

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE DESIGN OF SPECIFIC TOURISM PRODUCTS FOR THE TOURISM DESTINATION ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT: *Romania, as tourism destination with its component micro-destinations (Muntenia, Oltenia, Banat - Crișana, Transylvania, Bucovina, Maramureș, Moldavia and Dobrogea), possesses many tourism attractions and at the same time has a real tourism potential. The fact that it is not included among the Europe's „valuable” destinations represents a loss both for its inhabitants and for Europeans in general, too. One of the reasons is the lack of an image consolidated by identity elements or / and simply the lack of image that would represent the starting point for development of appropriate tourism products (developing a strategy). This paper proposes, starting from the image perceived by the inhabitants about their own destination – based on the example of Transylvania – to emphasize the importance and also the role of the destination image in developing the main directions of actions and, especially, in developing the strategy for the specific tourism products.*

KEY WORDS: *tourism destination; tourism product; tourism destination image; strategy.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is often said that one essential thing for people is not "living", but "travel". Tourism is one of the most dynamic economic sectors in most countries and at the same time, is one of the noblest of human occupations; Tourism is one of the most promising industries of this century (Ahn, 2009).

Thus, in 2010 the travel industry (WTTM) achieved 9.3% of the global GDP and provided about 236 million jobs. For 2010, the same organization predicted for Romania a direct contribution to GDP of this sector of 1.9% and providing jobs to about 267000 (World Tourism Organization UNWTO, 2011). The year 2011 is expected to continue increasing but at a somewhat slower pace. According to the latest barometer of the World Tourism Organization, international tourism continues to grow, in the first two months of 2011 it was recorded an increase of almost 5% in the number of arrivals of foreign tourists (in EEC it was recorded a growth of 12%.) (Daily Business Journal, 2011).

Globalization creates real competition and excellence in business, tourists require complex products and services, consisting of elements provided by different companies as a result of different travel motivations and specific requirements arising there from. In the present context created by the occurrence of new trends in the current business environment (accelerated globalization, high automation, innovation, advanced telecommunications), tourism industry has evolved from a traditional business, to the need for adopting new sources of innovation, collaboration and value creation (Shahbazipour, 2008).

2. TOURISM DESTINATION – COMBINATION OF TOURISM SERVICES AND EXPERIENCES

Tourism destination can be considered as a whole (package) of tangible and intangible components, a combination of travel products and services providing an integrated experience to the tourists. The package of products and services is perceived by the tourists as an experience available at a certain price. Tourism destination includes basically the following components: elements of tourist attraction (natural, cultural, architectural and industrial heritage, social attractions, sports, etc..) facilities and services offered by providers in the hospitality industry (accommodation, food services, transport services, shopping and other services), access routes to their destination (infrastructure, transport equipment, operational factors, government regulations), destination image and the price paid by the tourist (Middleton, et al., 2009).

Companies in the tourism industry are currently facing with increasingly demanding tourists, which basically requires them to offer innovative products and memorable experiences. A truly memorable tourist experience is that which comes from tourism companies showing their concern for visitor / tourist, showing that they "care" about the tourists. Companies in the hospitality industry, delivering products of value to the tourist are those who understand that the tourist is truly the most important

entity of any business. These companies believe that the current tourists are a rare and very valuable resource, not just a source of income.

To provide competitive products, companies from the hospitality industry must consider the success factors for innovation: the establishment / selection of the appropriate target market, but also the analysis / evaluation of the tourism services based on the „tangible” quality, and on the behaviour, commitment and training of personnel (human resources management).

The only sustainable advantage that any organization in the hospitality industry can create is to deliver memorable tourist experience. To achieve this aim, companies in the industry must strive to understand in detail the tourism product purchase decision process in a tourism destination. Also, this effort must be based on deep understanding of customer needs and desires, and on appreciation of how the company defines its value.

Provided products and services must be exactly the solutions that tourist expects. Tourism companies must be able to look beyond the tourist behaviour or the purchase of the product or service. To enhance tourist experience, these companies must take into account the tourist opinion (tourism companies which are not doing this, are losing the chance to increase the number of satisfied and loyal visitors); to act to ensure consistency (companies must ensure that the information received by the traveller during an interaction is not forgotten in the next step); to be open with the tourists (through increased flexibility, extending the working hours, increase transparency for tourists); to customize products and experiences offered to tourists (companies must be careful in assessing customization costs against the benefits from sales, taking into account the long-term value growth by improving the tourist experience); to revise (change) employees' attitudes and behaviour (employees actions are usually the most important actions in the tourist experience); to design the complete tourist experience (organizations must plan and design the complete tourists experience and do not let things go by themselves) (adapted from Rațiu & Zaharia, 2009).

Tourism destination image is not necessarily based on the direct experience of visitors (tourists) but it is always a serious motivation for the acquisition of the tourism product. In the mind of the tourist, tourism destination image is closely linked to his expectations about the experience he expect to have in that specific destination.

