Characterization of tourism activity from Central Region, Romania

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Abstract Tourism represents now undoubtedly a phenomenon that dominates the contemporary world, a profitable segment of the world economy, which is characterized through dynamics, multiple motivations and a variety of forms of expression. If at first tourism activity has a strong social character, in recent years, has become one of the most important economic factors. Currently the two correlative sides of tourism are closely correlated, tourism gaining an important social and economic role.

Material and Methods

To conduct this work was done extensive documentation in the field: books, reports, national and regional statistics, strategic development plans and has on base the analysis of economic indicators characterizing tourism activity.

Results

Located in the center of the country, the Central Region is characterized by a predominantly mountainous relief that made possible the development of tourism and witch found here old traditions and a high development potential.

The variety of natural resources existing within the region constitutes an important basis for economic development of the whole region and especially in the development of tourism activities.

Central Region is formed from six Counties (Alba, Brasov, Covasna, Harghita, Mures and Sibiu) being recognized through the variety of landforms, mostly mountainous, with high tourism potential. The relief of the area is the most important from the elements of natural potential of the region, with particular influence on human resources. Although it has a rich and varied tourism potential, in present only a part of this is capitalized. Through the development of various tourism activities, including rural tourism ones, in the Central Region, will be created a viable alternative to the region's economic development, especially of the rural area. The development of tourism activities will bring the development of other economic sectors, determining the multiplier effect of tourism at the local economy level. [5]

Having a high natural and anthropogenic tourism potential characterized by the variety of landforms, richness of the forest and a cultural heritage of a great value, the Central Region is a true tourist area with a long tradition in our country. Here we find resources for practicing various tourism forms, from mountainous tourism to spa tourism, cultural, ecumenical, sports, rural and even agrotourism.

Preserving authentic cultural richness, in original forms, can still be found in the villages of the region. Social and historical conditions that characterize this area of the country, made that Central Region to be an area in which Romanian spirituality interfered with the Hungarian and German ones, creating an original symbiosis. Preserving the traditions and specific customs of each inhabiting nation and their blend with the traditional Romanian ones made possible the development of new forms of tourism - rural tourism and its agrotourism variant. Thus, at the Central Region level were established many areas, in witch the agrotourism activity has known a rapidly and intense development: Bran-Moeciu - Fundata area (the most important agrotourist area of the country), MArginimea Sibiu area, Corund, Rimetea, Superior Valley of Aries, the Sacele area - Intorsura Buzau. [6]

With an intense tourist activity distributed throughout the year, the Central Region is the second tourist region of the country, after the South East Region. Here, tourism is the most dynamic economic branch, but has not yet reached the maximum rate of recovery of the tourism potential of the region.

Analysis of tourism offer

Tourism offer is represented by the natural and anthropic tourism resources, but also by the "created offer" meaning, material and technical basis of tourist accommodation structures. All these elements
of the offer have effect over the volume, structure and guidance departments of tourism demand. [1,2]

For tourist activity to take place must be present, in the studied area both of valuable tourist attractions and a proper technical infrastructure, enabling the smooth satisfaction of consumer needs.

In order that the demand to manifest strong on the market is required the provision of some quality services, practicing of appropriate prices and also the use of a skilled workforce. Thus, in practice it turned out that the lower value of tourism resources can be compensated by the high quality of benefits and through additional facilities in order to practice rest and recreation or leisure tourism.

The technical-material base specific to tourist accommodation units has in year 2012, a total number of 1526 accommodation units.

The structure of material and technical base of accommodation establishments, from the Central Region showing the predominance of agrotourist pensions (594) and the tourist ones (429). Also, we find 269 hotels, 109 villas and bungalows, 49 chalets, 29 hostels, 21 campgrounds and cottage type units, 19 camps and preschool students, six tourist stops and a holiday village. The distribution of tourist accommodation structures is different, by the component counties, Figure 1.

