

Sustainable Development of Romanian Tourism in the Context of regional geopolitical Actuality

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Abstract

The current concerns of the specialized environment in the tourism industry – research, academia and professional training providers, profile media – are directed to highlight, through analyses, summaries, case studies, etc. - In what way and to what extent -, if the sustainable development of Romanian tourism, in the current regional geopolitical context, is viable, has prospects and how? The tourism industry should play a particularly important role in the concerns for the development of a sustainable society in the current regional geopolitical context. This sector of activity can represent an important force for achieving sustainability, by increasing living standards in underdeveloped areas, promoting the preservation of the natural and human environment and providing an engine for the development of peaceful international exchanges.

Key words Sustainable development, tourism, geopolitics, analysis, current context

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“Geopolitics offers a better key of interpretation on current events, as well as a coherent platform for reconfiguring the future.” (Kaplan, 2014)

Introduction

The global **awareness** of the importance of tourism has triggered a new vision over the opportunities that this industry represents. In this context, the concept of “**New Tourism**” was outlined, meaning a “new type of tourism”, which aims to give a new dimension to the sector, constituting a mature response to the demands of an increasingly complex and dynamic world, amid a Globalization which is increasingly “supporting” the geopolitical and/or geostrategic arguments, specific to each region, which, to some extent, has tourist potential and a “dowry” of tourist destinations that cannot be neglected. In the context of Globalization, a new requirement is demanded, and a new concept has emerged: **Sustainable Development**.

Sustainable development in tourism emerged through the 1990s, thus creating the **Sustainable Tourism**, which dissociates itself from mass tourism, as a form of alternative tourism, based on the following principles:

- Minimizing the negative impact of the tourism activity on the natural environment, in order to achieve ecological sustainability;
- Minimizing the negative impact of tourism activity on local communities and its members, in order to achieve social sustainability;
- Minimizing the negative impact of tourism activity on the culture, traditions and customs of local communities, in order to achieve cultural sustainability.
- **Sustainable tourism** represents a positive approach with the intent to reduce tensions and friction created by the complexity of interactions between the tourism industry, tourists, the natural environment and local communities, as hosts of the tourists. *“Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without*

compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Pearce, Warford - 1993), initially formulated in the report entitled *"Our Common Future"*, drawn up by the *World Committee on Environment and Development*, led by Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, a report thus known as the **Brundtland Report** (1987).

The concept of sustainable development, also defined as a transformation process in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of techniques and institutional changes, is carried out harmoniously *"represents the selection criterion of economic policies and structural adjustment in general, and environmental policy in particular"*, assuming three-plan performance: economic; ecological; social – cultural, by increasing the number of workplaces, practicing tourism, as a measure of physical and mental regeneration.

Debates regarding **the concept of "sustainable development"** have not yet led to a coherent point of view from a theoretical and methodological perspective, but the extension and the intensity with which they are organized offer the chance of a lucid assessment of the current models of economic and social development, which are in an obvious conflict with the requirements of the conservation of natural capital.

The social context is marked by the human identity crisis, which fails to identify and understand the landmarks of its relationship with nature, to which it belongs, trying to create its own landmarks, developing activities that affect the evolution of natural capital in the ecosphere.

The economic context must be reported, firstly, to the boundaries of the property institution, its attributes finding an asymmetric reflection in the social economic practices plan. As long as the damage caused to the natural environment is not found in the cost of products and services, the risk of repeating the unintended use of resources in activities is maintained, which is only apparently profitable, so that, overall, society as a whole integrates losses.

The ecological context is that of the exacerbation of the environmental crisis. Processes such as greenhouse effect, ozone layer degradation, global warming, glaciers melting, worsening state of the planetary ocean and industrial pollution, diminishing the quality of groundwater or surface water resources, with every effort, regional and international, continue to accentuate.

The geopolitical context is increasingly needed in the development equation and this amid the expansion of the spatial scale of manifestation of imbalances. While problems such as armed conflict, refugee crisis, famine, etc., can be limited in time and space through political-military dialogue or cooperation, eco-crises, and some of its components, cannot be regionalized. *"Sustainable development is a concept that is expected to solve all the problems of the contemporary society, namely: poverty, environmental degradation, loss of trust in institutions, uncontrolled expansion of urbanization, uncertainty over having a workplace, alienation of youth, elimination of traditional values, inflation, unemployment and other economic-financial or geopolitical crises"*(Andrei, 2001).

