

SPATIAL TRENDS, CHANGES AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN TOURISM AFTER THE MILLENNIUM IN ROMANIA: TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY?

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Abstract

Tourism is considered as one of the most important economic sectors, providing opportunities both for economy and development as it accounts for 5% of the GDPs in countries worldwide. This fact emphasizes the significance of the industry in Romania, as well, although tourism makes up only 1.9% of the Romanian GDP. During the research, our objectives were to examine the correlation between the economic development level and tourism; their spatial relationship. The results revealed that despite the increasing number of tourist arrivals, one of the biggest problems of Romanian tourism is the decreasing number of guest nights. In our opinion, this phenomenon seriously threatens the sustainability of capacities, which can be a key issue of future tourism development policies.

Keywords

tourism, economic development, Romania

JEL Classification

R1

Introduction

Since 2008, international tourism makes up 8% of the total export incomes and 5% of the GDPs in countries worldwide (Lau, Oh and Hu, 2008). The industry is considered as one of the most important economic sectors, providing opportunities both for economy and development.

According to the data of the World Travel and Tourism Council, the contribution of travel and tourism sector to Gross Domestic Product and employment exceeds the global average in many developing countries (Abounoori, Akbari and Ghavamipour, 2011).

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) states that tourism represents the world's largest industry, generating billions of development of tourism is considered as a priority economic

option with regards to the dollars' income and millions of jobs every year (www.unwto.org). In Romania, the existing potential of tourism is outstanding.

The strategic economic importance of tourism lies in its contribution (direct and indirect) to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Tourism makes up 1.9% of the Romanian GDP, a rate that clearly indicates the importance of tourism industry in the Romanian economy (Surugiu, Freni and Surugiu, 2009; Zaman et al., 2010, Moraru, 2012). Nevertheless, Romanian tourism itself is not very successful in comparison with its direct competitors. The contribution of tourism to the Gross Domestic Product in Romania is much less than the input of tourism to the GDP of Austria (4.3%) or Hungary (4.6%) (Moraru, 2012). In 2011, the country was ranked at 34th place on the list of international tourist arrivals.

In Europe, Romania is one of the countries where the number of arrivals has been increasing constantly in the past years. The only exception is the years of the economic crisis, but the same tendency appeared in these years throughout the whole continent and worldwide. However, the 10% rate of Romania's fallback is a significant ratio. (Figure no.1). The value for International tourism, number of arrivals in Romania was 7,686,489 in 2012. In response to the changes in the volume of tourism, the capacity of the supply side has also transformed. The changes in the number of bed places almost followed the changes of guest numbers and its tendencies. Despite the growing number of tourists, the number of guest nights has been decreasing drastically since 2008 (Figure no.2).. After reaching the bottom (16,051,135) with a 23% reduction rate in 2010, this number has started to rise again. This phenomenon was caused by the economic crisis, however, it is also clear that the number of guest nights were constantly falling at the end of the decade, despite the expansion of capacities. Figure no.1 shows that the number of international tourists in Romania increased especially after 2006, corresponding to Romania's accession to the EU (2007) and Sibiu being the cultural capital of Europe (2007). The vast majority of international tourists in Romania are from the EU and other European countries, while the number of visitors from third countries is significantly lower (Bucurescu, 2012). In 2008-2009, the number of domestic and international tourists both decreased, coinciding with the economic crisis. This phenomenon, e.g. the effects of the global crisis on the tourism of Romania, was discussed by many authors (Costea, 2009; Stănciulescu and Micu, 2009). With regards to international visitor spending, Romania is ranked at 54th place among all countries worldwide. According to the latest statistics, the total value of international expenditures (current USD) in Romania was \$2,317,000,000 in 2011.

Over the past 12 years, the value of this indicator has fluctuated between \$2,409,000,000 in 2008 and \$428,000,000 in 2000 (UNWTO). Because international tourist spending counts as export income, it greatly improves the balance of payments. Nevertheless, statistics also suggest that tourists with higher spending willingness tend to choose other destinations than Romania: it is also indicated by the country's 34th place on the list of arrivals, but being only at 54th place when it comes to spending.

