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ACCESSIBILITY AND TOURIST FUNCTION DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN SMALL TOWNS

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Abstract: Referring to the Romanian towns with less than 20000 inhabitants, the study makes a diagnosis of the tourist function and evaluates the potential for future development of this activity in relation to the geographic tourist accessibility (depending on the location from the major tourist axes, bigger cities or national tourist regions) and the potential tourist accessibility (expressed by natural and anthropic potential, existing services and general urban infrastructure development). The analytical approach regarding the key factors in the dynamics of the tourism phenomenon in small towns is useful in setting local and regional strategies for an optimal decision making process.

Key words: tourism, small towns, tourist function, geographic tourist accessibility, potential tourist accessibility, urban development

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INTRODUCTION

In a well balanced system of settlements, small and medium towns function as infrastructure clusters and growth nuclei at the urban-rural interface. The main loop of urban development is the offer of specific economic activities generating capital, building and infrastructure opportunities. After 1990 there has been a divergent and contradictory evolution through the involvement of tertiary activities (sometimes only through commerce) and through the functional diversification of small towns, which were industrial, or even monoindustrial before. On the other hand, many of these small settlements are faced with a certain crises regarding local economic activities, incapable of surviving in a market economy, which sometimes leads to the loss of urban characteristics, a decrease in the incomes, labour force emigration and demographic ageing. In these conditions, the tourism opportunities may be experimented as a reliable component for a more diversified local economy. Tourism may thus be seen as a quasi-autonomous development engine, capable of integrating some of these urban spaces within more dynamic territories and of reviving them on new economic grounds (Cazes, 1992).

The tourism phenomenon is hard to quantify because of its fluidity and its postmodern valences given the subjectivity when choosing the destinations, which

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depends mainly on the perception upon a tourist site or a locality prestige and tourism brand. Nonetheless, it is also highly important to consider the tourist site as a starting point to create the tourist image based on the natural tourist patrimony, the organization and quality of tourism infrastructure, and also physical access, degree of isolation or accessibility of the destinations. Between two towns with the same type of tourism services, people will choose that with an accessible patrimony, as the tourists do not longer see it as transit point, but as tourist destination.

Defining and evaluating the tourist accessibility should take into account the characteristics of the transportation system, the ease to reach the tourist site from a certain location, the time taken, the costs and the effort made to go that distance. It should also focus upon the tourism activity itself, meaning the quantity, quality and localization of opportunities with a comparative analysis of these services' offer and demand (Shen, 1998). For the development of tourism activities in a territory, we should take into consideration the attractiveness, development and accessibility requirements (Talabă, 2008). "*It is more than obvious that the most spectacular site, the most remarkable monument do not become tourist sites until the moment they become accessible*" (Dewilly and Flament, 1993). On the other hand, accessibility can only be understood in relation to the natural and anthropic tourism potential of the areas and to the tourism organization, both reflecting the tourism activity of the site.

Figure 1. The tourist accessibility

In our opinion, the tourist character of a place is given by the way in which the tourists place themselves regarding the potential tourist accessibility, which represents a synthetic index obtained by integrating the accessibility of the tourist patrimony, the tourism infrastructure and the geographical accessibility of the current communication network. If either of the three is missing, the space cannot be attractive for tourists. This supports the statement that not all the towns have valuable tourist potential and one should carefully evaluate the realities of a place/town in order to develop a sound local economy (Matei and Caraba, 2010).

CONCEPTS AND METHODOLOGY

In the studies having as subject tourism, accessibility is a function of distance from the centres of population, which constitute tourist markets, and of the external transport, which enables a destination to be reached. It is measured in terms of distance travelled, the time taken and the costs involved (Medlik, 2003).

In order to explain our study it is essential to dissociate between the meanings of the terms tourist function and tourist accessibility in the specialized literature and in our vision.

The tourist function is one of the few indices in the geography of tourism accessible through official statistical instruments, the official data registered by the National Institute of Statistics (NIS) being completed by consulting the sites destined to promoting the tourist products by tour-operators. The tourist function rate imagined by P. Defert may be calculated by comparing the lodging capatown (L) and the resident population (P), named theoretical tourist function rate, or by comparing the number of tourists to

that of the population, named effective tourist function rate (Defert, 1972 cited by Muntele and Iațu, 2006). It is a relative index depending on the demographic size of towns, with an advantage for small towns, but useful when comparing them with each other. The index expresses in a relatively accurate way the intensity of the tourist phenomenon, and the corrections available by introducing other variables (as the overnights spent there) do not severely alter the results (Muntele and Iațu, 2006).

We are trying to correlate the theoretical tourist function rate with other socio-economic indicators illustrating the degree of local tourist development (the number of employees in tourism, the number of companies involved in tourism, from lodging to public food supply, their turnover and profit), and also with tourist accessibility on the main transportation means for the studied localities.