The distribution by counties of tourist accommodation establishments with accommodation function is uneven, the largest concentration being achieved in Brasov County with 42.3% from the total by region of tourist units, at the opposite pole being situated the Covasna County with only 6, 6% from the total.

An important indicator in analyzing tourism activity is the tourist density, which is calculated by reporting the number of accommodation units to the area unit.

The density of accommodation units, per area unit highlights the concentration degree of tourist accommodation structures with accommodation function. In the analyzed period there was an increase in the density of accommodation units, both nationally and in the region. In year 2012, the concentration degree of the accommodation units, at area unit, has a value of 4.49 units/100 km², value superior to those registered at national level, 2.45 units/100 km².

In the Central Region, analysis by counties, indicates the highest density value in Brasov County, 12.06 units/100 km² and lowest in Alba County, 1.81 units/100 km².

Technical and material base specific to tourist structures with accommodation function is partly outdated; imposing its modernization, the quality of services offered to tourists is closely correlated with the degree of modernization and technical equipment of the accommodation units.

For the analysis of tourist offer a special importance should be given to the accommodation capacity (existing and in operation), this indicator
expressing the number of places of tourist accommodation existing and actually used during the operating period of tourist unit.

In year 2012, the existing accommodation capacity in the Central Region was 53,787 beds, representing 17.86% from the existing accommodation capacity existent at national level. Central Region ranks second place, after the South East Region, in terms of existing accommodation capacity, increasing by 2.6% compared to year 1990.

![Fig. 3. The structure of regional tourist accommodation capacity, by counties](image1)

At the Region level, 40.34% from the total number of accommodation places are found in Brasov County. At the opposite pole is situated Alba County, which has only 6.08% from the total number of beds.

![Fig. 4. Existing accommodation capacity in operation, Central Region, 2012](image2)

In terms of accommodation capacity in operation, existent at the Central Region level represents 21.17% from the one registered at national level. The distribution by counties of the region shows that, just as in the case of existing accommodation capacity, the highest value is recorded in Brasov County, here being found 47.37% from the operating capacity of the region, and the lowest value is recorded in Covasna County, which has only 8.37% from the regional capacity.

Utilization degree of the accommodation capacity is highlighted by the index of accommodation capacity in operation. During 1990-2012 period, there were significant changes in terms of this indicator, both nationally and regionally, Figure 4.

![Fig. 5. The evolution of the index of accommodation capacity use, 1990-2012](image3)
In the period 1990-2012, the net use index of accommodation capacity decreased in the region with 30.9%, which is below the national average, 31.9%. Regionally, the largest reduction in net use index of accommodation capacity was registered in Brasov County, with 44.4% and lowest in Harghita County, with only 16.9%.

Regarding the usage degree of the accommodation capacity at the counties level can be seen that in some counties exceeded the regional average: Covasna, 36.0%, Mures, 28.0% Sibiu and 26.8%, but there are also counties where the indicator value is lower: Alba, 20.1%, Brasov, 20.0% and Harghita, 19.9%.

**Analysis of tourism demand**

Tourism demand is represented by the whole of people expressing their desire to move periodically or temporarily outside their residence for reasons other than the provision of paid work at the destination. By definition, tourism demand responds to commands: need, desire, strength and willingness to purchase.

Tourism demand analysis is based on the number of indicators aimed number of tourists accommodated, number of nights and average length of stay. [1,2]

During 1990-2012 period, at the Central Region level can be observed oscillations in terms of the number of tourist arrivals. The trend manifested mostly, at the region level, is one of diminishing the number of tourists. For the analyzed period, at the region level has been a registered decline in tourist arrivals with 17.33%, a value lower than the national average, 37.76%.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Number of tourists accommodated, 1990-2012, thousand tourists</th>
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<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
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<td>Central Region</td>
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<td>Sibiu County</td>
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**Source:** Anuarul Statistic al României

At the counties level reducing the number of tourists is different. The highest rate of decline in tourist arrivals number is recorded in Harghita County, 153.9%, followed by Alba County with a decrease of 52.17%. The lowest level of this indicator is registered in Brasov County, 4.57% and in Mures County the only one from the region where it can be seen an increase in tourist arrivals, 27.07%.