Sustainable development in tourism is all the more important as this sector depends in a great measure on tourist attractions and activities related to the natural framework and the historical and cultural heritage of a tourist destination.

This requires tourism to integrate the natural, cultural and human environment, respecting the fragile balance, typical to many tourist destinations.

At a national level, **sustainable development strategies** must be focused on the following objectives: achieving economic growth, maintaining sustainable demographic developments, reducing dependence on conventional energy sources parallel to the identification and widespread introduction of renewable and environmentally friendly sources, the preservation of the economic resource base and its expansion by identifying new resources, improving the used technologies and introducing new technologies, with superior technical and economic parameters.

Ensuring the sustainable development of tourism, assumes compliance with the following requirements:

- the policies applied in this field must be based on rational, rigorous economic and social criteria, as well as on the environmental protection requirements;
- the development will be done with the commitment and cooperation of the public sector and the private sector, as well with the participation of civil society and local communities.

The state has an important role to play in ensuring the sustainable development of tourism!

The private sector can and is called upon to contribute, as well, to the development of sustainable tourism, by integrating economic, social, cultural and ecological criteria into their decisions on investment, management, marketing and human resources.

In the European and regional context, Romania differentiates itself from neighboring countries both in terms of the exceptional touristic, natural, anthropic and cultural potential, (which is not properly exploited, yet), but also from an economic, political and social point of view.

It is considered, by some analysts, that Romania would be “*still developing*”, and with an “*emerging*” economy, ambiguous terms for the majority of the population. The internal political situation, fluctuating to derisory, underperforming, corruption (but without the corrupt ones!) and an endemic political clientelism, has not allowed and has no chance to offer viable solutions in the future to ***economic recovery and sustainable development of Tourism as a Strategic Priority***.

“*Tourism was one of the few sectors that produced positive news for many national economies*”, as WTO Secretary - General Taleb Rifai stated in January 2015. In the same context, Taleb Rifai has also “*appealed to National Governments to develop strategies to support this sector and to meet its commitments regarding sustainable development*”.

The geopolitical transition process (Copechi, 2016) that started in 1989-1990 allowed Romania to promote a positive policy of openness, cooperation and good neighborliness, in particular to ensure and promote its role as a stability factor against the background of conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The risks to our security could have become major risk sources for the entire continent.

The new regional geopolitical context has given Romania the opportunity to promote at a continental level and not only, a new role – that of the bridge, the turntable of intra-EU ties and those between Europe and neighboring regions. Unlike the geographical position of a country that is fixed, the geopolitical position varies, sometimes for very short periods of time, depending on certain socio-economic factors and (geo) politics. Geopolitical stability is an illusion in which the majority of politicians and influencers preferred (and continue) to believe.

If we analyze geopolitically the level of competitiveness in tourism of Romania, as motivation for a possible sustainable development, we can take into consideration as reference, for comparison, the eight neighboring countries, in terms of territorial and historical point of view. They can be considered “*competing*”, as well as successful tourism models: Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine.

Looking closely, introspectively, succinctly, synthesized, at the historical or tourist relations with our neighbors, through the objective prism of a geopolitical analysis, we will find that:

- **The Republic of Moldova** is only the last episode that closes the circle of diplomatic corps between Romania and its neighbors;

- **Ukraine** is the neighboring country with which Romania has the most difficult and tense relations, as a result from the statements about the former Romanian territories, acquired from the USSR. According to the Great American Cold War strategist, Zbigniew Brzezinski, “*the situation in Ukraine will not resolve itself without new geopolitical changes in the region*” ...

- Relations with **Hungary** are unstable, the root of this problem being the issue of the status of Szekler County. Hungary finds itself in a revisionary reinventing process, leading increasingly aggressive and provocative actions against neighboring countries that (still) have Hungarian minorities.

- Regarding the relations with **Serbia**, after 1999, when Romania considered the NATO action to bomb Serbia to be justified, official relations were back to normal only after Romania, a member of NATO and the EU, started to protest Kosovo's independence. Serbia is reoriented, following the stated intention of not accepting integration into the EU at any cost, remaining for Romanians only a transit destination.

