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Article

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TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA AND FRANCE: AN APPROACH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NEW ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY

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Abstract

The issue of sustainable tourism and its potential contribution to regional development and convergence within the EU has been, in recent years, one of the primary research themes and a constant concern in European policies. However, currently, the European tourism industry is facing a loss in competitiveness at the global level due to a reduction in its share in world tourism and lower average revenues, many regions being in decline and the geographical flows being redirected. Based on these aspects, the present study proposes an analysis from the New Economic Geography perspective, considering two EU countries, a developed one (France), but situated in a tourist sub-region with a declining share in the total international tourist arrivals (Western Europe) and a developing one (Romania), from a growing tourism sub-region (Central/Eastern Europe). Using a comparative analysis at regional level, with three categories of functions - a function of impact (economic, social, environmental), a function of stability and a function of convergence - combined into a matrix model, we achieved an integrated research on the contribution that tourism brings in the two countries in terms of development and regional convergence. Then, we proposed a classification of regions according to the tourism index (mature tourist destinations, less attractive or in the early stage), the conclusions of the paper outlining several action lines for improving competitiveness of tourism in developing regions.

Keywords: tourism, sustainable regional development, New Economic Geography, function of impact, stability, convergence, tourism index

JEL Classification: Q01, Q56, L83, R11

Introduction

The topic of sustainable tourism has often been discussed over the last years due to the acknowledgment of the complex connection between environment and economy as well as to a strong need of integrating these two constituents, which points to an orientation

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towards long-term development that could consequently generate a positive impact on society. By using this premise as a starting point, the specialty literature emphasizes various approaches to the relation *sustainable tourism-regional development*. Therefore, we learn that, on the one hand, sustainable tourism gathers all infrastructures from the natural environment, which work for the regeneration and future productivity of available resources; on the other hand, the contribution that the individuals, their consumption habits, lifestyle, income level, bring to the tourism can be discussed (Butler, 1993; Cerina, Markandya and McAleer, 2011). It should be mentioned that there is a bi-directional effect because in order to be able to talk about sustainability, this sector should, in turn, be capable of creating a wide range of opportunities, by taking into consideration: *the environmental approach*, which focuses on the need of protecting the environment, *the economic approach*, which is based on optimizing the resource needs, *the social approach*, which has as main analysis method the responsibility of those who find themselves in a tourist destination (Sörensson and von Friedrichs, 2013, p. 15).

In an early form, sustainable tourism has been exposed in the Brundtland Report (1987), which claims that in order to function within optimal standards, a balance between economic, social and environmental aspects should be ensured. Later on, in 1995, as a consequence of the first World Conference on Sustainable Tourism that took place in Lanzarote (Spain), the bases of a *Charter for Sustainable Tourism*, which refers to these three constituents that generate sustainability, were set. *The Guide for Responsible Tourism* (2005), published by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is an addition to this document. The European Commission (2003) also drafted an information material, entitled “Basic Orientations for the Sustainability of European Tourism”, whose purpose would be guiding tour operators in the development process, and in 2012, EC presented the “European Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism”, aiming at encouraging sustainable and responsible tourism policies, as well as the actions that have to be implemented in Europe and then promoted worldwide.

The widest accepted definition of sustainable tourism is given by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), which sees it as being the component that meets the current needs of tourists and of the host regions, protecting, at the same time, the increase of the opportunities in the future. If we were to refer to the actual situation, there would be two trends in Europe: on the one hand, due to the crisis, various manifestations which resulted in pressures that diminish the touristic potential of a certain area (Bulgaria, Greece etc.) can be observed and, on the other hand, despite these inadequacies, the promotion of sustainable tourism is more and more discussed, fact which can lead to economic growth. This is how this widely used term is defined by many specialised institutions, in reports such as: The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report, drafted by World Economic Forum (WEF), World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), documents of the European Commission, United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), UNWTO, which also made forecasts for 2020 in relation to global tourism (the „Tourism 2020 vision” report), etc.