In year 2012, the number of tourists staying in the Central Region stood around the value of 1,640,400, representing 21.43% from the total number of tourists accommodated in Romania. Nationally, in year 2012, Central Region is ranked at first place in terms of tourist arrivals.
Another important indicator of tourist demand is the number of overnight stays. In year 2012, the value of this indicator was 3677.1 thousand days-tourist, representing 19.18% from total overnight stays number recorded nationally. Reported to this indicator, Central Region is ranked at second place after South East Region.

The analysis of the number of overnight stays at the region level, Figure 3.6., shows that Brasov County has the highest level, 1,486,500 days-tourist, concentrating 40.43% from the total number of overnight stays at the regional level.

During 1990-2012 period, the number of overnight stays, at the region level, fell with 42.47%, the value being below the national average, 57.15%.

At regional level, the reduction of this indicator was manifested differently from one county to another. The highest reduction level was recorded in Harghita County 70.8% and lowest in Mures County, 28.31%.

Regarding the structure of tourist who visits the Central Region, by place of origin, most of them are Romanian, foreigners accounting only 18%. Foreign tourists visiting Central Region come mostly from European countries (Hungary, Austria, Poland, Czech, Slovakia, but also from Western Europe) but also from countries such as America, Canada, Israel.

The variety of natural and anthropogenic tourist resources of the Central Region offers the possibility of increasing the number of foreign tourists visiting these places. Preferences of foreign tourists are turning to cultural tourism, the health and wellness tourism, currently these forms being exploited in a limited measure.

At region level, the share of foreign tourists in total overnight stays was, in 2012, 16.7%, which is below the national average, 17.2%. The distribution by counties shows a higher concentration of overnight stays of foreign tourists in Sibiu County, 24.6%, and a lower percent in Covasna County, 6.4%.

The average length of stay shows the average time (days) of stay of tourists in accommodation spaces and reflect the possibility of retaining the tourist offer in a particular area, region etc.

Regarding the evolution of this indicator, during 1990-2012 period, there was a decrease in average length of stay. Nationally, the reduction is 30.5% and at region level is higher, 31.25%.

In year 2012, the average length of stay in the Central Region is 2.2 days/tourist, value lower of national average, 2.5 days/tourist. The analysis of this indicator at component counties level from the Centre Region, shows that there are counties where the average length of stay exceeds the regional average, Covasna - 6 days/tourist and Harghita 2.9 days/tourist.

The high value of this indicator in Covasna County is due to health tourism practicing. The average length of stay in Alba County registered the same value that the one at regional level, 2.2 days /tourist and in the counties of Brasov, Mures - 2 days /tourist, and Sibiu - 1.7 days /tourist, the average length of stay is lower than the regional average.

Regarding foreign tourists, the average length of stay is 2.1 days/tourist, lower than at the national tourists, 2.2 days/tourist.
The seasonality of tourism demand and consumption is the dominant feature of the tourist activity with important implications in the work of service providers from this field. One of the peculiarities of the tourism market is the focus in time of tourism demand and consumption.

The analysis of tourism activity, at the Central Region level in year 2012, by mouths, Figure 10, indicates a concentration of arrivals and overnight stays of tourists in summer period (August to July) and the lowest in March. A particular case is found in Brasov, County with two of the most important winter resorts from Romania, where tourist arrivals in the two seasons are numerically close.

Central Region has a high tourism potential, which allow the deployment of many types of tourism. The most important tourism product of the Central Region is diversity: landscape, ethnic, cultural and religious. Through physical and geographical features and cultural heritage it can be express the role and social importance of tourism in the Central Region. The diversity of modalities dedicated to spare time is based on the natural and antropogenic high potential from the Central Region.