As regards the concept of accessibility, we have to make the distinction between geographical and potential tourist accessibility. The first represents the sum of distances between a tourist site and the possible locations of tourists, on the shortest way and considering the quality of communication means. On the other hand, the potential accessibility is obtained by weighing it with certain elements of tourist attractiveness or repulsiveness, part of the tourism offer.

In general terms, the geographic accessibility measures the average distance between the locality and its whole potential tourist market (Celata, 2007). Recent studies have shown that there is no obvious correlation between this type of accessibility and the number of tourists (Toth and David, 2010; Celata, 2007). Thus, in case of Italy, for example, the correlation index between accessibility and the total number of tourists is -0,33, with higher values for the tourist sites on the Adriatic See shore and almost zero for the great historic towns and for other attractive destinations. A better correlation is the one between the geographic accessibility and the tourism of proximity, meaning within the same region, especially for the "*sea and sand*" type of tourism and less for the travels towards special destinations such as historic towns (Celata, 2007).

Based on these previous approaches, our study of geographic tourist accessibility for small towns is, on one hand, depending on the distance from the centres of population and from the tourist regions, which constitute tourist markets and concentrate tourist flows. On the other hand, the accessibility is a consequence of small towns' tourist attractiveness, resulted from the complementarities between the natural-anthropic tourist potential and the specific tourist infrastructure. We will calculate the accessibility of small towns in comparison to the nearby towns with more than 50000 inhabitants, situated on national or international tourist axes, where there may be many local tourists or people that came from another region or country.

As Handy and Niemeier (1997) pointed out, accessibility is determined not only by the spatial distribution of the potential destinations, but also by the activity development level, tourist activity in our case, by their quality and character. In this perspective, our study approaches accessibility taking into account not only the distance and number of potential tourists, but also the potential tourist attractiveness of the destinations. It considers the tourist potential and the degree of development in comparison to the physical and psychological distance between the potential tourists and that specific area. We start from the idea that, even though tourism is often exogenous and it can make the local environment artificial, there is in fact a very strong connection between the tourist offer, the natural and anthropic tourist potential, the access to it through transport infrastructure (external and internal for the towns taken into account), specific tourist infrastructure (lodging capatown and quality, tourist public food supply, the offer for conference, leisure and relaxation spaces) and general infrastructure (the endowment with urban utilities: water, sanitation, gas, telecommunications etc.).

An important source of information regarding these indicators was represented by the grounding studies regarding the *National Planning Act (PATN) – section 8 – Areas*

with tourist resources through the raw data and synthetic indices that we completed and reinterpreted taking into consideration the necessities of the current study.

TOURIST FUNCTION IN RELATION TO OTHER SOCIAL-ECONOMIC FACTORS OF TOURIST DEVELOPMENT IN SMALL TOWNS

The tourist offer in Romanian small towns is extremely diverse and differentiated depending on the positioning with regards to the tourist resources and the degree of endowment with general and specific tourist infrastructure, to the image of the locality and it is often directly proportional to the value of the indicators concerning the social and economic state of local population. Even though tourism seems to be exterior to the local community and identity, with a relatively artificial instalment, providing income to a limited group and not reflecting the quality of urban life, there are in fact numerous connections to local development, sometimes obvious (incomes for the local budget, local population employment), some other times indirect (valorising local products through consumption, promoting the local specifitown by the tourists satisfied with the services).

Most of the 215 Romanian towns having less than 20000 inhabitants do not have an obvious tourist function. Nevertheless there can be identified 30 localities including or overlapping officially recognised tourist resorts (23 of national and 7 of local importance). This status is reflected by the tourist function index which varies between 0% (many of these towns have no lodging capatown or tourist activities) and 260% (Eforie).

