

TOURISM-A PANACEA FOR THE ROMANIAN SMALL TOWNS DEVELOPMENT?

Elena MATEI

Correspondence Address: University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography
1 Nicolae Bălcescu Av., 010041, Bucharest, e-mail: matei@geo.unibuc.ro

Ciprian Cosmin CARABA

University of Bucharest, Tourism Studies and Forecast Research Centre
1 Nicolae Bălcescu Av., 010041, Bucharest, e-mail: cipriancaraba@yahoo.com

Abstract: In Romania, after 1990, the number of small towns has been increased, but they are confronted with migration and negative birth rate due to the competition with cities, being less attractive for the economic investors. For these reasons, tourism has been seeing as a panacea for any issue regarding the (re)development of an area, settlements. Thus, the study gives to the local authorities, developers and planners some relevant aspects of the tourism limits and its potential for the regional and/or local development. The outputs of the study show that the tourism can't represent a magic solution, because a lot of towns with tourist function are faced with depopulation and decrease in accommodation offer and in this framework, the option for this activity must be carefully analyzed in local planning. Based on two ways to obtain pertinent responses: analysis of field observation and statistics data in quantitative way, the results have a general application and can be used to diagnose the opportunities for tourism development in small towns from Romania.

Key words: tourism, panacea, small towns, development, Romania

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1. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps that because tourism is the fastest growing economic sector globally or locally, gathering activities which generate satisfaction for increasingly number of people, and clean services for entrepreneurs, it is seen as a potential magic panacea, (Giauntzi and Nijkamp, 2006) in any place. There are some questions that need answers and many works on the success of this industry have not exhausted the tourist route in dynamic of the economy. The first question is that if tourism is a panacea for all economic syncope means that it is a permanent factor of development, out of impact. Knowing that it operates on two coordinates which had to be found a permanent balance and interrelations: environment and man, tourism is the vector of sustainability of economy. But studies on life of product, environmental impact, reduce its potentiality, despite the fact that it has multiplicative effects on the economy (Leeuwen et al, 2006) and emerging forms in the tourism industry expands beneficial influence.

In this case study of Romania, similarly with other studies (e.g. Western Cape, Ferreira, 2007), small towns could have elements to sustain somewhat tourism, but some prerequisites (tourism infrastructure, potential investors, appropriate services, and

skilled labor) are undeveloped or absent from many of them. But the role of tourism in towns should be related to the demographic characteristics, (Ledo and Iglesias, 2007) in order to analyze the future for both these two components.

The hypothesis of the study is if the option for tourism development can be an applicable solution to any small town, it could assure the success seen in its influence upon the population dynamics.

2. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Due to the size of the issue, the study stops to several methods and pathways to analyze the role of tourism in the small towns' development. One is focus upon the junction between the Master Plan of the Tourism Ministry with that of the Romanian Strategy of Development of Small Towns. The second way uses quantitative methods based on statistics and surveys. Thus, to avoid some difficulties, concerning the scale and the multi-faces of the problem the study uses statistical indicators covering the whole of Romania for the last years about population growth via natural birth rate, migration rate and tourist infrastructures evolution. Then, the paper purchases a survey about population perception concerning the need and directions for local development.

The measurement of the statistical indicators is focused on the National Institute of Statistics data, for 2006 and 2008 to obtain the population dynamism and a survey applied in 2008 on 50 inhabitants of small towns. For the third pathway it was evaluated the perception on the attractiveness of the small towns expressed by the share of migration workforce in European countries, the necessities of the investment in their views.

3. TOURISM IN THE GOVERNMENT'S VISION

Government of Romania has always considered tourism a priority sector. Although a national tourism development plan have been existed for over 10 years, the great question was represented by its recommendations failure or fault in the application. The Master Plan¹ highlights the shortcomings of current and potential directions of development of the Romanian tourism for a period of 20 years (2007-2026). Master Plan includes a concrete program of action on 6 years (2007-2013) focused on access to structural funds provided by EU.

In the political field is indicated to increase private sector involvement in decision making at the national level, the setting up of the National Tourist Organization as a semi-independent body, whose performance will be monitored by the state secretary of tourism. It is also recommended unification of legislation important to tourism through a parliamentary law.

For human resource development it has to consider organizing a network of institutions and personnel training programs in tourism and hospitality and organizing awareness programs in tourism at all levels starting from primary school through integration in school curricula.