One aspect of particular importance, which can be noted from the numerous reports issued by the EU on tourism, is the connection between governance and sustainability (the need to follow a territorial planning for tourism, to involve the active actors in the decision-making processes, to take into account the available financial resources, to induce respect for the environment, to constantly use the innovative dimension, etc.). If all these were taken into consideration to a greater extent, a tourism industry reorientation would occur, which

would mainly lead to a real convergence process (Torres-Delgado and López-Palomeque, 2012). On such a background, the topic that has met considerable interest is whether tourism has a multiplier effect larger in the developed regions than in the regions under the “convergence” objective (GDP/capita is under 75% of the EU average). As well-known, peripheral regions are confronted with structural difficulties and therefore, a closer and more realistic evaluation of their touristic potential is required, as well as that of tourism in promoting local development, in order to set up optimal development strategies (Castellani and Sala, 2010, p. 873; Popescu, 2005). Moreover, the road to competitiveness is obtained by using economic elements as well as elements that describe the phenomenon of space, defined by the *New Economic Geography (NEG)*. Spatial planning plays an important part in ensuring the development of sustainable tourism, together with initiatives that would allow the decrease of transaction costs, the adoption of responsible behaviour that would also keep the integrity of the local cultures and environment, community development, and would, moreover, increase returns to scale and multiplier effects (Risteski, Kocovski and Arnaudov, 2012; Lan, Wu and Lee, 2012). With urbanisation, the regions that hold an important natural capital (landscape, cultural patrimony or special biodiversity) have become popular tourist attractions. However, the resources necessary to tourism (for instance, service quality, infrastructure quality, transport facilities, waste management, energy use, etc.) should be properly managed in order to produce a positive impact on local and environmental communities. The more countries and regions develop the tourism industry, the more significant the driving effect on natural resources, on consumption models, pollution and social systems is. Therefore, the management need and the sustainable and responsible planning are imperative in order to ensure the survival of this industry as a whole. The tools that consider drafting practical action plans at the local/regional level are also important, as well as shaping mid-term and long-term strategies concerning the development of tourist destinations and the establishment of benchmarking practices in relation to the destination (competencies’ transfer, good practices from the competitive regions towards convergence regions) (Lozano-Oyola, et al., 2012).

At the macroeconomic level, we find out that the answer provided by the tourism industry to the social and environmental objectives of European policies is not the expected one. In addition, the EU tourism geography reflects significant disparities at both national and regional levels, raising questions not only regarding the potential of tourism to participate in the achievement of the Union’s goals for sustainable development, but also in the capacity to reduce disparities in the economic, social and territorial fields, as stipulated in the strategic documents of the European Commission. Having these findings as a starting point, we propose in our research to highlight, in a first part, the realities of tourism in the two countries examined (Romania and France) and in the second part, to capture the role that has tourism on development and regional convergence, based on the creation of three functions (of impact, stability and convergence) and of a tourism index, by which we can classify the regions of Romania and France in mature tourist destinations, less attractive or in early stage. The research results will allow us to formulate, in the conclusions, several ways of action that should follow, especially the regions in developing, in order to improve the competitiveness of tourism industry.

1. Tourism in the international and European context

1.1 Considerations regarding the sustainable tourism

Up to the present time, the sustainable tourism has been subject to three paradigm changes (Clarke, 1997). *The first paradigm* distinguishes between sustainable and mass tourism, the former being considered to be good and the latter harmful. *The second paradigm* analyses sustainable tourism on a weak to strong scale, where “weak” includes well-being due to economic growth and technical innovation, and “strong” refers to the protection of rare resources. *The third paradigm* states that sustainable tourism should include all types of tourism and that mass tourism should be subject to improvement. In addition, in order to discuss convergence, all types of tourism should be sustainable. Nowadays, the need of finding a balance between all types of tourism is more and more obvious, economic interests having to find a balance between social and environmental interests (Kilipiris and Zardava, 2012). This means that societies could maximise their profits and undertake, at the same time, a social and environmental responsibility.

International tourism is the economic sector that resisted best in crisis in comparison to the other sectors, i.e. constructions, real estate, automobile industry, etc. According to UNWTO, in the near future, the first three receiving regions will be Europe, Eastern Asia and America (Central and Southern America have already recorded a 4 to 7% increase in the number of incoming international tourists). The fast-growing international tourism led to new destinations, such as Asia and the Middle East.