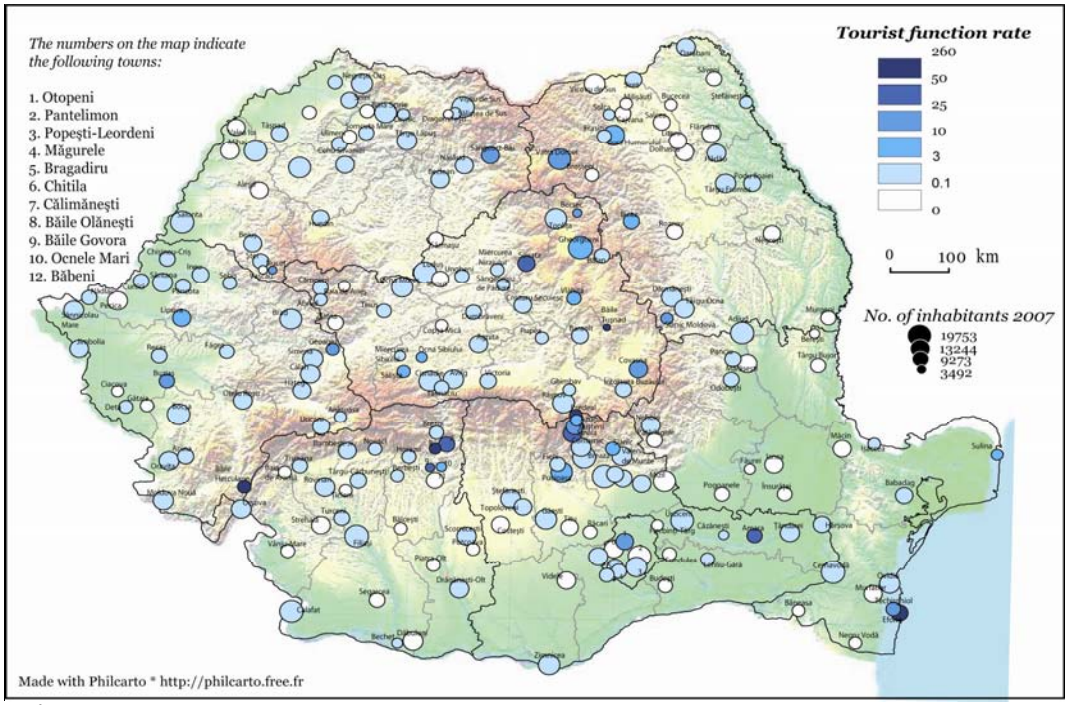

Figure 2. The theoretical tourist function rate of the Romanian small towns (Source: NIS, 2009)

We have high values of the tourist function rate in the traditional tourist areas, where small towns – including or being represented solely by traditional resorts – are either disposed according to a tourist linearity principle (the resorts on Prahova Valley or the resorts on the seaside), or they are more or less isolated tourist resorts which valorise a certain local natural potential (Băile Herculane, Băile Tuşnad, Amara, Sovata, Buziaş, Geoagiu). Within the last years, the evolution of the lodging capatown reflects

extremely contrasting situations: small towns in the traditional tourist areas like Eforie, Buşteni, Sinaia, Amara have maintained their lodging capatowns, while others have increased it (Buziaş), or even had important progress due to investments in new facilities (Frasin) or in modernising the capatowns that existed since before 1989 (Borsec). Certain towns have experienced a decrease in their lodging capatown, either because they were not important tourist sites (Gura Humorului) or they were placed outside the main tourist axes (Marghita, Oraviţa).

On the other hand, many of the lodging units for tourists are not officially registered or they are hidden by simple habitation statuses, so that we cannot rely on official statistics. That is why the calculated tourist function rate may be altered by not taking into account certain tourist structures, so that certain towns may appear repulsive to tourism, but they do have small pensions, summing remarkable lodging capatowns. This shortcoming was partially adjusted in our case after field experience and consulting sites promoting the tourist lodging capatown.

The distribution of the tourist function values in small towns can be partially explained, by analyzing certain social-economic and micro-economic indicators related to the tourist phenomenon, but they have to be very cautiously interpreted because the official statistics may alter local realities, sometimes hidden from official frameworks.

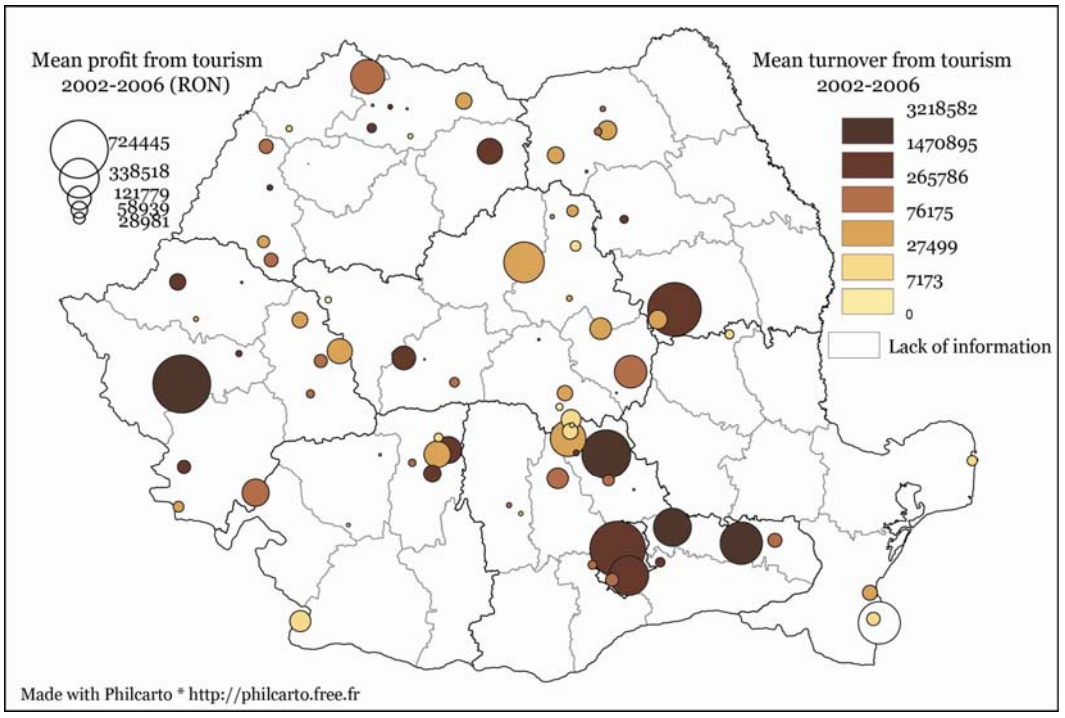

Figure 3. The average turnover and profit of the tourism companies from Romanian small towns (Source: Listă firme, Borg Design, 2008)