Each tourism destination has its own image (most often based on historical events) and a primary goal of the tourism destination marketing is to strengthen the destination image (or, where appropriate, changing or improving it) in order to influence the expectations of potential visitors (tourists).

Visitor's return to a tourism destination (which derives from the satisfaction felt at the end of his visit) largely depends on the expectations that he had at the destination, on the image he previously had about the destination and on how he perceived the performance at the destination (Pike, 2002).

The image of the tourism destination image plays a key role to differentiate the destination in this highly competitive market. Studies conducted by various specialists in tourism shows that the information provided to the tourists is an important means of training and promotion of tourism destination image and, of course, understanding the process of choosing a tourist destination by the potential tourists. Thus, both formal

sources of information (brochures) and informal (relatives and friends) will significantly influence the process of creation the image of the tourism destination and play a special role in the analysis of tourists' purchasing behaviour (Molina et al., 2010). Due to the impact that the tourism destination image has both on the tourism offer (market positioning of the tourism product, product promotion) and on tourism demand (tourist behaviour, process of making the purchase decision), we can conclude that the tourism destination image is an important aspect to be taken into account in developing a competitive strategy of the tourism destination (both from managerial and marketing perspectives).

3. ROMANIA: TOURISM DESTINATION, SPECIFIC IMAGES AND TOURISM PRODUCTS

Developing a competitive strategy in today's global business environment requires delivering of tourism products adequately coordinated for each tourism region. Creating a long term competitive advantage for the tourism destination Romania requires a strategic positioning of the tourism product in order to achieve the strategic objectives and a unique image which is grounded on creating and providing superior value to tourists (Stanković & Dukić, 2009, p. 25). The concept of „value” is not new, it is already known the term (concept) of „value chain” created by Porter in order to identify and explain the activities that create / destroy the value. It should be mentioned specialists' attention to find new methods of value creation and delivery in order to achieve a better positioning of the tourism destination on the target market.

Due to the large number of local stakeholders involved in the production and distribution of the tourism products, designing a competitive strategy for the tourism destination Romania represents an extremely difficult and complex approach, more so as it can be seen, from tourism marketing perspective, as a „summmum” of micro-destinations (brands) (Stăncioiu, Teodorescu, et al., 2011). In this respect, it is necessary to balance the strategic objectives of all parties involved to ensure the sustainability of local resources. A competitive strategy for the tourism destination Romania is able to ensure the optimization of tourism effects and the achievement of strategic objectives for all stakeholders (Buhalis, 2000).

Romania is one of the most attractive tourism destinations in Europe and has a great potential based on both natural resources and human capital. The tourism destination Romania has seven tourism sights listed in the UNESCO world heritage (one less than Austria or Hungary), which represent favourite destinations for the cultural tourism, like the monasteries of Moldavia, the Horezu monastery, the fortified churches of Transylvania, the Dacian fortress from Orăștie, the historical centre of Sighișoara and the wooden churches of Maramureș. Like anywhere in the world, the UNESCO stamp represents a clear indication for the tourism sight attractiveness and maps out precisely the most important tourism routes. (adapted from Purcărea, et al., 2010, pp.67). Analyzing foreign tourists' preferences regarding Romania it can be concluded that American tourists prefer cultural tours, Transylvania and Dracula tours; British tourists prefer cultural tours, Maramureș, Bucovina and the mountain resorts; French, German and Austrian tourists prefer cultural tours and the Black Sea resorts.

All historical regions of contemporary Romania are recognized as regions with an important tourism potential, with many natural, artistic, cultural and historical attractions, providing unique and unforgettable experiences to the visitors who would like to return to the destination.

The results of a study (Stăncioiu, Băltescu, et al., 2011) conducted from October 2010 to January 2011 among residents of the historical regions of Romania (Muntenia, Transylvania, Oltenia, Banat, Crișana, Bucovina, Maramureș, Moldavia and Dobrogea) show that Romania can become a competitive niche tourism destination.

Assuming that the macro-destination Romania and its brand encompasses under its umbrella all the regions as micro-destinations, the aim of this study was to identify the perceptions of the Romanian residents about the tourism products in each micro-destination, and also find out to what extent the perceptions of residents from different regions of Romania regarding each region may help in the construction of the destination image, as the first step in defining the strategy for the destination.

We take as an example the micro-destination Transylvania, the central part of Romania, respectively the inter-Carpathian region, which is geographically confined as follows: by the Southern Carpathians (bordering on Muntenia region), by the Eastern Carpathians (bordering on Moldavia region), by the Western Carpathians – Apuseni Mountains – (bordering on Banat – Crișana region) and by Maramureș region to the North.

The results of the mentioned study highlight that in the micro-destination Transylvania it can be developed two tourism products for the segments of young people aged 20 – 24 years, actual and potential tourists, respectively the *leisure, relaxation and recreation tourism* and the *cultural tourism*.