According to the WTTC (2013), at the global level, “Travel & Tourism” contributes to GDP more than the automobile manufacturing industry, financial services, communications and mining industry in every region of the world¹, having almost 98 million people directly employed in 2011, which means a 6-time higher profitability than that of the automobile industry, 5-time higher than that of chemical product manufacturing, 4-time higher than in mining. In relation to the *income-expense* report, for each dollar spent on Travel & Tourism, 3.2 dollars are generated in GDP at the level of the entire economy. More precisely, 1 million dollars in tourism sales creates twice as many jobs as the same million dollars spent on financial services, communications and automobile manufacturing.

By switching the point of interest from the international level to the European one, the fact that the European Union is the main tourist destination in the world, taking up about 60% of the international tourists and having a strong internal tourism can be noticed. The countries with a high level of income have an internal tourist market especially developed during the summer. In return, countries from Southern Europe have more than 75% of the stays as consequence of the internal market, with a weak tourist capacity, which generates lower revenues. In Northern Europe, the percentage of internal stays is between 30 and 50% of the overall tourist stays (Ministère de l’Economie, des Finances et de l’Industrie de France, 2010). When Europeans go on holiday abroad, most of them select other member states of the European Union as destination. According to the data provided by UNWTO (2012), the reasons for travelling are: leisure, recreation and holidays (51%), which means

¹ In 2010, tourist activities contributed by 12% to the global GDP; according to the Tourism Trends & Policies Statistics (OECD, 2012), the tourism sector in Romania represents an important percentage of GDP and of the overall employment, benefitting from an increase in tourist destinations.

467 million incoming international tourists in 2008; 15% of the travels were for business or professional purposes; 27% aimed aspects such as visiting family, friends, health, religion or other reasons; 7% of travels have no specific reason. The main means of transportation used are: 52% tourists travel by plane; 39% by car; 6% by sea, and 3% by train. Among the foreigners that stay in Romania (1.5 million), 60-70% of tourists arrive for business purposes, and not for spending their leisure time (NIS, 2012). It can be noticed that, after 2008, when the current crisis stroke, a sudden decrease was registered in the number of tourists coming from abroad, while intra-European flows resisted, confirming that, to Europeans, the entire EU territory is the place that offers secure holidays.

In the EU, according to the World Tourism Organisation (2013), the tourism industry generates more than 5% of its GDP, and there are approx. 1.8 million companies that hire around 5.2% of the overall workforce (approx. 9.7 million jobs). When additional sectors are taken into consideration, the estimative contribution of tourism in creating the GDP is higher, as it indirectly generates more than 10% of the EU's GDP and ensures approx. 12% of the workforce (direct employment of 10 million people and support of 28 million jobs in 2011). In fact, 72% work in the restaurant and catering industry, 15.5% in the hotel industry, 4% in travel agencies, 1.5% in open air camping (camping, caravans, etc.) and 4.5% in thermal bath management. These statistics are translated into *multiplier effects* (changes in revenues and employment, resulted from a change in expenses). Therefore, the WEF (2013) performed an analysis on 20 countries worldwide and drew the conclusion that only in France and the United States of America the value of the economic multiplier of tourism and travels is lower than the overall revenues average (figure no. 1).

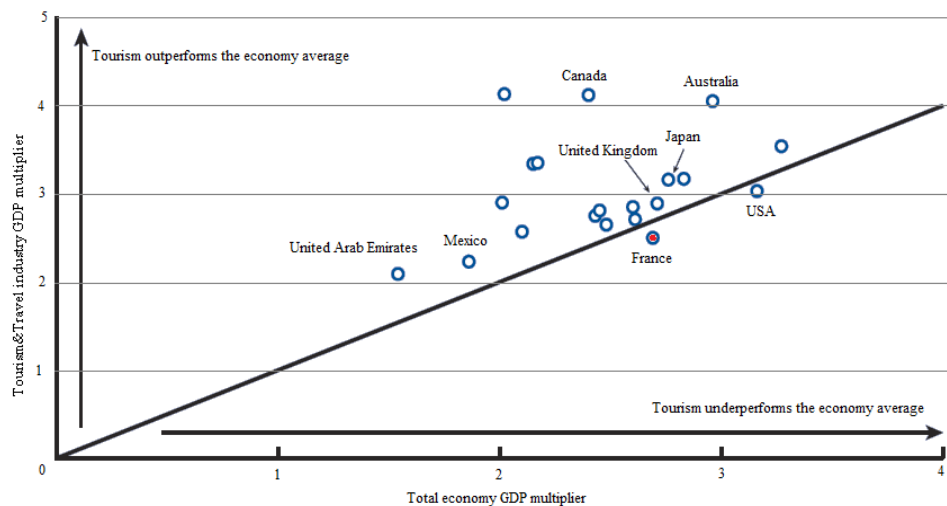


Figure no. 1: Total economy GDP multipliers, by income, in Tourism&Travel industry