- **Bulgaria** is seen within the European Union in “*tandem*” with Romania. Beyond other “*small incidents*”, relations between Romania and Bulgaria have never materialized through solid economic partnerships, not even in tourism. What is less known is that in Bulgaria the revisionist trend is, as well, fashionable.

- Relations with the **Russian Federation** are “*in a situation that is not exactly stable or encouraging over the last two years, with little initiative in bilateral relations*”, as the Russian ambassador in Romania stated in an interview with the Romanian media, in 2016:

“I realized that, in terms of tourism, Romania is underestimated, not only in Russia, but also in other countries. As far as infrastructure is concerned, your country is lagging behind if we compare it to central Europe or even neighboring Bulgaria. Unfortunately, Romania's reputation, in terms of tourism, is not very good in Russia. Not many real attempts have been made to change the situation. Even hostility in the sphere of information to Russia is not an appealing trait for Russian tourists!”

The only “*friends*” remain... Slovakia, Turkey, Poland and China, possibly. For now!

If for a long time, in history, the most secure friend of the Romanian Country was just the **Black Sea**, it is now no longer the neighbor with which Romania has the best relations. But... The Constanta area became the key to the Danube, the largest commercial and tourist river transportation artery in Europe. In addition, it is also a strategic key for the Balkans, becoming one of the most important corridors for transporting from/to EU countries. Placing military bases in Bulgaria, along the Danube and in Romania, the US controls the Black Sea region. Of tourism - in the Black Sea," Russian Lake " -, we can no longer speak!

The geopolitical position is reflected eloquently in our history, but, by the location in this regional and European geopolitical pole, if the assets will not be exploited, Romania could enter into a dangerous situation which in turn can start generating malfunctions, vulnerabilities, with unsuspected track in the area and continental space.

The geopolitical analysis of the Romanian space would be greatly diminished by content if we did not refer to the economic criteria as well. American Professor Edward Luttwak (Luttwak, 2013), from the Center of International and Strategic Studies in Washington, believes that... "the geo-economic priorities and modalities have already become dominant in the actions of the state" ...

The geo-economic and geopolitical dimension of the Romanian space will depend on the geo-economic and geopolitical interest for Romania; if it will be maintained, if it grows, given the economic and geopolitical stakes that this region represents in the future.

Also, the geostrategic position of our country will require, in a closer or more distant perspective, its full connection to the east-west flows (energy, road, economic, commercial, human/touristic, etc.), as well as the entire modern infrastructure, adjacent to them (roads, railways, airports, ports, roads, energy, etc.).

In this context, the sustainable development of **tourism**, would be an opportunity, an offer, a chance, a solution and not only?!

Why is the sustainable development of tourism for Romania in the future 25 years important??

The important role that the sustainable development of tourism in the development of the economic and social future of Romania is undeniable, however, efforts must be made to ensure that the tourism potential is fully exploited, the government and the tourism industry will have to overcome a number of challenges to ensure that maximum benefits are achievable for the economy and society in a sustainable and long-term way.

But the most important argument is that **tourism is an important consumer of space, natural and anthropogenic resources**, a generator of changes in the environment and the economy, causing several types of effects. Tourism is totally dependent on the environment, as it constitutes the "raw material" of tourism, being in the subject matter, the field of activity and the venue of tourism.

The components of the environment – the landscape, forests, rivers, lakes, sea, nature's monuments, air or mineral waters – contribute to the development and pursuit of tourism of rest, recreation, specialized or spa treatment. As these resources are more varied, more complex and unaltered, the greater the touristic value of the area, the attractiveness of the area is greater, thus leading to the satisfaction of varied tourist motivations. The obvious dependence of tourism on the quality of the environment, makes it interested in all its environmental protection actions.

The degradation of tourist resources can have the most serious socio-economic implications. Economically speaking, the degradation of tourist resources leads to the impossibility of tourist recovery, the decline in tourism revenues, thus constituting a loss to the economy. From a socio-cultural point of view, the degradation of tourist resources will result in a reduction in the possibilities of restoring health and the inability to meet people's cultural and educational needs.

The analysis of the environmental impact of tourism seen as the accumulation of all these effects, positive or negative, interests because it is intended that the tourism expansion to preserve the ecological balance, avoiding resource overload, pollution and any other negative effects on the environment. Therefore, great importance is given to the quality of the environment, because any sudden change produced - by massive and uncontrolled deforestation, for example-, leads to diminishing, and sometimes even to the cancellation of its resources and their valorization through tourism.

