

MARKETING STRATEGIES AND POLICIES FOR DEVELOPING TOURISM IN THE CENTRE REGION

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Abstract: *Tourism is one of the economic branches that has expanded fast over the last decades. The motivation of tourists are very different: some tourists seek rest and relaxation, other adventure, some tourists prefer nature, while other tourists want to discover new places or are interested in historical, cultural objectives or cultural manifestations. Health rehabilitation also counts, among the frequently encountered tourist motivations. There is a quite well-structured segmentation of the tourism market according to the characteristics of tourists such as age, family situation, educational attainment, level of income.*

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JEL Classification: *M31, M37.*

1. Introduction – Types of tourism in the Centre region

Without trying a clear distinction between the forms of tourism in the Centre region, we consider their differentiated analysis useful. From most researches and studies that have been developed until now, it has been concluded that the forms of tourism with the highest development potential are: mountain tourism, spa tourism, cultural tourism and rural tourism (www.regio.adrcentru.ro).

Mountain tourism benefits from exceptional natural conditions in the Centre region, almost half of the area is covered by mountains. The Centre region includes significant parts of 6 of the 28 national or natural parks of Romania and includes many other protected areas and natural reservations.

Cultural tourism is favored by the existence of valuable objectives surrounding the territory of the region and some well-known architectural landmarks (fortified churches, Bran Castle, Sighişoara's Citadel, Sibiu, Braşov, Alba Iulia etc.) as well as prestigious traditional festivals (Pentecost pilgrimage from Şumuleu-Ciuc, Mount Găina Maidens Fair). The relatively small distance between the cultural touristic objectives favors their integration into different thematic circuits.

Spa tourism is beginning to be reconsidered and upgraded in recent years and is a preferred form of tourism in the counties of the Centre region, especially in the counties: Covasna, Harghita and Mureş. Romania owns one third of Europe's mineral water springs, many of which are located in the Centre region.

Rural tourism is preferred by families with children who seek relaxation in a peaceful and healthy environment. They are also interested in foreign tourists as a direct means of knowing authentic traditional civilization. In the last 20 years rural tourism has developed dynamically. The number of tourist and agrotourist pensions in the Centre region is over 800, and the number of accommodation places has reached almost 13,000.

Business tourism has grown mainly in big cities and several resorts that offer high comfort and accommodation and have the necessary technical facilities.

2. SWOT Analysis of the tourist destination, Centre region

The process of policy and strategy development should be based on an overview of the current situation of tourism in the Centre region. The utility of the SWOT analysis consists of identifying strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities in this region.

Strengths:

- Physical and geographical framework favourable to the development of human settlements, communication channels and economic activities;
- Rich forests, exploitable for economic purposes and with a role in preserving the regional ecosystem;
- Existence of important natural resources, including energy resources;
- The network of urban localities is balanced;
- The existence of a growth pole (Braşov) and two urban development poles (Târgu Mureş and Sibiu);
- Increase the proportion of employees who have graduated higher education institutions;
- Road network that allows access to all areas of the region and ensures a good connection of the Centre Region with the other regions of Romania;
- The Centre Region is crossed by the Pan-European Transport Corridor IV;
- The university network of 13 universities, university research centres in almost all scientific fields;
- Relatively balanced economic structure;
- Trendency to increase the shares of economic sectors with a high added value (services, certain branches of industry);
- Significant volume of foreign direct investment (2nd place after Bucharest-Ifov);
- The value of exports has grown 4 times over the past 10 years;
- I.M.M. have a significant share of staff and turnover;
- The presence of a business-supporting infrastructure;
- Clusters in training in the fields of wood processing, biomass, electrotechnics, food industry;
- Important tourist potential, diversified and spread across the region, increasing tourist flow;
- Significant agricultural potential, including organic farming.

Weaknesses:

- The mountainous terrain imposes restrictions on territorial, social and economic development;
- Only half of the water bodies in the Centre Region have a good environmental status;
- Large number of villages not connected to the public utility infrastructure;
- Demographic slowdown and the process of demographic improvement since 1990;
- High migration rate after 2000;
- Low rates of activity and employment of the working-age population, increase in intra-regional disparities as regards employment;
- Unemployment rate is higher than the national average;
- Insufficient technical condition of the road network;
- The lack of motorways and high capacity roads;
- Subdued investments in rail infrastructure maintenance;
- Residential, educational and poor health infrastructure in small towns and in rural areas;
- Continuing the tendency of economic polarization at regional level;

- The economic connection of the region with the European market remains relatively low, the reduced participation of the domestic companies in various economic cooperation networks;
- The underdeveloped and under-utilised business infrastructure;
- Tourist infrastructure is unequally developed at regional level;
- The access infrastructure to some areas with tourist potential is poor;
- Economic dependence on agriculture of most rural localities, low degree of agriculture technology;
- Small, economically unviable agricultural holdings;
- Ageing workforce;
- Unsustainable exploitation of forests.

