

## THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

### **Abstract**

The complex of negative factors (the infrastructure status, the outdated mentalities, the poor professional qualifications, the long economic crisis etc.), to which we add a certain inertia and/or superficiality of some local public authorities regarding the meaning and the definition of the local development of tourism, explains the difficulties this branch faces, being so dependent on the general status of the national economy. Hence, the existence of a national program of regional development of the sustainable tourism is crucial, the program identifying the priority objectives of a less evaluated area, which would revitalize their economy. Thus, under the conditions of a well-directed regional development, we consider that the careful qualification of the persons involved in the local, county and regional development organization should be started. The statistics is not enough from this point of view; it has to be completed with the comprehensive identification of the local resources. There are counties that have already inventoried the entire natural and cultural endowment they dispose of in terms of truth and value, representing the tourist objectives, so that a heritage re-evaluation of priorities for promotion and re-promotion is enough, in order to determine the corresponding necessary funds. In the context of the global economy, the sustainable development strategy of tourism in Romania must focus on the catalyst factors of economic and social change, in order to promote the economic growth. At the same time, strategy has to be flexible enough to adapt to shocks and change processes.

**Keywords:** regional development, tourism, sustainable development, sustainable tourism product, heritage tourism.

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## DEZVOLTAREA REGIONALĂ A TURISMULUI DIN PERSPECTIVA DEZVOLTĂRII DURABILE

**Mirela MAZILU**

Professor Ph.D., Faculty of Economy and Business  
Administration, University of Craiova, University Center  
Drobeta Turnu Severin  
E-mail: mirelamazilu2004@yahoo.com

### **Rezumat**

Complexul de factori negativi (starea infrastructurii, mentalitățile depășite, pregătirea profesională precară, criza economică prelungită, etc.), la care se adaugă și o anumită inerție sau/și superficialitate a unor administrații publice locale în ceea ce înseamnă și definește dezvoltarea locală a turismului, explică dificultățile prin care trece această ramură, atât de dependentă de starea generală a economiei naționale. De aceea existența unui program național de dezvoltare regională a turismului durabil este de maximă importanță, el identificând pentru început obiectivele prioritare ale unor zone mai puțin evaluate, care ar revitaliza economia acestora.

**Cuvinte cheie:** dezvoltare regională, turism, dezvoltare durabilă, produs turistic durabil, patrimoniu turistic.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Starting from the already accepted idea that an integration of the regions is more efficient and realistic than the national integration, Romania has to reevaluate this opportunity for tourism as well, adapting the institutional abilities, mobilizing the political factors, coordinating the decision levels and encouraging the participation and the civic involvement. The regional development directly depends on these factors. There are often situations – not isolated – when the tourist products of a country with tradition in the field are “packaged” and presented much more consistent and sometimes more exaggerated compared with the real value of the tourist product.

The EU experience in the field of regional development policies is quite vast, starting with the creation of the European Community in 1957. Regarding us, we are several years from the promulgation of the Regional Development Law in Romania and three years from the setup of the National Agency for Regional Development. In this context, the development and the consolidation of the entire ensemble of activities in the field of regional development field is necessary. Starting from this idea, an analytical approach is mandatory for a correct perception and elaboration of a paper, which proposes to analyse several aspects of the tools used in the process of the regional development of tourism.