There can be analysed, depending on the data availability, certain relevant index in order to illustrate the tourist identity of a small town. Among them we mention the degree of endowment with tourist services, tourist seasonality, the typology of tourism investments and the degree of valorising the natural, cultural patrimony and of local identity. According to these indicators, small towns may be inventoried, put into a hierarchy and classified depending on their tourism development potential. Less accurate indicators, but illustrating the tourist profile of small towns, are on the one hand the

declared average turnover and profit of the companies involved in tourism (figure 3), and on the other hand the estimated population employed in tourism (figure 4).

As regards the declared average turnover and profit of the tourism companies the official statistics indicated contrasting situations. If the fact that we find among the first, the resorts Călimăneşti, Eforie, Sinaia or Băile Herculane is only natural, we also find in the top of the list transition towns near the capital and the most important national airport (Otopeni) or the so-called bedroom-localities (Urziceni). If we analyse the average profit data, we have among the best placed the secondary tourist sites (Buziaş, Târgu Ocna), which is a proof of recent dynamism, but also of underground tourist economy development in the main national resorts. On the other hand, most of the companies involved declare another activity field in most of towns with no major tourist attractions, but with a certain lodging capatown, there are no truthful official data on turnover or profit from tourism.

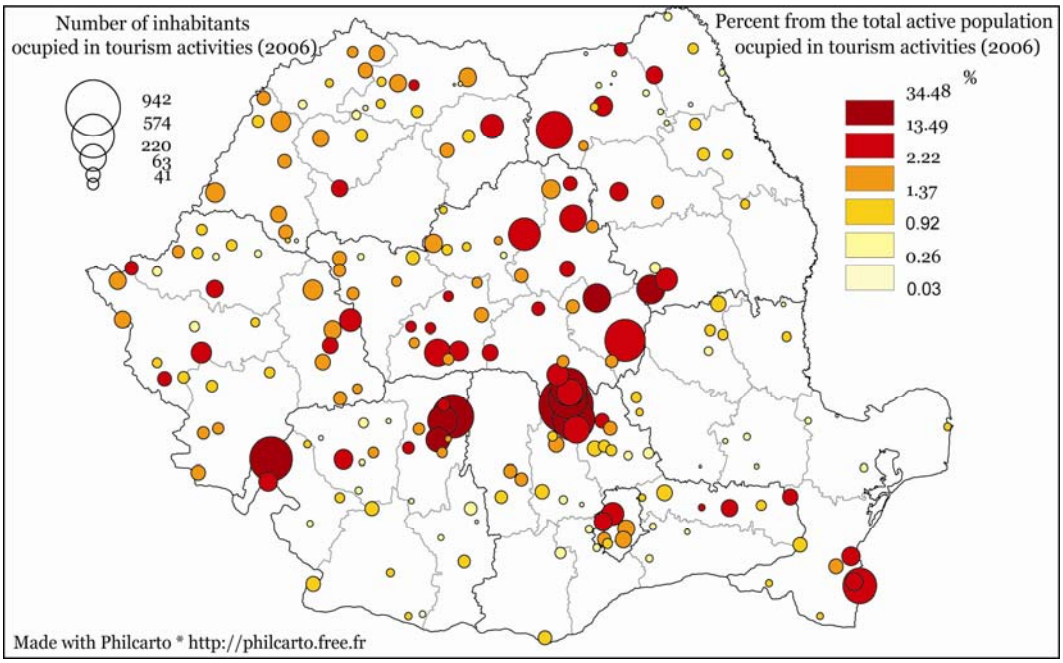

Figure 4. The population employed in tourism from Romanian small towns (Source: NIS)

With a stronger meaning to the local communities in small towns, the tourism employment indicates high absolute values for the big resorts (Sinaia, with almost 1000 employees, and also Băile Herculane, Călimăneşti or Covasna), and relative high values for the very small localities with a predominant tourist side (Băile Tuşnad, Băile Olăneşti or Băile Govora). As concerns this indicator, too, the figures are most of the times far from the real values of employment in tourism, underestimating it, and we should also take into account the discontinuity (seasonality) and complex bias (displacement of labour force, sometimes from distant locations) of this activity.

The difficulty of analyzing these indicators comes from the discontinuous character of the data, and also from the complexity of tourism incomes, which should be related to investments and to their amortization in time, and to the collateral incomes from public service activities or tourist commerce. The profitability of tourism activities and the way in which they integrate in the community cannot be estimated only by analyzing the profit – which does not come from concentrated incomes –, because the tourists access the

tourism services in various parts of the town. Also, especially for small towns, the profit may be obtained mostly from transit tourism, not related to the number of nights spent there, so it cannot always be correlated to the degree of lodging capatown use.