Opportunities:

- Utilization of renewable energy resources (biomass, micro-hydro, solar);
- Polycentric urban development;
- Moderate improvement of certain demographic indicators;
- Increase the level of training of the labour force;
- Increasing the share of the employed population in the tertiary sector;
- Improving and expanding transport infrastructure, developing intermodal transport;
- Improving access to areas that currently have a poor road infrastructure, ensuring fast road links between the Centre Region and other regions of Romania;
- Expansion of passenger air transport and freight air transport, including the construction of Braşov - Ghimbav International Airport;
- Unleashing research potential and transfer of results to economy;
- Expanding business-supporting infrastructure, diversifying the range of services offered;
- Increasing the financing of the research - development - innovation sector, as a result of the European policies in the field;
- Increase of the tourist flow to the region;
- Agriculture's profitability, development of economic activities related to it;
- Creating viable economic alternatives in rural areas.

Threats:

- High negative impact of climate changes and non-rational exploitation of natural resources;
- Increasing disparities between large urban centres and small and medium-sized towns;
- Increasing demographic decline and accelerating the ageing rate of the population in the coming years;
- The increase of the external migration phenomenon, especially of the young and the highly qualified population;
- Educational issues in poor population groups, especially the Roma population;
- Non-correlation between educational opportunities with labor market needs, low labor participation in further training programmes;
- Overburdening European and national roads, continuing the degradation of

road transport infrastructure;

- Low road safety;
- Increased disproportion between road transport and rail transport;
- Unfavorable external economic developments can negatively impact the economic future of the Centre Region;
- Decrease in the attractiveness of the Centre Region for investment;
- Maintain a low degree of absorption of European funds;
- Increase in the area of unused agricultural land, non-rational exploitation of forests;
- Emphasizing economic and social problems related to poverty in small towns and rural areas.

Following this analysis and based on the information obtained from the marketing researches, a series of specific marketing mix policies will be proposed and strategies will be suggested in order to bring the Centre Region into a competitive position on the market.

3. Marketing mix of the tourist destination, the Centre region

The marketing mix for the Centre Region includes the following elements: product, price, distribution, promotion, personnel, partnerships, physical tests, process management.

3.1. Product policy

Romanian tourists choose the tourist destinations in Brasov, Alba, Sibiu for a limited time, usually a weekend, in the counties of Covasna, Harghita, Mureş. Romanian tourists and foreigners spend more time in spa treatments. In order to extend the stay of both foreign tourists and Romanian tourists, as well as to attract a larger number of tourists, it is advisable to design tourist products such as tours for 5-6 days to visit surrounding places, to contain an offer that is more complex and diversified by age. The aim of the tourist packages must be, besides visiting all the objectives, the discovery of specific customs and traditions to highlight the uniqueness of the Centre Region.

3.2. Price policy

In the case of this marketing policy, the main measure that has to be taken is to adjust the prices to the quality of the services so that the relationship between quality and price is considered right by the tourists.

Tariffs for access to cultural, religious, and historical objectives across the Centre Region are accessible to everyone. Even so, it is necessary to grant discounts to groups, pensioners, students, students and pupils.

As a price strategy in the Centre region, low price strategy can be used to win a market position and attract consumers. It would be an opportunity for the region to attract more tourists considering Romania's current economic situation. The recommendation is also the adjustment strategy for off-season tariffs (spring and autumn periods).

3.3. Distribution policy

In the Centre region there are several tourism agencies, as well as associations that promote tourism and participate in tourism fairs and represent each county in the region. Travel agencies prefer to organize package tours on demand rather than to arrange programmes internally and externally. Due to the poor infrastructure of the region, there are foreign tour operators who do not include the Centre region in their offers.

There is a very large and unexploited developmental opportunity through incoming tourism in the Centre region. It is necessary to contribute all the actors in the tourism field in order to establish tourism products of the type of tourist destination in the Centre region,

at an advantageous price, which will be distributed both to the travel agencies in the country and abroad. It is also necessary to collaborate with the big tourist operators in order to include these products in their offers.

Electronic distribution requires designing a single official web site that includes all the information a tourist needs when it comes to visiting the Centre Region. This web site may also contain an online booking system that includes accommodation in the region.

Because the Centre region intends to strengthen its position on the market, an intensive distribution strategy including the use of a large number of intermediaries is recommended. The tourist product from the Centre region should be placed primarily in the offers of the big international tourist operators, then in the tourism agencies and the domestic and foreign tourist information centers and to the electronic intermediaries.