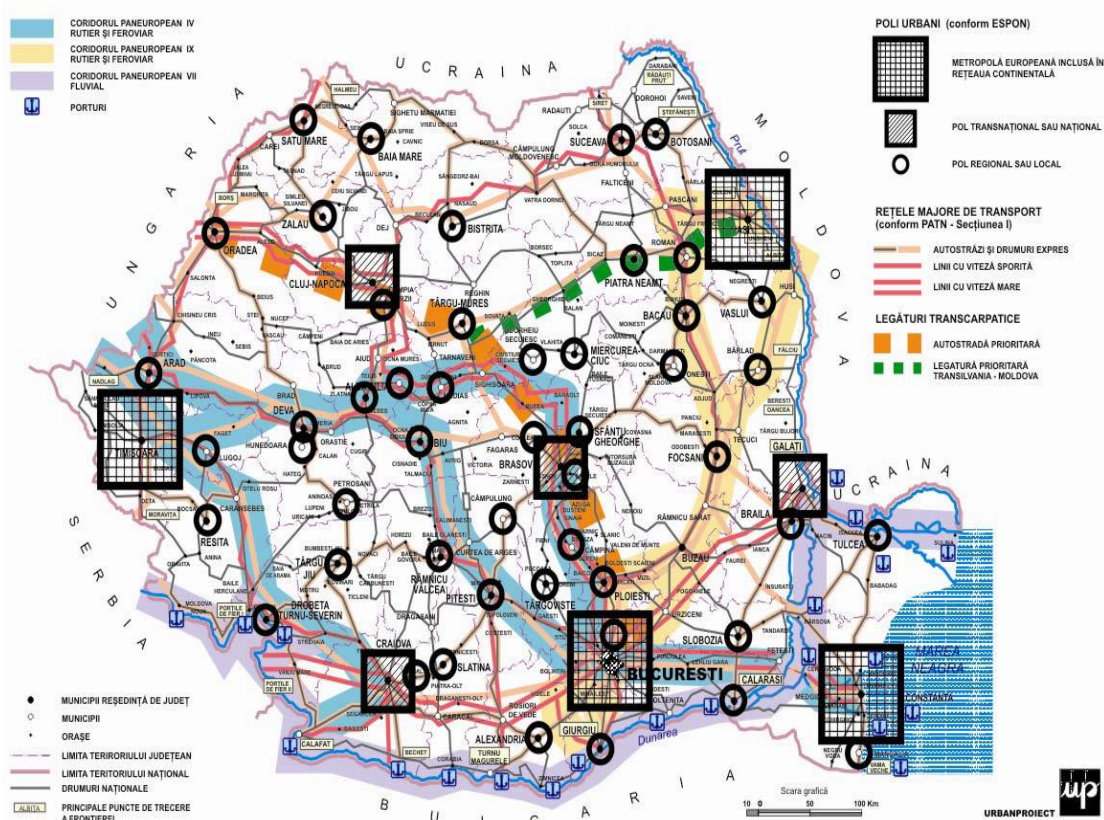
On a long term, the general strategic objective of the territorial development is the affirmation of the regional-European identity of Romania as a relay between north and south and east and west and as an intercontinental connector, through the sustainable development, the reduction of the current gaps and the increase of competitiveness regarding the effective reintegration in Europe. The general strategic objective consists of the following specific objectives:

- the connection to the European and intercontinental network of poles and corridors of special development;
- the structure of the urban planning through the balanced development of the urban localities network;
- the affirmation of the urban-rural solidarity associated to different categories of territories;
- the revaluation of the natural and cultural heritage.

The strategy shall take into account the consecrated or emerging corridors/poles of development, aiming at the creation of premises for the extended spreading in the adjacent spaces of the increased

effects generated by them, as well as the efficient interconnection into a functional network at the regional, national and trans-European levels.

The focus on the increase of the role of the regions in the development of Europe has constituted an important phenomenon in the last three decades, appreciated as an essential element of the European construction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The development of the regional phenomenon in Europe takes place on two levels: on a vertical level, between the regions and the main European institutions represented by the European Union and the European Council, and on a horizontal level, between the regions of Europe. The relations on the two levels, of the regions between them and with the European bodies were institutionalized in 1975. The European Council setup the Permanent conference of the Local Powers from Europe that year, and, on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1975, The Council of Ministers of the European Community setup the Regional Policy committee and the European fund of Regional Development.



Source: Urban Project, 2010  
 FIGURE 1. THE MAP INDICATING THE DEVELOPMENT POLES

Lately, as a natural consequence of the growth of regions importance, there are more and more discussions on the "Europe of regions", underlining the fact that the region represents "more than a simple intermediate level between the state and the local authorities", becoming, together with other

states and localities, the third point of the triangle in which the European integration process is developing.