Source: according to WEF data, 2013

The indicators related to tourism receipts and expenditure are presented below (figure no. 2) in order to fully illustrate tourism figures in the EU states.

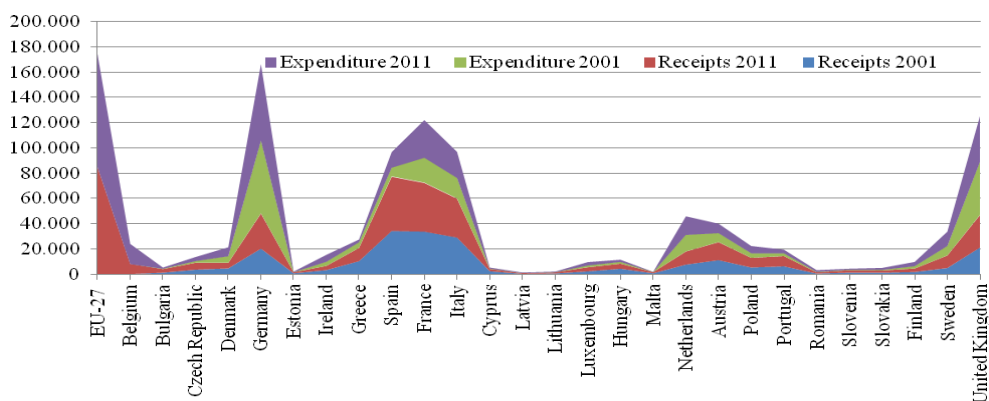


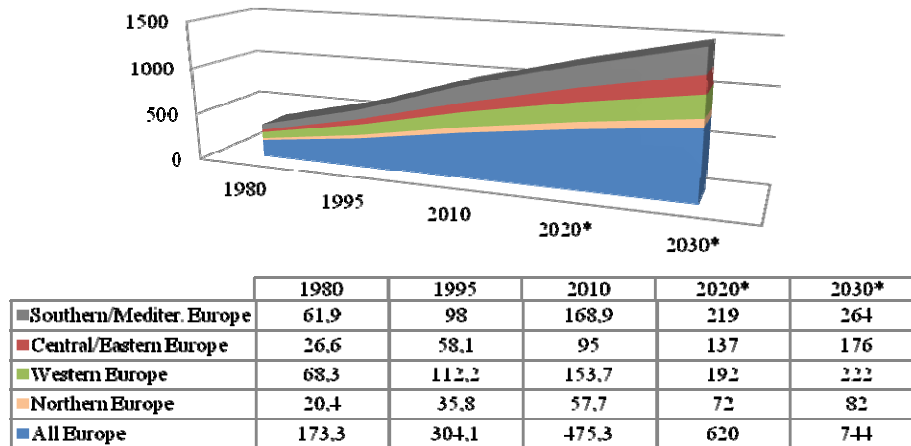
Figure no. 2: Travel receipts and expenditure in balance of payments (EUR million), 2001-2011

Source: own processing according to Eurostat data, 2012

In the period 2001-2011, at the EU level, a rate of tourism income lower than the costs (in 2011 the ratio was 85.016 million Euro to 89.578 million Euro) was registered, the highest ranked at this chapter being: Spain (43.026 million Euro incomes, compared to 12.423 million Euro expenditures; France (38.682 million Euro revenues, 29.922 million Euro costs); Italy (30.878 million Euro revenues, 20.709 million Euro costs), Austria (14.267 million Euro incomes, 7.531 million Euro costs); Greece (10.505 million Euro incomes, 2.266 million Euro costs); Portugal (8.146 million Euro revenues, 2.974 million Euro costs). Romania recorded a deficit, being on the last place in the EU, with 1.409 million Euro expenses compared to 1.019 million Euro in tourism revenues. France is the most popular tourist destination in the world and, in terms of revenues from tourism, it is on 3th place, after the U.S. and Spain, with 53.8 billion dollars. In 2011, foreign tourists defy the economic crisis, exceeding 81.4 million, staying more than 10 days on the average, spending around 33.4 billion Euro (8.4% more than in 2010).