GEOGRAPHIC ACCESSIBILITY AND THE POTENTIAL TOURIST ACCESSIBILITY OF SMALL TOWNS

The infrastructure networks play a crucial role in ensuring the access of social and economic actors to various resources, such as tourist resources. The latest researches indicate the transition within territory and transport planning from the "*predict and provide*" models to models centred upon the expected connectivity of locations and upon life quality improvement (Straatemeier, 2008). Any rational organization framework of a territory in general and especially of tourist activities should take into account the accessibility as interaction potential, influenced by both the quality of transportation system (regarding the distance, cost and time), the connection degree (connectivity), and the quality of the potential destinations.

The local dimension of the tourism phenomenon in small towns is circumscribed to larger scenarios, through which the tourism inserts within the regional and national territory. Certain territories are part of regions where the tourism phenomenon has already begun, being included in integrated tourist areas, with important waves of tourists benefiting from a homogeneous and complete infrastructure. Some small towns are part of important tourist paths, but they are only transited by the tourists flows, while others are more or less isolated and tourists find it hard to get to them. This happens in case of localities with low tourist potential but also to urban realities that could become extremely interesting if their natural or anthropic patrimony could be accessed.

Reducing the distance-time and the distance-cost may contribute to the promotion of locations for mass tourism, while isolation or high cost may either deprive them from being visited or transform them into favourite destinations for special types of tourism. Thus, accessibility determines individuals' travel decisions, but in certain cases the low accessibility is less important, being successfully compensated by certain factors, and sometimes, paradoxically, the inaccessibility becomes an attractiveness factor. Marginality may be attractive in itself to certain tourists; that is why it is difficult to estimate the weight of the distance in calculating the tourist itineraries and tourism development. Localities with competitive advantages may attract waves of tourists even though they are far from the main tourist axes. In this case, the most important is the capatown to use and promote the local attractive potential and to reduce the importance of distance. For example, localities such as Piatra Olt, Bolintin-Vale or Mărăşeşti, even though they are well-situated on the main transportation and tourist axes, they do not have significant capatowns in the field.

The choice for a tourist destination depends on the image regarding the local possibilities and attractions, and after making the decision regarding the type of tourist destination the individual takes into accounts the competitive advantages. Nonetheless, a good accessibility isn't necessarily a source of competitiveness (Toth and David, 2010). The accessibility issue is essential and relevant in order to select a destination among several with similar attributes (such as mountain or seaside resorts) and less relevant for unique sites (historic towns, beach resorts).

On the other side, certain recent studies (Toth and David, 2010; Celata, 2007) indicate that there is no absolute connection between the improvement of geographical accessibility (regarding only distance and transportation) and the increase in the incomes from tourism. They also indicate that there is a significant difference between the theoretical models applied in tourism and the actual tourist waves. Especially small towns with tourist function do not fit in proximity logic or in certain gravitational models, as the objectives may be visited by tourist from other areas rather than by those living nearby. In

other words, tourist accessibility cannot be exclusively connected to the distance towards an emitting centre in the proximity, with an important (demographic) value.

The location of certain small towns with tourist profile in Romania may be related to the presence of the main transportation ways, functioning as national or international tourist axes. Thus, they could be easily connected to areas with more population and with a more important economic potential. In this logic, the essential parameter is the distance-time parameter which describes the interaction probability between small urban settlements and the major system of communication ways (especially highways and national or international tourist axes), most precisely the towns over a certain demographic and tourist potential level. Meanwhile, based on previous studies (Camară and Tudora, 2010), we identified 11 national tourist regions, two of them situated at the seaside and nine in mountainous areas (figure 5).

