat higher than that of the first place holder. (Croitoru, 2011, Volume XVIII)

At the level of the European Union, tourism occupies an important place, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises, and its contribution to the development of the economy differs greatly between the different areas of Europe. In rural areas located at a considerable distance from urban centers, tourism is often the

main source of income for the population in that area and the main sector that can ensure adequate employment.

This phenomenon is visible, especially, in the island countries of Europe, coastal regions (especially in southern Europe) and alpine regions. The dynamics of the tourism sector confirm the fact that the central and eastern European states represent a viable source for the revival of European tourism. Statistical data show that Europe has the most sought-after tourist destinations, being the most visited region in the world. The wealth of cultural and natural resources, the quality of the infrastructure, the variety of geographical areas are probably some of the reasons why Europe holds this position. At the same time, the expansion of the European Union significantly improved the tourist potential of the region by increasing the cultural variety and introducing new destinations into the tourist circuit.

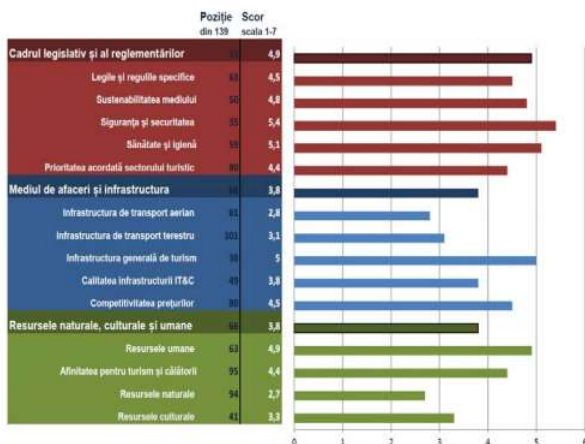


Figure 2 Tourism competitiveness index in the case of Romania

The economic crisis has significantly affected the tourism sector, this is reflected both in a decrease in the number of foreign tourists and in the income obtained from them by a country, as well as in the transformation of international tourism into domestic tourism. The second phenomenon directly and significantly affected Romanian tourism, where the number of vacations spent by residents in 2010 decreased by 11.1%(3) compared to 2010, especially when the percentage of foreign tourists in the total tourists was, at the level of

2010, at only 15.4%(4). After two consecutive years of contraction, the European tourism sector began to show signs of recovery starting from 2010 when the nights spent in hotels increased by 2.8% compared to 2009(5). However, this was not true for Romania either, which continued the negative trend, recording in 2010 an 8.7% reduction in nights spent in hotels compared to 2009.

In the context of European tourism, Romania occupies the 34th position out of 42 positions, one of its direct competitors, Bulgaria, being seven positions higher, on the 27th place. Moreover, European countries occupy very good positions in the ICT world ranking under the conditions in which most of them were seriously affected by the economic crisis, and both the investments and the revenues obtained in the tourism sector experienced a significant decrease (Ringbeck, Pietsch, 2009, pp. 32-42).

Moreover, an analysis of the impact of the economic crisis, in the period 2007-2009, demonstrates that the most important tourist destinations in Europe such as Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Greece or Ireland were at the epicenter of the crisis, one of the only beneficiaries of after the crisis, from the European area, being Bulgaria. In the period 2009-2011, Romania managed to climb three positions in the ICT ranking, a fact that can be, among other things, a proof of the increase in the efficiency of communication in tourism.

Poziția României în raport cu competitorii regionali										
Ordine	Țara	ICT			Cadrul legislativ și de reglementare		Mediul de afaceri și infrastructura		Resursele naturale, culturale și umane	
		Poziția în Europa	Poziția globală	Punctaj obținut	Poziția globală	Punctajul obținut	Poziția globală	Punctajul obținut	Poziția globală	Punctajul obținut
1	Republica Cehă	22	31	4,77	26	5,26	37	4,56	31	4,48
2	Slovenia	22	33	4,64	29	5,19	33	4,7	53	4,03
3	Croația	24	34	4,61	42	5,02	36	4,58	43	4,23
4	Muntenegru	25	36	4,56	32	5,15	49	4,15	36	4,38
5	Ungaria	26	38	4,54	24	4,29	45	4,28	48	4,06
6	Bulgaria	27	48	4,39	54	4,79	44	4,32	51	4,05
7	Polonia	28	49	4,38	49	4,86	65	3,81	30	4,48
8	Slovacia	31	54	4,35	39	5,05	57	3,96	52	4,04
99	România	34	63	4,17	51	4,85	66	3,8	66	3,84
10	Serbia	38	82	3,85	67	4,57	84	3,39	94	3,6
11	Ucraina	39	85	3,83	64	4,63	76	3,53	118	3,33
12	Moldova	42	99	3,6	68	4,57	98	3,11	129	3,12

Figure 3

Regarding its direct competitors, neighbouring countries or located in the same region, it can be observed that Romania is in a rather unfavourable position, being clearly

ahead of both its neighbour to the west, Hungary, and its direct competitor on all tourist markets, Bulgaria. The result is all the more interesting as it can be noted that some of the countries ahead of Romania (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) cannot benefit, for example, from the opportunities offered by a coastline that can be exploited from the point of view of tourist view.

CONCLUSIONS

Regarding its direct competitors, neighboring countries or located in the same region, it can be observed that Romania is in a rather unfavorable position, being clearly ahead of both its neighbor to the west, Hungary, and its direct competitor on all tourist markets, Bulgaria. The result is all the more interesting as it can be noted that some of the countries ahead of Romania (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) cannot benefit, for example, from the opportunities offered by a coastline that can be exploited from the point of view of tourist view.

For our country, the need to develop tourism resides in the fact that Romania is a country with a tourist vocation, benefiting from a valuable and varied natural and anthropogenic potential, harmoniously dispersed throughout the territory, but insufficiently and improperly capitalized where 8 major forms of tourism are practiced, the largest share returning to seaside, mountain, weekend, spa tourism.

A possible solution would be for the agritourism promotion strategy to include new directions and elements, in the sense of: intensifying and adapting it to the current competition conditions of the international market through: promotion actions, strengthening the image of the Romanian agritourism offer and effective use of improving the image of Romania in the world through the new media channels.

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