The regionalization process is organized in each European country according to its own context (legal, economic, social, demographic, and ethnic) and to the historic traditions. In addition, the concept of region differs from one country to another in terms of meaning, but there is a series of common elements allowing the formulation of unitary definitions and explanations. The European institutions have defined differently the regions, taking into account the field of work, the political approach (the European Council) or economic approach (European Union) of the regional development process.

Instead, the European Council has defined the region as being “a medium-sized interval which might be determined geographically and which is considered homogenous”. This definition emphasizes the connection between the territory and the human element populating it, element appearing as the awareness of the homogenous character of the region.

The European Union has considered the region as being “immediately inferior to the state, according to the competences that have been granted to it within the centralized systems or which it has granted within the federal systems. It manages a territorial community whose size varies very much on administrative and political levels. Comparing this definition with the one formulated by the European Council we notice the fact that the region has an administrative character, using as a criterion the competences, which the region disposes of. In reality, the regions differ very much in terms of geographical size and population.

The regionalization process has been achieved differently according to the country, the state organization (unitary or federal state), the legislative frame, the ethnical component and the historical traditions.

Thus, there are the following types of regionalization:

- political regionalization (Spain and Italy);
- incorporated regionalization, resulted following the creation of the unitary state by uniting more components creating certain individuality (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland);
- diversified regionalization, with regional frames determined after the territorial and political criteria, as well as after criteria such as language and culture (Belgium);

- classic administrative regionalization, through decentralization, setting up regions as autonomous territorial collectivities from an administrative viewpoint (France);
- functional regionalization, through debunching, constituting regions as simple circumscriptions of the state administration (Greece);
- regionalization through cooperation, where the regions represent institutionalised forms of cooperation between the local territorial collectivities (Romania).

We should notice that the definitions attributed to the region by the various European institutions contain a series of common elements. These are mainly the space (with more or less present limits), the human collectivity which fills that space, with specific features and a certain unity or identity, and the competences attributed to the region.

The regions may have various meanings: a region may be defined as a territorial area, as an ensemble of internal, distinct and consistent features, either physical or human, and which confer a certain significant unity and which distinguish, on the other hand, the neighbouring areas. Other criteria that may nuance the delimitation of a region are: the physical attributes, social and economic features, the language, etc. according to which certain types of regions may appear: crowded regions, regions in decline, geographical regions, historical regions, natural regions, planning regions, underdeveloped regions etc. From an analytical point of view, the concept of regionalization considers the region as one of the best forms of spatial organization of information, and the functional regions are considered of major importance for the process and the objectives of development planning.

In conclusion, the region comprises a part of the territory (state, continent, geographical area etc.) characterized by certain particular features and the collectivity living in the region. The concept of region has a very vast scope of application. There are three categories of regions:

- regions with states;
- regions comprising more states from a geographical area (e.g. Benelux, Visegrad group. The Black Sea group of countries);
- cross-border regions, grouping the geographical areas on the one hand and the state borders on the other, connected by tradition, language, religion, culture, etc.

In case of the regional development of tourism, unfortunately, the things do not comply with the principles and functionality of a region.

From this viewpoint, the majority of Romanian tourism service providers do not have even a medium level, thus the foreign visitors still wonder that “such a beautiful country with such a clean and generous nature is so less promoted for tourism”. It is true that the providers and the sellers of the Romanian tourism products are confronting, unfortunately, with the lack of funds for promotion and advertising. At the same time, the fact that a part of them have serious minuses in this profession, many times without a calling for tourism, to which everyone is a master is also a reality (!).

Romania has regionally and continentally “natural and cultural interferences of European level” with a broad diversity, supported by a generous geographical frame: mountains, hills, fields, lakes, the Danube Delta, the Black Sea seaside, etc. It is well known the fact that the picturesque of the various natural areas of Romania, completed by the real cultural treasures – sometimes of a global interest – constitutes a very important reason for tourism. At the same time, there are major changes in the models of economic growth through the direction towards the intensive types, towards the fields attributed to the sustainable development, globalization and integration. In this context, tourism is manifesting as a social component, with a significant participation to the general progress, and as a promoter of globalization and a factor of sustainable development.