3.4. Policy on promotion

There are several initiatives to promote this region due to its high attractiveness and diversity among the destinations in Romania. That's why the first step to start a promotional company is to establish an identity for this destination. An attempt to promote in Covasna county was "2017 - The Year of Tourism. Regional Balneoturismic Cluster – 2014".

In order to ensure effective promotion at the local level, the cooperation with all the actors in tourism and the support of the local authorities and of the destination management organization are necessary in order to:

- Design an attractive, interactive portal to show all the attractions of the Centre Region (for each county in the region), the activities that can be carried out here, and the opportunities for leisure;
- Produce various high-quality, attractive, well documented promotional materials such as brochures, leaflets, CDs, tourist guides, distributed free to tourists, information centers and travel agencies in the country and abroad;
- Include the tourist product on social sites and on the websites of different travel agencies;
- Design a brand for the Centre region to represent the identity of the tourist destination, including an advertising clip with the region's representative, unique objectives, a very concise presentation of traditions and leisure opportunities; a short message, easy to remember; promotional materials have to be promoted with a common message. This brand must be launched both on the national and international markets;
- Organize internationally renowned festivals;
- Organize info-trips for representatives of tour operators and travel agencies in order to gather information about the region;
- Participate in many tourism fairs and exhibitions with products from the Centre region;
- Attract personalities to support concerts, book presentations etc.

3.5. Staff policy

Both staff in tourism and the local population should be considered, as both categories contribute to the experience of tourists.

Most managers of the tourist accommodation units prefer to hire staff with professional experience rather than with knowledge accumulated in school.

Salaries in tourism are very low, the workload is high, that's why the employees are not motivated. Managers of tourism organizations in most cases adopt short-term strategies: not to hire staff for an indefinite period with low salaries and to change it periodically.

Job insecurity, low salaries manifest in the form of uninterest of staff in the tourism organization in which they work. Employee dissatisfaction is an issue that should not be forgotten, so urgent action is needed to improve the situation.

The precarious financial situation and the lack of jobs are factors that make the staff working in tourism to strive at work, to learn in the process of working, to be kind and always willing to help. This is confirmed by the opinion of the interviewed tourists in the quantitative research, according to which the respondents believe that the staff working in tourism in the region of Covasna are adequately trained.

Organizations active in the field of tourism must consider the following strategies to overcome the problems faced by the population engaged in tourism:

- Invest in the continuous development of staff;
- Managers should encourage quality and not quantity, appreciate and support training, and assign tasks to the future staff in the specialised field;
- Keep competent employees through loyalty, reward, information, investing in training, offering facilities, flexible working schedule etc.

These strategies should be applied in all tourism organizations in the Centre region and should be proposed and supported by the Destination Management Organization and local authorities.

The attitude of the local population towards the tourists is friendly, open, hospitable. It is a surprising aspect which is appreciated by tourists, most of them praise the local population in the region.

3.6. Process policy

Tourist packages are designed to attract tourists to a particular destination, extend the stay, and encourage tourists to come back to have the same experience.

In order to facilitate accommodation, boarding, transportation, guiding, tourists have to be organised in groups.

Local accommodation units and restaurants will be contacted to choose the most advantageous offer. In restaurants, animation programs will be contracted for each evening according to possibilities and in order to present local traditions. Local transport companies will be contracted to ask for their offers and opt for the most advantageous ones. Specialist guides will also be chosen to accompany tourists along the tour.

The idea of tourist packages will be proposed to the marketing organizations of destinations in the region to offer tourist packages to tourists who come to the Centre region.

3.7. Physical policy

This policy must be approached from the point of view of the staff's ability to provide the service and how the tourist found the delivery process.

In the Centre region, the staff who work in tourism are kind, therefore the quality of the tourist services process is generally considered satisfactory by tourists.

Most tourism organizations are aware of technological developments and are equipped with the newest equipment: card readers, online reservation systems etc.

Most tourism organizations apply the policy of generating and maintaining customer relationships by setting up databases with them and by finding their feedback important regarding the quality of the service.

The proposed management strategy for the future is aimed at tourism management organizations that need to invest in conducting market studies to determine trends in consumer behavior and tourists' expectations from offered services.

4. Conclusions

Marketing is essential to ensure the success of a tourist destination. This is a strategic mechanism whose main objective is the development of tourism in the respective destination, in accordance with the protection of the environment and the satisfaction of the needs of the actors involved in the tourism activity.

The first aspect that any marketing plan should start with is knowing and forecasting the dimensions of the tourist market, concepts that are a constant concern of tourism management organizations considering the dynamic of this market.

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