

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA

C. A. BĂLTESCU¹ D. BOŞCOR¹

Abstract: *The article aims to identify the premises and records of the cultural tourism development in Romania. The steady international efforts for supporting cultural tourism are perceived at national and local level. The article highlights the steps taken for the recognition of the Romanian cultural tourism by the specialized public institutions and by private companies. Also, a global assessment is achieved of the offers for practising and developing cultural tourism in our country.*

Key words: *cultural tourism, cultural heritage, cultural routes.*

1. Introduction

Cultural tourism is one of the oldest types of tourism and continues to represent an essential direction for the development of world tourism [31]. The European cultural heritage is the oldest and most important force generating the tourism phenomenon [36], and the cultural tourism is recognized as a pole of tourism attractiveness in Europe [28], becoming one of the most popular types of tourism [7]. In Europe, a 40% share of cultural tourism is estimated in the tourism field as a whole [42].

2. Theoretical issues regarding the development of cultural tourism

In the first period of the '90s, the research studies regarding cultural tourism were numerous and underlined the inextricable links between tourism and cultural heritage, starting from the idea that heritage is the driving force of tourism activities' development [28]. Cultural tourism includes visits to cultural attractions, such as heritage sites, artistic and cultural events and activities outside visitors' residence

area [5]. Analysts focused on the cultural attractions („new consumption cathedrals”) located in urban and rural areas [33], and the spread of investments in order to increase the cultural attractiveness of destinations has driven the literature to show the issues regarding the development of theme products and the marketing of cultural tourism [24]. Also, concerns have increased regarding the highlighting of the role of visitors' experience in the analysis of tourism field and involving tourism destinations for a better use of cultural resources as an element of developing travel experiences [29].

Specialized literature has lately focused on the qualitative aspects of the travel experience among tourists and on the local communities visited [31], as well as on the genuineness of the elements which make the travel experience [15], [3], [39]. Authors have also underlined the influence of cultural tourism development on the improvement of the negative effects of tourism seasonality [9].

¹ Dept. of Marketing, Tourism and International Relations, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

Several research studies have shown the interconnection between cultural tourism and creativity, emphasizing the participative character of modern cultural tourism activities, by means of which the consumer can know and understand the particular features, complexity and identity of visited places [11]. Creativity is explained by involving tourists in practicing daily activities specific to the visited destination, directing consumption to the elements of heritage with a low level of tangibility [32]. The activities of the craftsmen are examples of sources for developing creativity in tourism [30] with positive effects on the increase in local people's income and their direct participation in the increase of local tourism attractiveness [10]. Tourists play an important role in shaping their holiday experience, but decisions on their contents belong to a large extent to tourism producers [27]. Tourists' interests in the activities performed on a small scale and which involve human interaction are well known [22]. The promotion of the area and revitalization of traditional crafts is a tool for promoting diversity, for developing the offer and for the expansion of the consumption of these products from the community to a larger public. Informed tourists are more motivated to be involved in creative activities on the expense of the traditional tourism consumption [34]. In a world where global competition is increasing, we witness spectacular developments in the offer of products and services according to client requirements, and the continued growth of the world as a whole [21]. The development of the local souvenir industry as part of the local economic activities represents an important element of the destination marketing [16], a means to express relationships and communication between tourists and hosts [6], research being focused on tourists and their buying behaviour as regards souvenirs

made by local artisans [13] or who wish to engage in local activities [20].

Researchers have shown the importance of cultural heritage valorization in order to ensure local competitiveness [2], [8], [4], [17], but the real local development and cultural tourism competitiveness demand an efficient collaboration between the private and public initiatives, as well as the achievement of synergies between the strategies of all the actors involved [1]. Where there is initiative and collaboration, the results at local/regional level are remarkable [14]. The role of tourism as a tool for increasing the standard of living, especially in the rural area, is well known and represents the subject of analysis from the 90s. Recent studies have created a model for assisting and helping poor areas through tourism [38], have identified the potential of upgrading traditional concerns for tourism valorization [23], and rural development is considered the basis of the integrated tourism management [19].