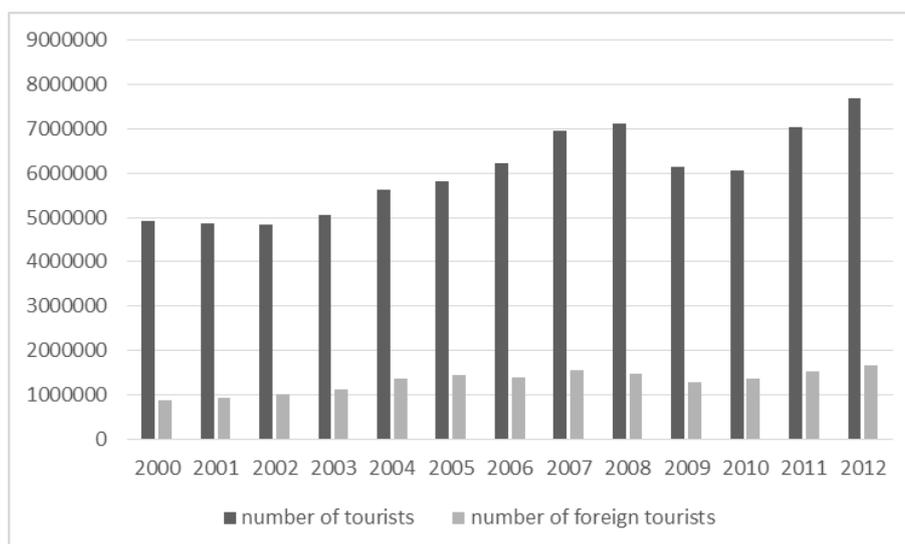


Fig. no. 1: Numbers of tourist arrivals in Romania since 2000
 Source: <https://statistici.insse.ro>

In 2010, the distribution of places of origin among the total of 7,498 million arrivals shows that 94.67% of the total arrivals was from Europe, and 59.43% of this percentage was from within the EU. When listing the countries of origin, Hungary is at 1st place (23.14%), followed by the Republic of Moldova (16.22%), Bulgaria (10.48%) and Ukraine (8,96%). This clearly indicates that the country mainly has visitors from the neighbouring countries. Tourism in Romania has significant regional differences (Figure no.3).

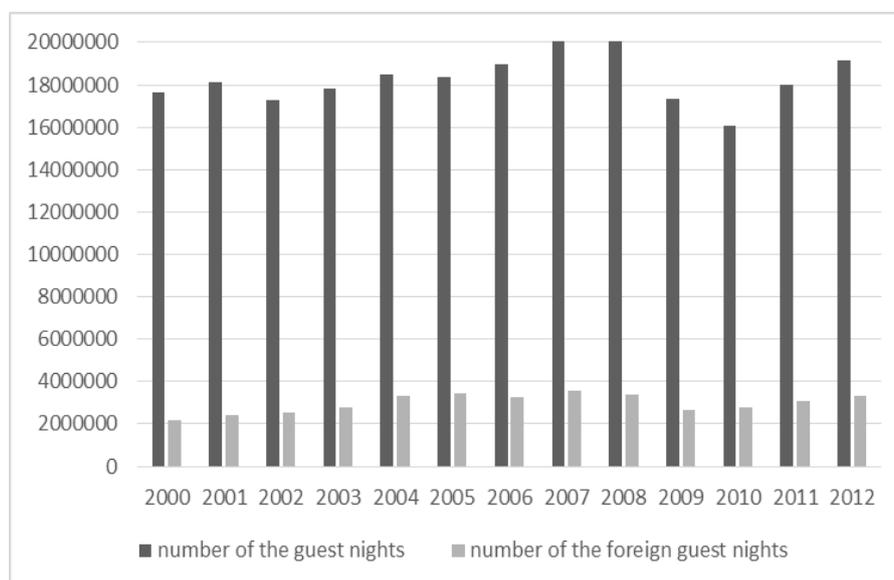


Fig. no. 2: Development of the number of guest nights in Romania since 2000
 Source: <https://statistici.insse.ro>

The most popular destinations are the Black Sea coastline, the Danube Delta, Bucharest and Brasov county – these places have the strongest dynamics, and the number of visitors has increased significantly over time in these areas. At ‘seaside’ and ‘mountain’ destinations, the rate of visitors has also increased, but at a slower rate, while at ‘spa’ destinations, a slight regression has taken place (Bucurescu, 2012). The above mentioned trends call for the examination of several problems, many of which our study focuses on. We have examined the correlation between the economic development level and tourism; their spatial relationship, and, in close relation with these, we have also studied the spatial concentration and characteristics of tourism.

We have reviewed the spatial changes in bed place capacities, i.e. which regions have increased their importance since the millennium, and how much they have strengthened their positions. We have also examined the possible reasons behind the drastic decrease of guest nights that occurred at the same time when the number of arrivals increased.