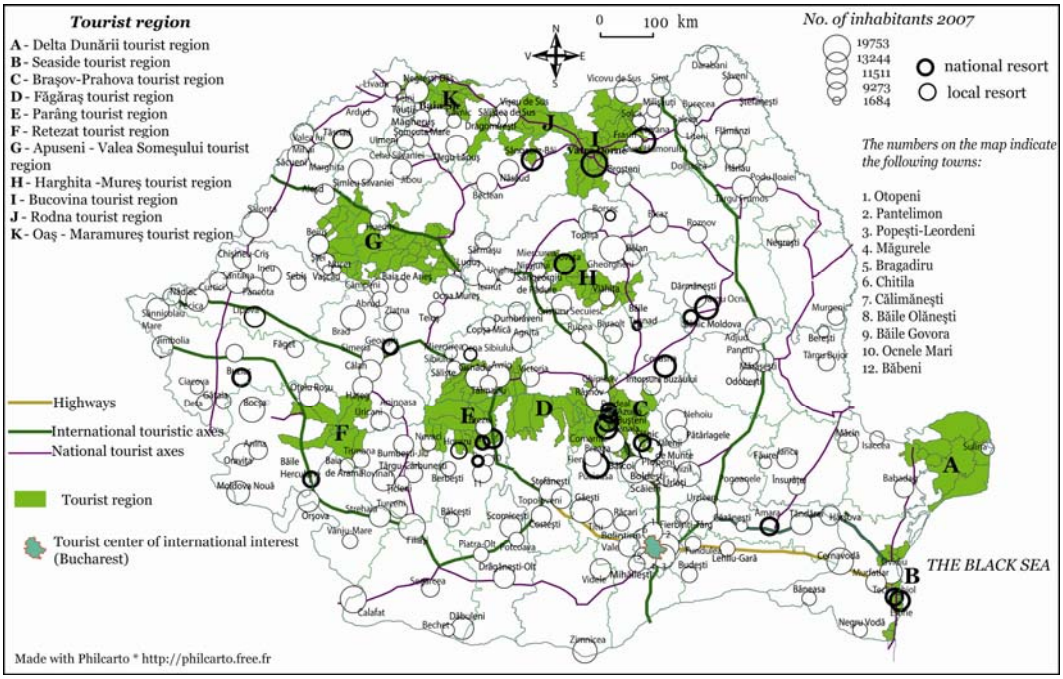

Figure 5. The geographical tourist accessibility of the Romanian small towns

We assume that most of the towns which are not tourist resorts become tourist destinations only if they are transited or are in the proximity of tourist sites. We calculate the accessibility of these towns in relation to the main tourist axes, to towns having over 50000 inhabitants, situated on these axes, which could constitute tourist destination points emitting their own tourists towards the small towns and the distance to the closest tourist region (table 1).

Regarding the distance from the closest city situated on a tourist axis, the processed data show a relative advantage for tourism development of the towns situated at 11 to 20 km from a bigger urban pole, not too close to loose the tourists in the other's behalf, not too far to compel tourists to depart form the main circuits. It is the case of Eforie, Techirghiol, Olăneşti, Călimăneşti, Băile Govora, but the validity of the indicator is very low. There are numerous exceptions of towns situated to such a distance but without having a tourist potential (Cajvana, Chitila, Băbeni etc.) or cases of renowned resorts situated to a bigger distance (Băile Herculane, Sovata, Sinaia etc). The distance form the closest tourist region seems to be a more effective indicator in relation to the tourist

function of towns. It is obvious a straight link between them as the most advantaged are the localities situated inside a tourist region. Nevertheless, it is not a sufficient condition (as the standard deviation shows); there are many towns without a noticeable tourist function among them (Dragomireşti, Brezoi, Tălmaciu, Ovidiu). Generally, the tourist function decreases once we recede away from the tourist regions. Again the exceptions are numerous. We can find tourist resorts situated at a distance of 100 to 200 km (Slănic Moldova, Geoagiu, Buziaş) or even more than 200 km (Amara) away from any national tourist region.

Table 1. The relation between geographical accessibility and the theoretical tourist function rate

The distance from the closest city having over 50,000 inhabitants:	**No. of small towns**	**Theoretical tourist function rate**		
		average	variance(s^2)	standard deviation(s)
1-10 km	13	3,21	49,44	7,03
11-20 km	35	12,59	1931,90	43,95
21-35 km	62	4,04	170,16	13,04
36-50 km	49	2,88	110,40	10,51
51-85 km	48	2,26	44,24	6,65
85-116 km	8	4,07	288,27	16,98
The distance from the closest national tourist region:				
situated within a tourist region	41	15,17	1720,26	41,48
0-10 km	19	3,59	75,02	8,66
10-50 km	40	2,93	135,89	11,66
50-100 km	38	2,69	131,85	11,48
100-200 km	41	1,62	15,80	3,97
over 200 km	36	1,1	19,21	4,38

Although it is a fact that geographical accessibility, as we understand it, is a comparative advantage for towns in order to develop the tourist function it is neither a vital prerequisite nor insurance for tourist development. We agree with Celata's statement: "*if a destination is unique, accessibility has no influence on its attractiveness*" (Celata, 2007).

The potential tourist accessibility reflects the degree in which the tourist potential and endowment are completed by being well placed within the territory in relation to the road, railroad or river infrastructure and to the main Romanian tourist axes. There is an obvious mutual connection: the biggest tourist areas were created in accessible areas or the accessibility of the areas has developed at the same time with their tourism. Small towns located in such tourist regions have an advantage, being constantly visited by tourists, and sometimes inheriting an important lodging, treatment and leisure capatown.