The cultural heritage, marketing and tourism are broad areas of analysis, providing the link with sustainable development and the basis of the strategic actions for sustaining and protecting the cultural heritage on the long term [7]. The relationship between cultural heritage and the contemporary tourism activity has an important positive side, the cultural attractions becoming pillars of local economies' development, but also a negative side through the presence of a high number of tourists negatively affecting the environment and the local social cohesion [12]. In this framework, applying the principles of sustainable development is a requirement [35]. The cultural heritage is identified through its specific values: aesthetic value, spiritual, social, historic, symbolic and genuine and through the concepts of sustainable development: continuity, equity, diversity, equilibrium, interdependence [12]. Cultural tourism

resources have the feature of renewability, which creates the idea of continuous use, helping to provide assumptions of sustainable development [25]; recent research studies have focused on local social conflicts generated by the tourism development [37], and on the benefits of using the indicators of sustainable development in the management of cultural tourism destinations [18]. Cultural tourism, based on the uniqueness and authenticity of tourism destinations, of local customs and traditions, can be promoted by creating cultural routes. The cultural routes are land, water mixed routes or other types which are physically identified and individualized through historic dynamics and functionality [41]. Tourist theme routes, the Silk Road or Route 66 being among the most famous, are the result of a marketing activity mix and contributes to guiding visitors to tourism consumption [26].

3. European concerns towards the development of cultural tourism

At regional level, the European Commission (2010) established a new political framework for tourism in Europe, number one world destination, highlighting the necessity of stimulating competitiveness in the European tourism field starting from the tourism offer diversification, by developing theme tourism products which can harness the cultural, natural, educational potential (cultural routes) of a region.

In 1987, the program of the European Council Cultural Routes was launched [40] which encourages the dialogue across cultures and religions and better knowledge of the events from the European history, and protects the cultural heritage, seen as a way to improve the quality of life and as a source of economic, social and cultural development. At the moment, there are 29 cultural routes certified by the European

Council, routes that cover the territory of more than 70 countries.

In 1997, the European Council created the European Institute of Cultural Routes in order to coordinate the existing routes at European level, to provide technical support and to initiate new proposals. On the map of cultural routes, Romania has been present since 2011, as part of developing the profile project „Cultural routes in the Middle and Lower Danube Region” together with Bulgaria, Serbia and Croatia.

4. Cultural tourism in Romania

Romania's joining the European Union has favoured the growing involvement of decision factors at national level for the valorization of cultural heritage as part of the European cultural heritage. In this respect, in Romania was proposed a National Strategy of the National Cultural Heritage for the period 2008-2013, which generates increased performance in the operational framework of cultural heritage management and the quality increase of the heritage field by sustainable investments in preservation, training and management of sites.

Following the collaboration with the European Institute for Cultural Routes in 2010, a Resource Centre for Cultural Routes was opened in Sibiu. The Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism from Romania signed an agreement in 2011 with the European Institute for providing technical assistance for the development of cultural routes in Romania, which can be integrated in the European cultural routes. The collaboration will end in 2014, the routes being „The Route of Fortified Churches” and „The Route of Orthodox Churches”, as well as the inclusion of tourist attractions from Romania in the „Cistercian Route”, „The Route of historic thermal resorts” and „Iter Vitis – The Wine Road”, these being routes already certified

by the European Council. At the moment, Romania is included in the routes “Iter Vitis” and „The Route of historic thermal resorts” through Techirghiol resort. A central element of the development of cultural tourism in Romania is the promotion of fortified churches routes. In this respect, 2011 saw the initiation of the tourism program “The Tour of the big fortified churches from Romania”, which has been operational starting 2012.

In the portfolio of the most important Romanian tour-operators, the specific products for cultural tourism are hard to individualize. The agency Marshal Tourism [43] can be noticed for offering pilgrimages at the monasteries from the northern part of Moldavia, Bucovina or Olt Valley, and a Brâncuşi trip, while other big companies as HappyTour, Eximtur, Paralela 45, Simpa Turism etc. have not included in their present offer cultural tours in Romania. The lack of products for cultural tourism is usual for the tourism agencies from Braşov, although the geographic position and the proximity of cultural attractions could be important decisional strengths in this respect. At local level, the association Professional Team proposes a tourist program “The tour of fortified churches from Transilvania”. The association for Promotion and Tourism Development from Braşov county (APDT) promotes the regional traditions and cultural attractions, and the tour-operator agency Enjoy Transilvania (Bucharest) promotes two tourism routes in the field, “The fortified churches at step” and “Villages and Saxon fortifications”. Regarding the big tour-operators with global activity, the German group TUI can be noticed, which organizes tours in Romania for 9-14 days, visiting the monasteries from the northern part of Moldavia and the medieval churches and fortifications in Transilvania [44].

5. Conclusions

The cultural heritage from our country is rich and valuable, the inclusion of the national tourist attractions on the map of European cultural routes being a proof in this respect. The weak promotion of this market niche with a remarkable potential explains the lack of tourism offers in the field. The hard efforts of important stakeholders on the Romanian tourism market and of the cultural institutions, and the collaboration between them will contribute to Romania’s firm establishment on the world market of cultural tourism.

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