Tourism revenues are due, first of all, to an efficient promotion policy, to standardised conditions that attract tourists. According to the UNWTO statistics (2013), the most numerous tourist flows at the European level were registered between 1980 and 2010 in Southern Europe (fig. no. 3). In this region, the countries with access to the Mediterranean Sea enjoy a temperate climate, which partially explains the preference of foreign tourists for Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal.

Looking ahead, data concerning the evolution of international tourist flows show a constant and highly powerful increase of tourism, with an average estimated to approx. 3-4% for the period 1995 and 2020, which should lead, at the end of the concerned period, to an increase by 50% of the number of international tourists as compared to the current numbers. It should be noted that this increase does not equally affect the accepting countries, which leads to a rebalance of the market shares in favour of less developed countries, for instance those from Central and Eastern Europe, where, as seen, the growth pace of international tourist flows will increase the most in 2030, by approximately 7 times, from 26.6 million tourists in 1980 to 176 million.



*forecasts **Figure no. 3: International tourist arrivals received (million), 1980-2030***

Source: own representation based on UNWTO data, 2013

From the collected data, the European tourism industry deals with major development gaps (low average revenues, became a net issuer), which brings forward the need of identifying models for enhancing competitiveness. UNWTO estimates that the main sub-regional destination will become Eastern Europe. For the time being, France is a landmark for the European tourist industry due to its tradition of hundreds of years in the field. Consequently, the comparison between the Romanian tourism and the French one is made on other terms, by starting from different realities, but by extrapolating them; the French model, based on social responsibility, can be used as good practice guide/benchmarking, which would allow Romanian stakeholders to learn from the best in the field and to find evaluation tools, as well as to increase tourism performance, thus contributing to the sustainable development of tourist destinations in Romania.

1.2. Comparative analysis on tourism industry in Romania and France from the perspective of the New Economic Geography

According to Direction Générale de la Compétitivité, de l'Industrie et des Services (DGCIS) (2013), before the French revolution in 1789, France was divided into provinces. During the revolution, these provinces were dissolved and the French territory was divided into 83 departments; after the First World War, the development of the urban means of transportation and that of regionalist ideas led some to question the need of creating administrative divisions larger than departments, as it was desired. Today, France includes 27 regions (22 regions in Metropolitan France (including Corse) and 5 oversea regions: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana, Reunion and Mayotte), 101 departments, 343 counties, 4 058 districts and 36.699 communes. In return, Romania is a smaller country in comparison to France, from the points of view of the region and population, and it is made up of 8 development regions and 41 counties, as well as Bucharest municipality. In figure no. 4, the administrative distribution of the two countries is presented.