The rural area of the Central Region is another advantage in tourism development. The village from the central part of the country, through its socio-historical conditions in which it has developed over the centuries, is an area in which Romanian spirituality interfered with the Hungarian and German communities, creating an original symbiosis. The traditional occupations of the inhabitants, folk traditions, architectural style and popular costume well kept, the natural landscape were the premises underlying the emergence of new forms of tourism - rural tourism and agrotourism - which has grown in recent years. The areas with the most developed agrotourism from the Central Region are: Bran – Moeciu – Fundata, Marginimea Sibiu, Corund, Rimetea, Aries Superior Valley area, Sacele - Întorsura Buzau, Hartibaciului Valley, Olt Valley.

Rural tourism and agrotourism attract especially families with children, seeking relaxation in a peaceful and healthy environment. Besides tourists from Romania, from this form of tourism are attract also the foreign tourists are interested by the Romanian culture, which is a direct means of knowledge of authentic traditional civilization. Agrotourism has registered a spectacular dynamic in recent 20 years, the number of rural pensions and agrotourist guest houses from the Central Region exceeding 10,000.

The rural tourism and agrotourism from the Central Region has experienced a strong growth, here being the areas with tradition in the agrotourism practice: Bran – Moeciu – Fundata, Marginimea Sibiu Borders, Alba - Garda - Arieseni - Avram Iancu – Vidra, Sacele Area - Întorsura Buzau and others. So the Central region concentrates the largest number of rural locations 37.85% from those existing at national level.

![Fig. 9. The tourist arrivals and overnight stays, Central Region, 2012](image)

![Fig. 10. The structure of the agrotourist guest houses from Central Region, by component counties](image)
The distribution of agrotourist guest houses from the Central Region, by component counties (Figure 10), indicates their dominance in Brasov County, 43.77%, followed by Harghita County, 30.13% and Alba, 10.27%.

If in the past managed to be preserved unspoiled the traditions of many of the inhabitants from rural areas, currently, under pressure of inherent changes and influences in modern society there are traditions for centuries in danger. Therefore, along with the preservation and restoration of heritage material is needed the support of the conservation and tourist promotion of intangible cultural heritage from rural area of the Central Region.

Conclusions

Considered to be a social and economic phenomenon specific to modern civilization, tourism is strongly anchored in society life and so, influenced its evolution. Formed from six counties (Alba, Brasov, Covasna, Harghita, Mures and Sibiu), Central Region is characterized by a rich natural and anthropogenic tourism potential. The most important tourism product of the Central Region is the diversity: landscape, ethnic, cultural and religious.

Central Region has a high and diversified tourism potential, both natural and anthropogenic. Forms of tourism with the highest growth potential are: mountain tourism, health tourism, cultural tourism and rural tourism.

The accommodation facilities network is not uniform distributed, the highest concentration being recorded in Brasov County (646 units), at opposite pole being Covasna County.

Accommodation existing capacity on July 31, 2012, was about 54,000 thousand places (17.9% from the accommodation capacity at national level), which gives the region the second position in the country.

Use index of accommodation capacity in operation is only 23.6%, meaning that, in average, the accommodation structure is fully utilized only 3 months/year.

The total number of tourists accommodated in 2012 (1,640,4 thousand represents 21.4% from the total of tourists staying in Romania), witch situates the Central Region on first place at national level. Most tourists who visit the Central Region are Romanian, the proportion of foreigners being significant (18%).

The average length of stay of tourists in the region in 2012, of 2.2 days, is lower than the national average (2.5 days). Seasonal cycle analysis indicates a concentration of arrivals and overnight stays of tourists in summer period, in August and July being the peak months, and in March is recorded the lowest level.

Rural tourism has recorded a spectacular dynamic in the last 20 years, the number of rural pensions and agrotourist guest houses from the Central Region beyond 1000, and the accommodation places provided being almost 19,000. Central region holds 37.9% from Romania’s agrotourist guest houses and 34.4% from tourist pensions. In Brasov County is one of the six holiday villages which have Romanian tourism.

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