Taking into consideration the regions of origin of the respondents, the figures look as follows:

1. in case of Muntenia as region of origin: 53.6% of respondents have chosen the *leisure, relaxation and recreation tourism* as the representative form of tourism for the Transylvania region and 27.7% have opted for the *cultural tourism*;
2. in case of Oltenia as region of origin, 52.2% of respondents have chosen the *leisure, relaxation and recreation tourism* and 14.7% have opted for the *cultural tourism*;
3. in case of Banat-Crișana as region of origin, 51.5% of respondents have chosen the *leisure, relaxation and recreation tourism* and 18.8% have opted for the *cultural tourism*;
4. in case of Transylvania as region of origin, 51.4% of respondents have chosen for their own region the *leisure, relaxation and recreation tourism* and 15.6% opted for the *cultural tourism*;
5. in case of Bucovina as region of origin, 48.5% of respondents have chosen the *leisure, relaxation and recreation tourism* and 15.4% have opted for the *cultural tourism*;

6. in case of Moldavia and Maramureș as regions of origin, 48.9% of respondents have chosen the *leisure, relaxation and recreation tourism* and 29.2% have opted for the *cultural tourism*;
7. in case of Dobrogea as region of origin, 52.2% of respondents have chosen the *leisure, relaxation and recreation tourism* and 21.1% have opted for the *cultural tourism*.

The particularly attractive natural environment, created by the Carpathian Mountains, and also the historical artifacts of a great importance and beauty (Bran castle, the Sarmisegetuza Regia sanctuaries, Huniazilor castle, Deva fortress, Sighișoara city, Râșnov fortress, Alba Carolina fortress, Carolina obelisk etc.), but also the urban settlements (Sibiu, Sighișoara, Brașov, Cluj-Napoca, Alba Iulia, Poiana Brașov, Predeal, Târgu Mureș, Covasna, Sovata, Mediaș, Tușnad, Sângeorz Băi, Făgăraș, Miercurea Ciuc, Deva, Ocna Sibiului, Sibiel) with various cultural – artistic institutions (the Black Church, the Cathedral of National Reunion and of Coronation, the Roman Catholic Cathedral, the fortified Churches, the monastery of Sâmbăta de Sus) determined the respondents, regardless of the region of origin, to opt for the *leisure, relaxation and recreation tourism* and for the *cultural tourism*, as representative forms of tourism for the micro-destination Transylvania.

Consequently, Romania as tourism destination may become equally a mass tourism destination, a niche destination or a specialized destination. In this respect, in order to become a successful tourism destination, three points are essential: creating a coherent product aiming to generate profits, achieving a flexible strategy and cooperation between the private sector and the local authorities. Romania could become either a mass destination, which requires more flexibility regarding the prices, either a niche destination, using a very aggressive marketing strategy, or could adopt a specialized tourism scenario (eg. as a destination for young people, for pensioners etc.).

In this respect, for the tourism destination Romania a series of actions should be taken which must be aimed, on the one hand, to identify the key partners that could be engaged in more effective tourism activities, to attract new markets (visitors), and, on the other hand, to prolong sojourn for existing tourist, extend market visibility in terms of product (accommodation, visitor information centres, tourist attractions, etc.) and better train of tourism operators.

Other actions that are aimed to create a strong brand are: the development of programs through cooperation of the central and regional organizations and the tourism businesses, considering both the main markets and the emergent ones (niche markets practicing various forms of tourism: historical tourism, religious tourism, medical tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, etc.); market segmentation for the tourism destination Romania (in order to create strong brands - country, region, companies, workers, services or products brands); tourism product development in each region; increasing diversity of high quality tourism experiences, offering a variety of natural attractions, cultural experiences, adventure, and various accommodation possibilities - hotel, motel, hostel, pension, camping etc; achieving an adequate positioning through a strong positive image, developing promotion actions, emphasizing the role of public relations in tourism (adapted from Purcărea, et al., 2010, pp.72-73).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Global competitiveness we are facing today creates many challenges and problems for achieving a sustainable competitive advantage in the hospitality industry (adapted from Stanković & Dukić, 2009, p.23). There are obvious problems regarding the demand management and the creation of a unique image for a tourism destination like Romania. The involvement of a variety of organizations in designing and marketing of tourism products makes it difficult to harmonize the different interests and objectives of these organizations. On the other hand, these companies enter into various types of partnerships in order to achieve individual and common effects. Consequently, the harmonization of strategic objectives of stakeholders and the increase of global economic benefits should be the most important strategic objectives of organizations of tourism, which requires creating value for all interested partners through the development of an integrated strategy to help creating and promoting a unique image of Romania as tourism destination.

A competitive strategy for the tourism destination Romania requires an appropriate management of the tourism destination brand and of the tourist experience, but also the active involvement of internal and external partners in the planning and implementation of the strategy (adapted from Kozak & Baloglu, 2010).

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