In order to identify the local potential tourist accessibility of small towns, we based our approach on the background studies of *National Planning Act – section VIII – Area with tourist resources (2008)* by using the raw data and some synthetic indexes – completed (by using field observations and information from unofficial tourist sites) and reinterpreted by us as accessibility indexes. The indicators taken into account refer to the *natural tourist potential* (natural environment, natural cure factors, protected areas etc.), *the cultural potential* (monuments, museums, artistic events, cultural institutions and events), *specific tourist infrastructure* (lodging and treatment places, conferences and expositional halls, leisure facilities) and *technical infrastructure* (major transport routes, utilities and telecommunication infrastructure accessibility). A brief evaluation of the tourist potential accessibility of the Romanian small towns was made by using *ascendant hierarchic classification* in order to identify specific typologies using the mentioned quantitative indicators (scores) and analysing them according to the standard deviation (Apetrei et al., 1996).

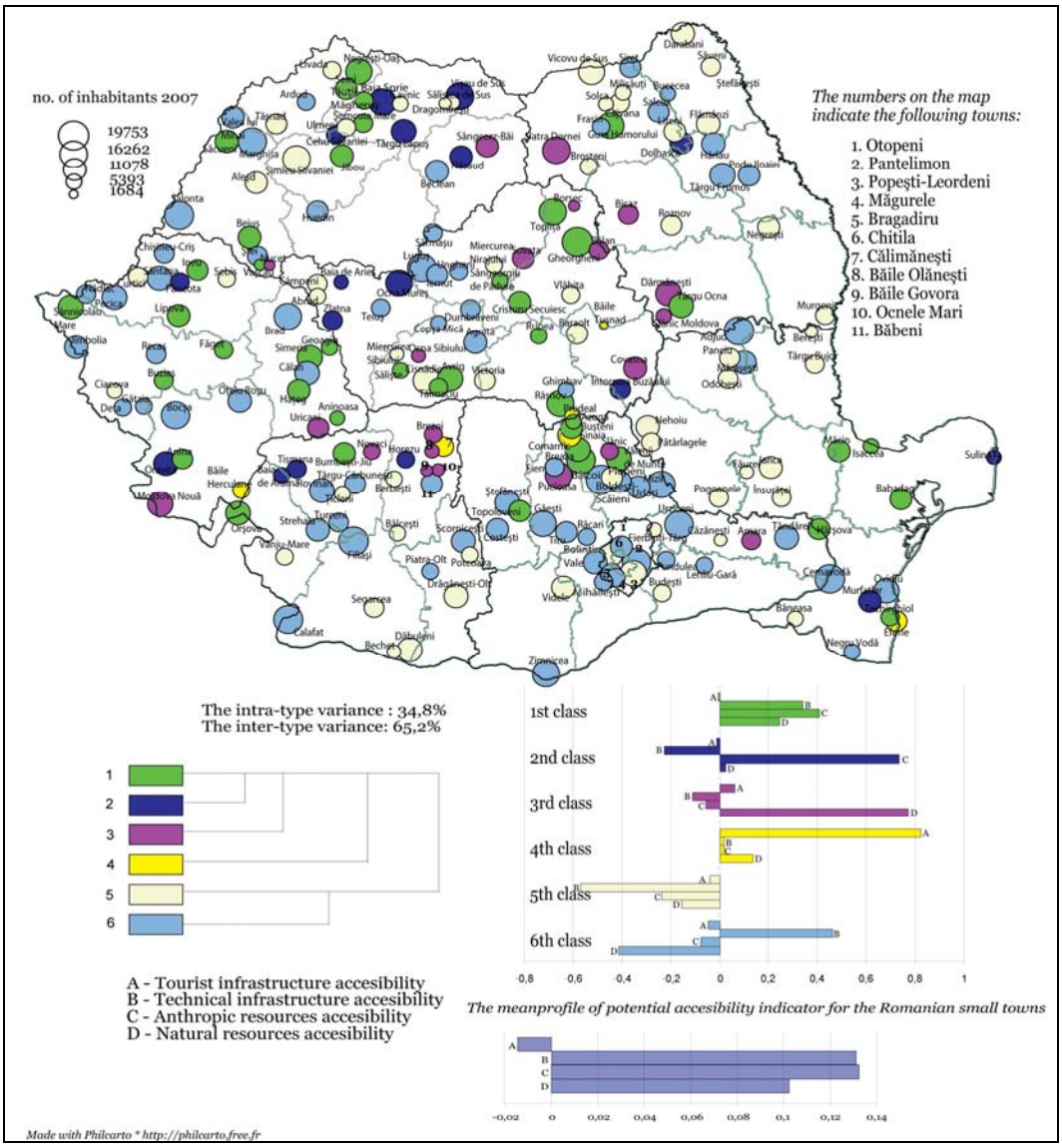

Figure 6. The potential tourist accessibility of the Romanian small towns

The first class includes the small urban settlements well connected to the general technical infrastructure and having important tourist resources, but lacking an appropriate tourist infrastructure capable of optimally valuating this potential (figure 6). Some of them are resorts of national (Târgu Ocna, Techirghiol, Geoagiu, Azuga, Buşteni, Gura Humorului, Buziaş) or local importance (Breaza, Vălenii de Munte, Lipova), while the others have important prerequisite of future tourist development. Their situation is extremely differentiated: some are confronted to major social issues and continue to experiment decreases in employment rate, because of firms' incapacity of being competitive in the market (Babadag, Hârşova, Măcin) or because of the deficient urban structures (Măcin, Isaccea), while others have an accessional trend due to the numerous project applied and implemented by the local authorities or due to the private investments in tourism infrastructure consolidation (Gura Humorului, Rupea, Buziaş).