Planning and development of tourist activities are recommended for preparation of detailed plans for the major tourist areas for a period of 15 years, setting design standards and quality in the tourist areas and tackling poor coordination in the planning system. Also, directions of development are proposed for all types and forms of tourism practiced in Romania, focusing on cultural tourism/heritage and the tourism routes. To improve the quality of data tourists (axis information services) are given a review of legislation on tourist information centers and facilitate their appearance but also the expansion and modernization of tourist signs international model. Investment policy includes encouraging Structural Funding 2007-2013 for development of tourism, establishment of

¹ National Tourism Development Master Plan for today was developed by a team of specialists from the World Tourism assisted by 20 Romanian researchers, (INCDT).

a fiscal policy of the Romanian Government to support investments in tourism.

The focus of marketing: they highlighted the need to adapt the Romanian tourism product to international market and the need for marketing and promotion strategies by identifying priority markets (France, Italy, Scandinavian countries) and brand development of the country.

Tourism Strategy identifies two important directions of development: cultural tourism / heritage (circuit type) and rural tourism. In this sense it can be recovered positions of the small towns located in rural areas to cities with a traditional or special cultural tourism potential (Horezu). Tourism Master Plan is not specifically aimed at small towns in the country. However there are small towns which have the status of a tourist resort, which benefits from a great tourism potential and are located on main roads, representing stops on the tourist circuit. For these towns, tourism master plan provides directions and development opportunities within the eight priority areas.

4. THE STRATEGY FOR THE SMALL TOWNS' DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA

Small towns in Romania face growing external pressure manifested by force from large cities to attract both population and business and investment. De-industrialization of small towns after 1989 led to a dramatic decrease in the number of jobs available and as a result and a lower level of income and living standards. Moreover, a large number of people chose to settle in larger cities with a more dynamic and, in recent years, especially going across the border.

Current strategies for the towns' development follow five priority directions: development of infrastructure (transportation, utilities, health, education and environment), development and efficiency of agriculture, human resource development, creating a framework for foreign investment and Small Commercial Corporations and tourism.

Priority area is the development of infrastructure. This area includes both transport infrastructure (especially roads and rails), other areas essential for economic development, and urban utilities (drinking water supply, sewers, power supply), and social infrastructure (health, education units).

Towns economy can be stimulated by the development and efficiency in agriculture from government subsidy programs, by establishing customs protective measures (limiting imports of certain products) or organizing training programs and facilitate access to EU structural funds.

Along with these are deemed necessary and the creation or upgrading of infrastructure and diversification of specific interest represented by units of accommodation, food stuffs and entertainment system marks of interest and information centers. In this area, the development strategy for small towns is somewhat convergent to the tourism master plan (fig.1.).

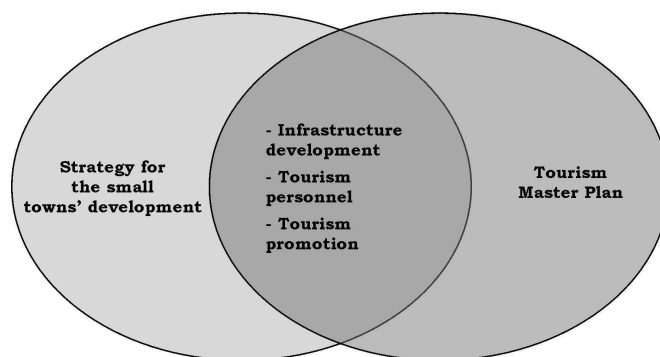


Figure 1. The joint points between Tourism Master Plan and The Strategy for the small towns' development in Romania

Tourism is also important for human resources development both through the development of initial (enhanced quality of state education) but also the organization of systems that complement the state system and developing a system of retraining and continuous education in collaboration with approved public or NGOs.

It is expected that the joint point of these two strategy to help in the achievement of the small towns' life quality, expressed by the positive dynamics of population.

5. POPULATION DYNAMICS AND TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE

To interpret and analyze levels of tourism effect for the small towns the following indicator were analyzed: natural birth rate, death rate, natural balance, departures and arrivals, migration balance and total balance of population, plus the dynamics of bed places in tourist accommodations. From the beginning it was adopted the idea that the dynamics of population could express the viability of economic life in these settlements.

Population dynamics is a punctual radiography concerning the natural and migratory balance as the effect of economic and social interactions in small towns in recent years, after 2005. Among all 231 small towns with a population under 25,000 inhabitants, 146 towns (63% of total) registered a negative natural balance in 2006 and only 130 in 2008. This little positive change affects some towns that have played an attractive role to the public who fit those located in the Bucharest metropolitan area but some towns with tourism potential (Valenii de Munte, Rasnov, Negresti Oas, etc.). But migration balance shows that in 2006, 150 towns were affected by departures, which is remarkable in mining towns (Motru, Balan, etc.), mono-industrial (Plopeni, Bals) but also in those with tourist function (Sovata, Baile Govora etc.). In 2008, the population of small towns' departures decreased slightly, from 145 of the 150 small towns maintained negative dynamics. Overall in 2006, 140 cities had a total negative balance, which means that 60% of small towns have experienced population decreasing. Later, respectively in 2008, the process has intensified, as 155 towns have recorded a negative population balance, especially those having specific function for tourism: Sulina, Baile Govora Horezu Buzias, Sinaia Sovata, and/or mono-industrial ones: Balan, Calan, Baia de Aries, Stei. The most dramatic decreases (15 %) are marked by: Dabuleni, Sulina, Sovata, Beresti etc.