Thus, under the conditions of a well-directed regional development, we consider that the careful qualification of the persons involved in the local, county and regional development organization should be started. The statistics is not enough from this point of view; it has to be completed with the comprehensive identification of the local resources. There are counties that have already inventoried the entire natural and cultural endowment they dispose of in terms of truth and value, representing the tourist objectives, so that a heritage re-evaluation of priorities for promotion and re-promotion is enough, in order to determine the corresponding necessary funds.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The regional development has been promoted by the European Union, which believes that the regional level represents “an administrative level that has its own place within the administrative hierarchy of the member states on an immediately inferior place after the central level, “the Community Charter of Regionalisation” (Păceșilă, 2004, p. 104), as a territory that forms a net unity from a geographic viewpoint or a similar ensemble of territories in which there is continuity, in which the population

possesses certain common elements and which wants to preserve its specificity resulted and to develop it in order to stimulate the cultural, social and economic process<sup>1</sup>.

The financial means for their protection must be stipulated in the regional policy on the revaluation at a European level of the valuable tourist objectives, correctly classified according to their attractiveness, intrinsic value, national importance, etc.

The basic objectives of the regional development policies applicable in tourism are the following:

- the reduction of the existing regional unbalances through the stimulation of balanced development, the accelerated recovery of the gaps in the economic and social field of the less developed areas, as a consequence of historic, geographic, economic, social, political conditions, as well as the prevention of new unbalances production;
- the correlation of sectoral governmental policies, at the level of regions through the stimulation of initiatives and through the revaluation of local and regional resources for the sustainable economic and social development and for their cultural development;
- the stimulation of the interregional, internal and international, cross-border cooperation, including within the euroregions, as well as the participation of development regions to the European structures and organizations promoting the institutional, economic and social development, in order to achieve some common interest projects, according to the international agreements to which Romania is a party.

These objectives are achieved through programs financed by the National Fund for Regional Development and from the Fund for Regional Development. The executive bodies are represented by the Agencies for Regional Development, in order to increase the development potential of each region and to create the proper frame for achieving the development objectives.

### 3. TARGET OBJECTIVES:

- the development of rural and urban areas through the stimulation of the partnership between the County Councils in order to implement the regional development projects;

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<sup>1</sup> "The Community Charter of Regionalisation" defines the region as "a geographical territory which forms a net unity or an ensemble of territories where there is a community, in which the population possesses certain common elements and that wants to preserve its specificity and develop it in order to stimulate the cultural, social and economic process". Administratively, the region is placed immediately after the central level.

- the advantageous mutual collaboration, in order to find solutions to common cross-border problems within the Euroregions;
- the development and the harmonization of commercial and economic relations;
- new collaboration projects;
- the development and the application of advanced technologies;
- the ecological security, the prevention of pollution, the prevention, the reduction or the elimination of the consequences of industrial faults and natural calamities, the increase of the number of production processes responding to the environment protection exigencies;
- the harmonization of the infrastructure development, including the energy systems, the transport networks and communication networks;
- the development of cross-border relations and the extension of the cooperation in the fields of ensuring the normative-legal, the science, the education, the culture, the sport and the youth frame;

It is a well-known fact that by ignorance, indifference and lack of education, the important elements of the national, natural and cultural heritage are ignored, with extraordinary repercussions. In order to avoid this, we believe that the drawing up of a regional development plan of tourism is necessary in order to comprise:

- the identification of all the tourist objectives at a regional level and the definition of an identity at the level of each region;
- the evaluation or the re-evaluation of the tourist objectives at their real value;
- their classification as an opportunity for economic support and protection;
- recommendations on their promotion or the improvement of their current promotion;
- the appreciation of their economic influences from their organized revaluation for tourism;
- the number of persons working in tourism and the level of their qualifications (mentioning the manners of their professionalization, training, etc.).