With the help of statistical methods, we wanted to reveal whether tourism indicators really typify the level of development; and if tourism indicators are to be considered as development indicators. Besides regional characteristics, we have also focused on the examination of temporal attributes and their spatial projection.

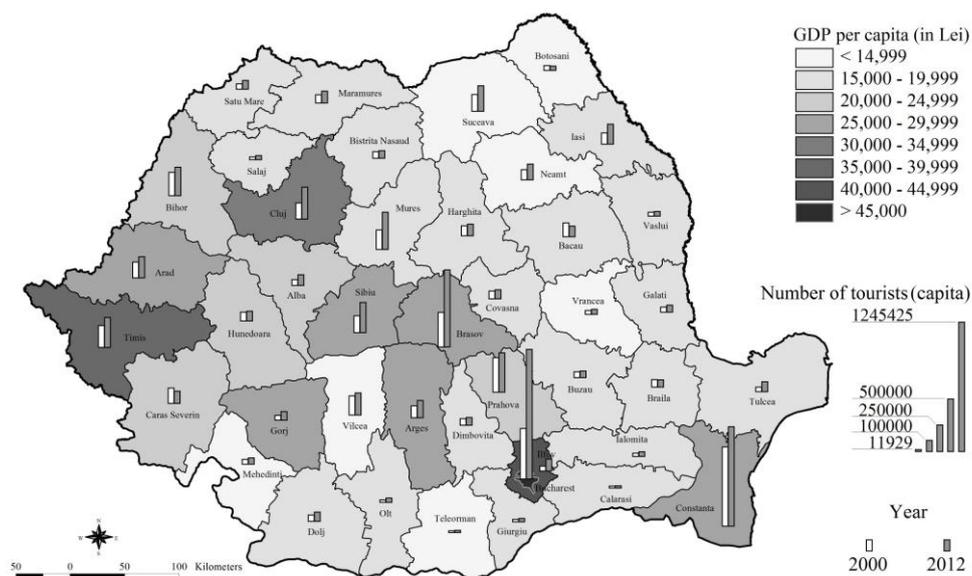


Fig. no. 3: Regional distribution of GDP and number of tourist in Romania
 Source: own edition based on <https://statistici.insse.ro>

Discussion

Tourism obviously exists in close relationship with regional development. The links between them are very complex. The complexity of their relationship is up to many factors: it depends on the regionalisation type of the given country; the typologies of the different regions (outlying and remote, intermediate or economically integrated); their economic

development level and tourism potential. The central government's willingness to play an active role in tourism development is also an important factor of regional tourism development (Lee and Chang, 2008).

Tourism industry has different effects on economic growth. Among other factors, tourism is a significant resource of foreign exchange income for many countries (McKinnon 1964, Michalkó, 2012). The income generated by tourism boosts the whole of the host economy and also stimulates investment willingness, therefore contributes to the financial growth of other sectors as well. To accelerate further economic growth, in some countries tourists are required to bring foreign currency with them – a minimum a daily rate is calculated for the whole length of their stay.

Conclusions

Tourism as a complex industry plays an outstandingly important role in Romania's economy, where the number of arrivals has been increasing constantly in the past years. In response to the changes in the volume of tourism, the capacity of the supply side has also transformed. However, when compared to its direct competitors, the sector is clearly lagging behind. Despite the significant growth in the number of visitors, the number of guest nights has decreased dramatically since 2008, and our analysis also revealed that there are significant regional differences between the different destination areas of the country.

Our paper aimed to explore the temporal and spatial distribution of the changes in Romania's tourism since the millennium. With the help of statistical methods, we wanted to reveal whether tourism indicators really typify the level of development; and if tourism indicators are to be considered as development indicators. We also tried to find out whether there is a connection between tourism and economic development; and if so, how strong is this relationship. We have reviewed the spatial changes in bed place capacities, i.e. which regions have increased their importance since the millennium, and how much they have strengthened their positions. Based on our results, the most popular destinations are 'seaside' and 'mountain destinations; of course, Bucharest, the capital is also a primary attraction, while in other parts of the country, both the number of visitors and the duration of their stay is decreasing. Our study aimed to explore these discrepancies in order to reveal possible solutions that can contribute to a balanced development of the tourism industry in Romania. Our results may provide a basis for further and more detailed analyses in the field of tourism and regional development, and also can help policy makers to locate the axes of future development planning.

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