In 2006, towns with positive natural balance, are identified mainly in those with a recent past in rural (Mihailesti, Cavajna, Vicovul de Jos, Baneasa) and in 2008, only Cavajna kept the rural model of birth, because the higher natural balance has been marked by Sangeorz Bai and Rovinari. Atypical situation meets in Tandarei town, where the natural balance was in 2008 similarly to 1968's, more than 24 %, due to the local community structure and traditions.

In sum, it can say that the average of total population balance was in 2006 about -1.75‰ and -1.43‰ in 2008, which shows a slow increase trend of population dynamics in the small towns of Romania (fig. 2). Moreover, many resorts faced with the decreasing of population due to the low rate of birth and migration.

Regarding the second set of indicators examined, those tied to the visibility of the supply of tourism infrastructure in the number of seats in all categories of accommodation, they are relevant, to the extent that explores the absolute figures, the trend of their dynamics, for the same years previously analyzed and relate to all activities that characterized this period Romania. Thus, approval or re-approval of accommodations, as amended by legislation in 2008 (MO no. 636/2008, MO nr.1448/2008) affected a number of companies seen by reducing the number of bed places. A statistical picture of the years 2006 and 2008 shows that the number of towns equipped for tourism has not changed, keeping 148 towns owning accommodation, which represents 64% of all small towns in Romania. Among these, 46 towns have registered a smaller number of seats in 2008 than in 2006, respectively 30% of those who have accommodation, such as the popular resorts (Herculane Spa, Eforie, etc.). 44 towns

stagnated as number of seats, and 60 towns increased their offer of accommodation, especially the resorts (Calimanesti, Slanic Moldova Lipova, Pucioasa, Vlahita, Sinaia, Busteni, Geoagiu-Bai). A particular situation is encountered in Otopeni town, where the presence of Henri Coanda-Otopeni international airport has stimulated the accommodation development which is double in the last two years, as well as in several towns positioned nearby customs (Siret, Nadlac, Chisinau Cris), but also in towns located in areas recognized as rural tourism pools (Viseu de Sus, Campeni, Rasnov Saliste, Avrig etc..) winery (Recas) and religious (Gura Humorului, Tismana).

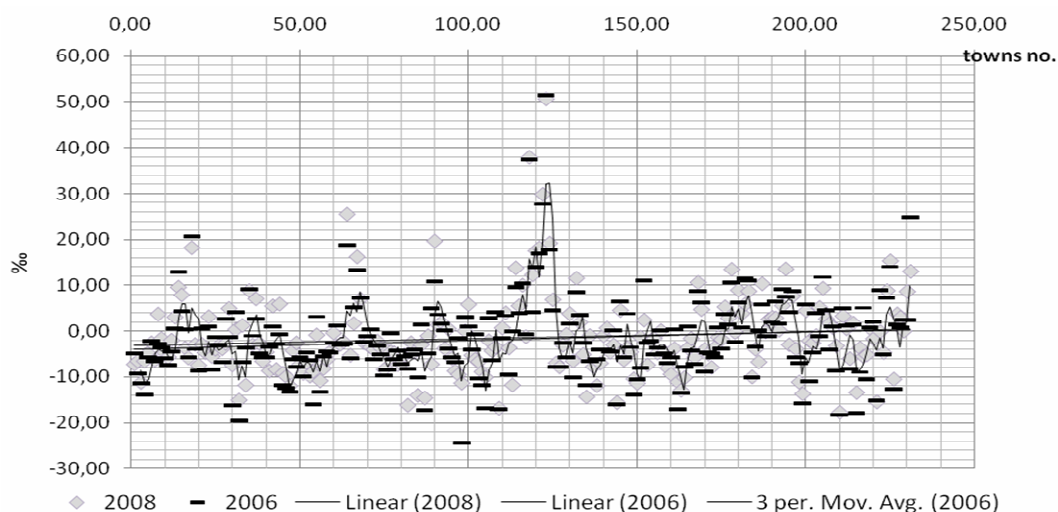


Figure 2. Population Dynamics of the small towns of Romania
(Processing by the NIS data)

In all, there are some small towns whose existence is tied to tourism. These include tourist resorts of national interest: Eforie that concentrates 1/3 of all premises offer accommodation of small towns, then Sinaia and Herculane Spa (figure 3).