The regional development strategy, especially for the regions comprising the real value tourist objectives, must take into account the fact that the increase of tourist flow, of any kind, positively influences the regional economy, without ignoring the pressure effects on the environment:

- directly, through the cashing total from the tourist consumption (accommodation, food, taxes and shopping);
- indirectly, through the contact and the local bilateral cultural influences, the knowledge of local economic values and the eventual business opportunities, the work force for services, the creation of a favourable image, etc.

We should not insist on the direct influence because it is obvious that the local cashing from tourism represents an important income for the community and the region. We only note the fact that the tourists are the best customers for the shops, the fairs, the exhibitions of any kind etc., fact that, besides the direct cashing, encourages the development of the organized trading, the increase of the number of shops and their quality. It is said that the best advertisement is the one made by the tourist when he/she returns home. He/she tells his/her impressions of the holiday to the family, friends, people he/she knows, who will be tempted to benefit from similar holidays if the story is exciting.

The effects of such an advertisement are fast from a tourist point of view and very significant for the image, which is created for the locality and/or the area.

The prosperity of a region as effect of the tourism development is manifesting in many stages:

- immediately, as a consequence of the direct consumption of the tourist product;
- on a short term, through the continuous absorption of the work force and the encouragement of the welcoming trading ("aggressively");
- on a long term, through the concentration of capital for investments in the general and tourism infrastructures, in accommodation structures for tourism and in the development of urban services.

The regional development must correlated and integrate tourism among the other components of the local economy, taking into account the fact that this clean industry does not affect the environment and, generally, does not imply large investments. A good tourism development project, comprised by the "regional development program", implies less costly investments as the integration is harmoniously achieved.

Finally, we believe that the influence of tourism on the increase of the quality of life from the areas in which it enjoys the attention of the public administration authorities and it is treated with professionalism must be mentioned (Mazilu & Ispas, 2009).

Through its wideness and complex content, tourism engages a vast natural, material and human potential, having profound implications on the dynamic of economy and society and on the international relations.

The sustainable tourism represents a distinct field of activity, a very important component of the economic and social life for a larger number of world countries. From an economic point of view, tourism is a main source of national economy recovery of the countries disposing of important tourist resources correctly exploited.

Results: on a global competitive (Mazilu & Marinescu, 2009) and more and more developed market, there is great need of a strong national branding of tourism, which optimizes resources, which concentrates the interests in a nucleus – public and private sectors, national, regional and local – and attracts tourists. This needs a special interest for a coordinated approach on the marketing and the distribution on the internet in order to optimize the vision on Romania. The recommendation of the World Tourism and Travel Council is that the Government of Romania continues the policy of an open market of telecommunications, generating lower costs and better quality services for tourists and tourism agencies. The main task of the government is to market the region or the country as a tourist destination and to improve the global image (Mazilu, 2008a).

The regional development policy aims mainly at: the reduction of the existing regional unbalances, with a focus on the stimulation of balanced development and the revitalization of the less favoured areas (with a late development); the prevention of new unbalances; the compliance with the criteria of integration in the European Union structures and access to the assistance financial tools for the member states (Bădescu & Alexandru, 1996, p. 48). Thus, the European Commission has declared its availability to finance the tourism development between 2010 and 2013, through the structural funds (the European regional development fund, the cohesion fund, the social fund, the European fund for agriculture and rural development, the European fund for fishing). For the period 2007-2013, Romania shall benefit from a financial allotment of approx. 30 billion. The structural funds include the European Fund for Regional Development, the Cohesion Fund and the Social Fund.

In the field of tourism and regional development policy, the government of Romania aims at the following objectives for the period 2007-2013:

- the reduction of the existing regional unbalances through the stimulation of competitiveness and the revitalization of less favoured areas.