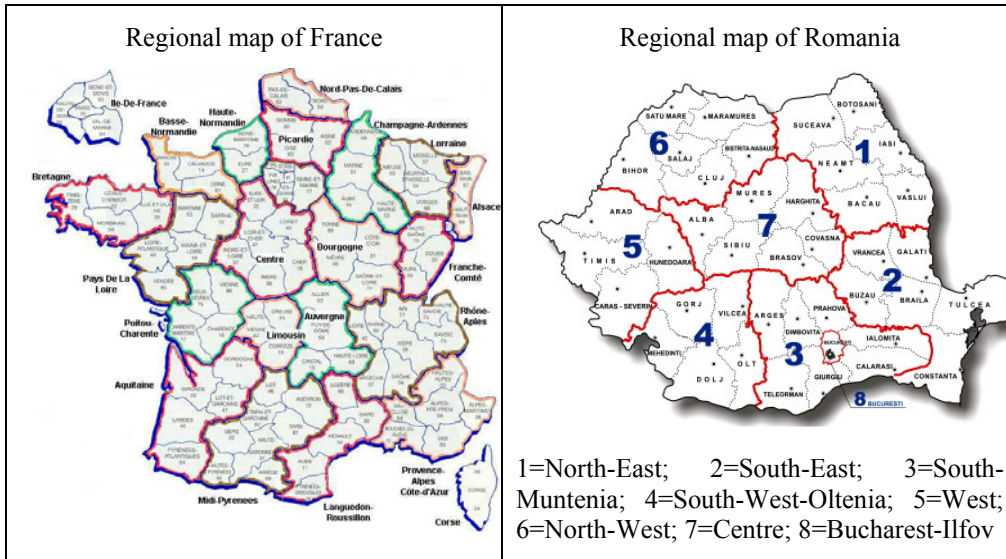


Figure no. 4: French vs. Romanian regions

Source: own representation

We must say that, regardless of its size, a country can create competitive advantages by means of efficient strategies and policies oriented on the sectors with development potential, which, in the case of both analysed countries, can be tourism. Therefore, the actual situation in this field in France and Romania will be further presented in a comparative manner. Thus, in France, the Internal Tourism Consumption (ITC) represented 7.1% of GDP in 2010 (137.6 billion euro, out of which 94.2 billion attributable to the tourist consumption of French visitors (68.5% of ITC, which means 4.9% of GDP). The tourist consumption of foreign visitors accounted for 43.3 billion euro or 31.5% of ITC and 2.2% of GDP. Between 2005 and 2010 there was an average increase by +2.1% in tourist consumption. According to Direction du Tourisme (2013) most of the non-resident tourists in France are neighbours of Northern Europe: Germans, British, and Belgians, who account for 46% of the incoming tourists. Besides them, a high percentage is held by the Dutch (8.9% incoming), Swiss (6.6%). The neighbours from Southern Europe (Italians, Portuguese, Spanish) account for 17% of the total number of tourists. With 87% arrivals and 87% overnight stays, Europeans spend, on the average, 5.6 nights in France; but, in their nationalist spirit, French have contributed the most to tourism revenues, spending 67.4 billion euro on holidays in their own country last year, and recording a 10.9% increase.

For a long period of time, it has been realistic enough to claim that 80% of the tourism activity in France was achieved on about 20% of the territory, where there is greater accommodation capacity, mainly at the seaside and in the mountain area. Nowadays, the development of the transportation infrastructure allows quick access to the recreation and short-term areas requested by urban population, by creating new recreation facilities near important metropolitan areas and ensuring increased tourist attraction in the rural areas. Many regions have developed their own tourist attraction points and have completed the territorial map, even if traditional tourist areas continue to be the most significant ones. However, the development of the urbanisation process causes saturation among the most

famous tourist areas, raising the problem of tourism maintenance on these territories, where a decline of well-developed accommodation areas can be noticed, which leads to a change in tourist frequencies. Therefore, territorial reconsideration is based on a series of factors specific to the New Economic Geography (transportation costs, travelling costs, transportation facilities, infrastructure quality, spatial distribution of tourism types depending on the region, etc.). Most of the times, in selecting their destination, tourists are guided by the near vicinity of the region and also by the opportunity costs.

In France, according to INSEE, tourism holds an important place in most regions. In 2011, it generated 239.000 jobs and 3.3% exports. The fact that tourism has a significant contribution to the French economy is proved by its relation to the other economic sectors (figure no. 5).

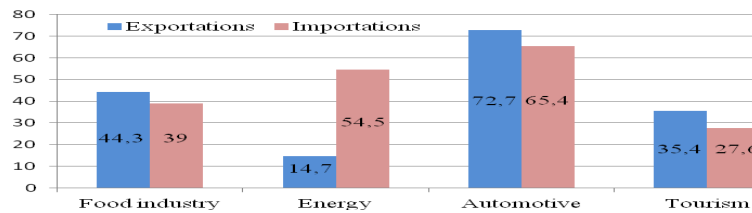


Figure no. 5: Tourism and other sectors in France (2009), at current prices, billion Euro

Source: INSEE (base 2000)

Therefore, by comparing imports and exports in France, an exceeding balance of +7.8% can be noticed in the field of tourism, the largest of the analysed industries (+7.3% in automobile industry, +5.3% in the agroalimentary one, -39.8% in energy). The most visited tourist attractions in France that generate important revenues in the national economy are: the Eiffel Tower, the Palace of Versailles (around 6.5 million visitors per year, 70% being foreign tourists), Louvre Museum, Centre Pompidou, Sainte Chapelle, Carcassonne, Arc de Triomphe, Mont Saint-Michel (about 3.5 million visitors per year) etc. Regarding Romania, these are: the ski resorts in Poiana Braşov and Prahova Valley, Bucovina and its monasteries, Porţile de Fier (Iron Gates), Transfăgăraşanul, Danube Delta etc.