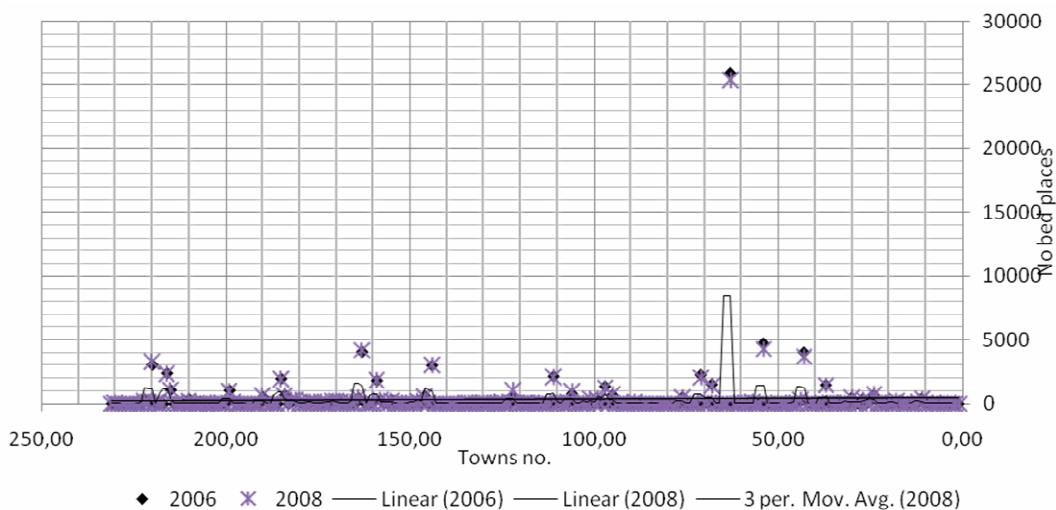


Figure 3. Trends in tourist accommodations' dynamics in the small towns from Romania
(Processing by the NIS data)

Total accommodations in 2008 gather 78,536 bed places, and in 2 years their number has increased only with 100 places. Accommodation with 2, 3 stars are widely spread, rarely 4 stars (Eforie, Baile Herculane, Gura Humorului, etc.) and very rarely 5 stars (Azuga, Predeal, Sinaia). This may be correlated with the financial power of investors and especially with the fact that small towns are target for lower income tourists, especially there where cultural tourism prevails.

It can be concluded that small towns which plans to develop through tourism, are still focused on middle-income tourists, on domestic tourism, social tourism in spas, it is unlikely that redevelopment to have entirely a big success as many of them experience huge process of population decreasing in number. Tourism, generally in Romania suffers because of poor transport infrastructure which not facilitate good access of tourists in all small towns and also the water running systems spreading which aggravate the tourist investments, (Matei, 2009).

Scenario that any town has tourism potential should be changed, because in most cases, this option is based on the perception of native people which subjectively over appreciates the hometown appeal. On the other hand, the phrase became a cliché in political programs that Romania will boost especially in tourism, partly explains the option of non-natives through tourism development. It is much closer to the truth that development shaped by the realities of these towns could attract investments in local economy, including tourism. For instance, Urlati town, where the policy of local authorities has lured investors to local industry represents a suitable solution, much better than the tourism option. So, the tourism development laterally, would be safer than focusing on tourism, taking into account that many famous resorts resize their tourism activity (Eforie, Slanic Moldova etc.).

6. CONCLUSIONS

Tourism has limits as territorial development factor, because it not acts in the same way on all small towns.

In terms of the relationship between the development of tourism and population dynamics as a positive feedback each other, the following conclusions can be highlighted:

- a. In small-sized seaside towns the largest increase occurred only in population not in tourism accommodation.
- b. In recent small towns, the past rural pattern of population positive dynamics is still preserved, simultaneously with the increase of tourism focused on boarding house establishments.
- c. An increase in tourist activities have occurred in the towns with health tourism potential, but this increase has not met correspondence in the evolution on the population, which registered decreasing in birth rate and migration as well.
- d. Towns with other economic role have experienced a strong dynamism, despite the fact they have no tourist specialization.
- e. The small towns around metropolitan areas faced with the positive population dynamics, but only those with transport function developed tourist accommodation.

The population perception about tourism solution as a factor for a successful development doesn't fit to the reality. For some resorts, with natural potential, tourism can be a basic factor of urban development, for others it remains an additional factor, as in the case of farming areas or former industrial towns, where nature features are completed by cultural heritage, while for others, tourism has no chance to help the urban development.

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