- the balanced regional development through the correlation of national public policies on sectoral development with the public policies on local development: infrastructure and transport, increase of the work force occupation, rural development, education and health, environment and sustainable tourism (Mazilu, 2008b).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The broad process of economic and administrative decentralization in Romania is also mentioned in the law, where another explicit objective is the *coordination of the sectoral policies of the government with the initiatives and local and regional resources* "in order to reach a sustainable economic, social and cultural development" of regions.

These stimulation processes of regional activities, their coordination with the central government policies (at the same time ensuring that the national sectoral policies reflect the regional necessities), and the promotion of the cooperation between regions are mainly the effort of the Government of Romania of satisfying the specific necessities of the country and of all its regions. However, they are all mentioned explicitly in the Regional Development Law in the context of the application of Romania for becoming a member of the EU in general and of the preparation of the development process of proper structures and institutional capacities in relation with the regional policies of the EU especially. The main fields that the regional policies might aim at are: the development of enterprises, the work force market, the attraction of investments, the transfer of technology, the development of the SMS sector, the improvement of infrastructure, the quality of the environment, the health, the education, the tourism and the culture.

The relations between the state and the region must be based on loyalty, cooperation and solidarity. The state must not prejudice or limit the regional autonomy, but the region is not allowed to prejudice the state's authority. In the exercise of the competences conferred by law, the regions and the local administration authorities must ensure the conditions for an efficient and advantageous cooperation. The local authorities must be consulted by the regional authorities whenever the interest from their competence sphere or their individual interests are altered by the measures adopted by the latter.

According to some authors, decentralization is seen as an absence of the dependence state on the central authorities (Cohen & Peterson, 1999, p. 34). Local autonomy and decentralization of services must be seen as a frame allowing the broadening of competences, which the other regional levels (development regions) are overlapping, while fulfilling the objectives of regional development policies.

The national strategy of regional development proposes a development strategy of alternative tourism, based mainly on the innovative tourism forms and niches such as rural tourism cultural tourism and other “niche markets” of tourism like hunting and fishing tourism, as well as the tourist circuits for “wine and traditional cuisine”.

A special mention must be made in connection with rural tourism. The vast rural areas within regions have multiple potentials that may be exploited through tourist activities: the beauty of the natural landscape, the gastronomy elements, the preservation of the traditional village structures and of the rural folklore, etc. The development of the rural tourist potential of the less developed areas shall be supported, areas, which have no other resources, the agricultural areas with, low agricultural productivity, etc.

The rural tourism development may consolidate the incomes obtained by the population from other sources, and may constitute even an alternative source of income for the population of the respective areas. The rural tourism creates new work places, especially for women, contributing to the solution of the serious problems with unemployment in the rural environment. The viable rural tourism development project shall be supported.

The development of some services packages for tourism shall be focused on, aiming at target groups (aged persons, young people, etc.) that may become components of some major tourist arrangement and on marketing measures in consensus with other goods and services suppliers. The rural tourist infrastructure development and the development or the improvement of the quality of the existing facilities shall be carefully considered.

The argumentation of this strategy consists of the following:

- Up to the present, there have not been serious and continuous attempts to develop alternative forms of tourism. These types of projects do not need huge financial resources that the regular tourism needs, and the EU assistance and the Romanian co-financing would have a visible impact (Mazilu & Marinescu, 2008).
- Despite the tourism crisis (Mazilu, 2011) of the last few years, there are numerous indications that there are new alternative forms of tourism that might reflect the potential foreign demand;
- The multiplying effects on the local economies of these forms of tourism are quicker than the traditional tourism and do not need an increase of the internal demand (Mazilu, 2007, p. 123);

- All the regional development plans drawn up by the Agencies for Regional Development contain development initiatives of tourism which are complying with the strategy proposed nationally, representing another indicator of the fact that tourism is locally and regionally perceived as a possible development axis and it enjoys a considerable local support.

There clearly results that the tourism regional development strategy and the associated measures shall be strictly correlated with the other development axes and priorities stipulated by the plan and especially by the infrastructural policy, the development of the human resources, the rural development and the protection of the environment, leading to the shaping of a tourist region with an exclusively tourist structure, identity and function, well represented in the European regional landscape.

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