Including no official tourist resorts, *the second* identified *class* comprises urban localities with an important historical and cultural background and natural resources above average, but having a low accessibility of the communication routes infrastructure, a deficient urban endowment and an insufficient tourist infrastructure. In this respect, significant are the cases of Ocna Mureş, Zlatna, Oraviţa, Întorsura Buzăului, Murfatlar and also Sulina (the least accessible of the Romanian towns, but having a remarkable tourist potential).

Many of the official recognised tourist resorts are included in *the third class*. They are advantaged by valuable natural resources accessibility that conducted to the appearance of important tourist capacities in Covasna, Slănic Moldova, Sângeorz-Bai, Pucioasa, Amara, Ocna Sibiului, Băile Govora, Băile Olaneşti. After 1989 the tourist infrastructure has been partially neglected or poorly managed, but lately the local authorities invested more and more in rehabilitation projects of these traditional spas. Some have a tourist clientele consisting of retirees arriving annually with tickets assured by the Pension Fund. Although they do not have an official status of tourist resort, other small towns have similar characteristics (Ocnele Mari, Bicaz, Novaci, Moldova Nouă). On the other hand the tourist development of these localities was blocked by the low equipment regarding the technical infrastructure and the relatively low local human potential.

The most advantaged in respect of tourist development – meaning lodging capacity and tourist facilities – are the towns included in *the forth* identified *class*. Valuating a natural potential relatively lower compared to the previous, they have instead a better accessibility to the transport networks, superior utility endowment and more important anthropic tourist resources. All the six towns are tourist resorts of national interest situated in mountainous areas (Sinaia, Predeal, Băile Herculane, Călimaneşti) or at the seaside (Eforie).

On the contrary, the most deprived in terms of tourist potential accessibility are the towns included in *the fifth* and *sixth class*; no official tourist resort town being included. The fifth class comprises settlements deficient under all analysed aspects of potential tourist accessibility. The 58 small towns having such o profile are situated in all geographic regions of Romania – in Moldavia (Milişăuţi, Cajvana, Negreşti, Murgeni, Bereşti, Darabani, Săveni), in Transylvania (Aleşd, Curtici, Abrud, Vlăhiţa, Livada, Cisnădie) and also in the southern part of the country (Budeşti, Fierbinţi-Târg, Plopeni, Baneasa). Better situated in terms of territorial accessibility and urban endowment, but still lacking significant tourists flows are the towns included in the last class. Some of the 70 urban settlements are satelites of Bucarest's (Otopeni, Pantelimon, Bragadiru) or of another important cities (Salcea-Suceava, Ghimbav-Braşov, Găesti-Piteşti), while others are situated at the crossroads of major communication routes that have also a role of tourism corridors (Urziceni, Mizil, Târgu Frumos). For these categories the transit travel, with or without overnight stay, has a significant share within the total local budget (Otopeni, Urziceni). Although generally well equipped with urban utilities (six of them, such as Marghita, Calafat or Salonta have the rank of municipium), most of them are bypassed or only crossed by the tourist flows because of no noticeable attractions.

CONCLUSIONS

The tourist activity cannot be rigidly evaluated based upon statistical data, sometimes being hard to dissociate it from the general population mobility. This is because of the multiple activities it comprises in a certain spatial context and sometimes because of the major share of unofficial and unregistered tourism activities. The success of implementing tourism activities in Romanian small towns often depends upon the natural and anthropic qualities of the site, upon the location and the characteristics of local politics, all reflecting upon the tourist function of that locality. The problems

appearing in numerous small towns with a potential for tourism development, but with no tradition in the field, are linked to the lack of tourist infrastructure, of potential investors, of appropriate services and of qualified labour force.

The accessibility of a destination clearly influences the attractiveness and potential for tourism and development. Nonetheless, the sole accessibility of the general transportation infrastructure is not in itself a source of competitiveness among towns. On the other side, the conservative valorisation of the natural and anthropic tourism potential, the creation of a functional general and specific infrastructure and the promotion of the town image may contribute to an increase in the general tourist accessibility and to the overall urban development of Romanian small towns. Localities should promote their endogenous resources, thus reducing the importance of accessibility in attracting tourist demand and communicating an image of a unique and easily reachable tourist experience. Arriving to integrated tourist products by developing strategies based upon the *travel chain* concept, with a special attention paid to transit regions and points would bring an advantage to many of the small towns with an obvious potential, but not constituting traditional centres of national tourism.

Even though it comprises an incomplete and incongruent statistical basis, this analytical approach regarding the key factors in the dynamics and success of the tourism phenomenon' emergence in small towns is useful in setting local and regional strategies for an optimal valorisation of the internal development potential.

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