From the regional point of view, according to Eurostat statistics, it can be noticed that the average intensity of tourism (tourism support capacity) in EU-27, which measures overnight stays in relation to the resident population, serving as an indicator of the relative importance of a region, was of 4.824 overnight stays per 1.000 inhabitants in 2011. In France, this indicator recorded an average value of 6.135 overnight stays, the best located regions being Corse, with 28.189 overnight stays and Languedoc-Roussillon with 12.624 overnight stays, at the opposite pole being Picardie with 2.599 overnight stays. Concerning Romania, the picture is as follows: national average: 840 overnight stays, extreme disparity (South-East region, 1.445 overnight stays in 2011 and North-East region with 420 overnight stays). Out of the 271 regions in the entire EU-27, in 2010, the most popular region was Île de France, with about 30 million nights spent by internal tourists; this number increased to 36 million nights in 2011. In addition, according to the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies in France (2011), in the region Languedoc-Roussillon, the labour force used in tourism accounted for 6%, namely 58.700 jobs, on average, during a year, being ranked 3rd in France, after the regions Corse and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. The employment rate of the labour force in tourism is different,

depending on seasonality and region as well: for instance, the seaside areas concentrate more than 40% of the jobs in tourism in the region during open season and almost 12% in the mountain area. The regions that attract the largest number of tourists in France are presented under figure no. 6.

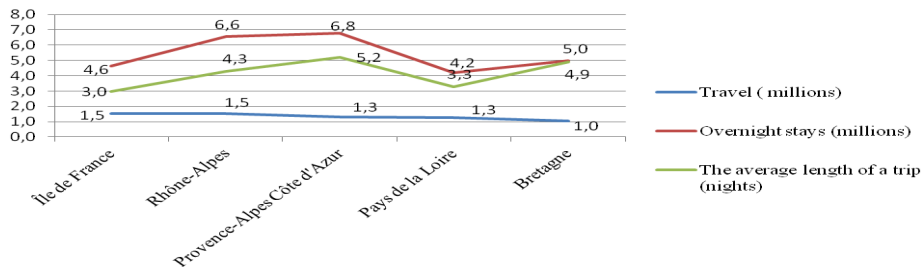


Figure no. 6: Top 5 regional tourist destinations in France, April 2013

Source: own processing based on DGCIS data, 2013

Therefore, in comparison to 2010, when Île de France was leader, in April 2013, in terms of overnight stays in France, the supremacy was held by the Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur region (6.8 million overnight stays), the average duration of a travel/holiday being 5.2 nights. This region is preferred by resident tourists, who generate 13% of the contribution to the country’s development, whereas non-resident tourists select the region Île de France. Figure no. 7 presents the most popular regions in terms of overnight stays of residents and non-residents.

What should be noted from these statistics is that, on top of external tourist preferences, there are also less developed regions as well as more recent ones that joined the European Union, such as Jadranska Hrvatska (HR03) in Croatia, Közép-Magyarország (HU10) in Hungary, Yugoiztochen (BG34) in Bulgaria. București-Ilfov (RO32) is preferred by non-residents, the explanation being tightly related to the business tourism, which is the main motivation of those who come in the area, and the South-East region (RO22) is preferred by residents, the reason being the Black Sea beaches. Therefore, for the convergence regions, tourism can be one of the largest and most important income generating factors. One of the good practices that can be mentioned and that can be part of a sustainability process is the development strategy of the region Pays de la Loire in France. Among the most important strategic axes aimed for this region, we may mention: enhancing the attractiveness of the area, the nurturing of solidarity values and the increase of the global competitiveness of the tourism sector. Seen from the regional attractiveness point of view, the improvement of a region’s image is achieved by sustained efforts. The use of international brands, such as Loire Valley, in the region Pays de la Loire or Bucovina monasteries in the North-East side of Romania can be used as landmarks in the development of tourism in less promoted areas. The effort of improving the competitiveness of the tourism in the North-East region, which places emphasis on mountain areas, can create added-value and jobs, in the same way in which, in the Pays de la Loire region, the focus on the need to support the seaside area of the region is expected to produce beneficial effects in the region’s economy. Another example of good practice specific to France, of high meaning for developing countries, such as Romania, is the large-scale promotion and sharing of solidarity values, which allow an important positive impact: on the public (tourism for all, spare time for the region’s inhabitants), on tourism employees (better working conditions, continuous professional training, accommodation for permanent or temporary employees), as well as on territories