Perhaps it is less known that Romania has, still, about 65% of the existing **European primary forest**. This is a forest that has not been affected by human activity and is a rare reminder of the past landscape of Europe. Romania's forests are protected by a variety of European Legislation, including **Natura 2000**, and the **UNESCO World Heritage Site - The ancient and primary forests of the Carpathian Beech and other regions of Europe**.

However, in the last 10-15 years, the forests of Romania were not only threatened, but also implemented vast, uncontrolled, chaotic deforestation actions, with huge impact on the environment, climate change, landscape and implicitly, of tourism. Illegal deforestation, is it not a **matter of national security of Romania**, especially since the phenomenon has been internationalized - by implication -, with geopolitical and geo-economic connotation

But the worst effect is that the **Romanian National Parks** have become victims of deforestation, being a “to date” theme on everyone's agenda; although, no one has any specific reaction or attitude, namely the representatives of the State. So, countless foundations have emerged - or associations, national or international - which “*pursue noble purposes, to protect the environment, especially the forests of the Meridional Carpathians, want to preserve the wonderful nature of Romania, to mark tourist routes over the mountain rivers, etc.*” Probably, after the forests of Romania have been “razed”!

The management of protected areas is carried out under the pressure of major logging companies. The forests of Romania have become the silent victims of incompetence, greed, dirty money and profits, leaving behind the mountains and hills of chaotic grubbed forest, the strictly protected habitats were destroyed, and the specific tourist infrastructure was affected. **Effects of globalization?**

A couple of years ago - incredible but true - the online media in Ukraine dedicated entire pages and terrifying images of the “**ecological catastrophe in northern Romania**” – namely the ancient codes of Maramures and Bucovina, which disappeared until, guess what? The Border. According to **Agent Green** estimations, illegal logging caused losses of at least 5 billion euros (3.6 billion pounds, 5.7 billion dollars) to Romania, after the fall of the communist regime in December 1989, and during the period 1990-2011-, 366,000 hectares of Romanian forest were cut illegally. For the past ten years there is suspicion that about 43,000 hectares of forest were sold illegally, when state-owned land was “**returned to private property**”. About 50% of the 6.3 million hectares of forest in Romania are in the hands of the state, the other half being exploited privately. Deforestation reduced the coverage of forests in Romania to around 26% of the total land area, “although scientists say 36% should be the minimum”. Losses are estimated at around 300 million. For now!

Ignorance, unconsciousness and ultimately the complicity of the governors was justified by the elaboration of a “**new forestry code**” - which would come “in support of private owners, to make money legally”-, and by declarations in the European Media, that “there was an illegal exploitation”, but, “*especially in the private forests, and not in the forests administered by Romsilva*”.

The height of cynicism, the business of deforestation in Romania belongs to an important Austrian group, Schweighofer, who reacted swiftly and insolently by objecting to a clause in the Forestry Code setting a maximum market share of 30% per species of tree for a lumber firm. According to them, “*that limit of 30% infringes European competition law and, if adopted, the firm could sue the Romanian authorities in an International Court and dismiss workers in its Romanian factories*”.

The European Commission declared that it “**assesses planned forestry changes in Romania**”, warning that the new legislation must comply with EU law.

Nota bene: The EU Wood Regulation obliges wood companies to ensure that they do not supply and place on the EU market products from logs “**illegally harvested**”.

A recent investigative film - published by Nature Conservation Agencies, **Agent Green** and **EuroNatur** -, reveals information about illegal exploitation, hunting and deforestation in protected areas of Romania. The video clearly and unequivocally states that this case is no longer exceptional news in Romania. Also, accusations against the Austrian company - which is “operating” in Romania - have been made by the **Environmental Investigation Agency** (EIA) in Washington, while publishing a video-undercover on their website-which leads to the link between Schweighofer and illegal exploitation.

As usual, the Austrian company denied the allegation.

Conclusions

The New Political - Economic Order based on the differentiation of the countries from a socio-political, economic, demographic and resource – based point of view, is the basis for the new vision of the geopolitics of the future and the multiple mutations that will take place.

The events that have taken place in the last two decades give researchers **new guidance on the future geopolitical structure**.

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