(dissemination of tourist clients). For instance, tourism offices, such as Office de tourisme de Doué la Fontaine, as well as unions of communes (Communauté de Communes de la Région de Chemillé or Communauté de Communes de la Région de Doué la Fontaine), were created with a highly important role in the tourism and regional development.

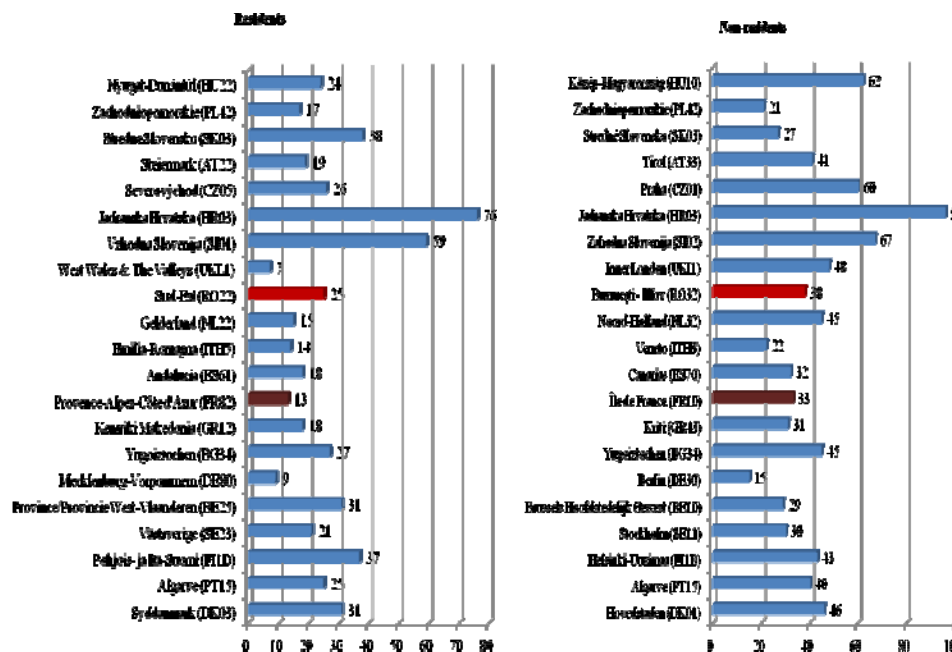


Figure no. 7: Share of most popular regions in national total (%), residents vs. non-residents, 2011

Source: own representation after the Eurostat data, 2012

The measurement of the impact of tourism on economic growth reveals that local-scale sustainability tends to be more adequate and relevant than the large-scale one (Chávez-Cortés and Alcántara-Maya, 2010, p. 3076) and this occurs because the population, the experts and the local authorities can actively involve in defining and assessing optimal touristic destinations, tourists' needs, and the impact of the carried out activities on the environment. The preoccupation for social responsible tourism and getting the stakeholders involved (tourists, tourist agents, other economic operators, decision-makers from local and central administration, education and research institutions, individuals, NGOs and associations, etc.) in its understanding and promotion are widely debated in specialised studies (Timur and Getz, 2009; Brebbia and Pineda, 2010; Blancas, et al., 2010). The results obtained from the research conducted by Timur and Getz (2009) highlight both similarities and differences in perception (from the economic, socio-cultural and environmental point of view), including a tourism industry actors' lack of information on the meaning of responsible tourism. As a consequence, the advice given by specialists is aimed at a more participative approach of the policies that support the development of sustainable tourism, sustainable networks that would integrate various categories of stakeholders, with various

interests, opinions and decision-making powers. This can be a starting point in arguing on the preoccupation for the role of the strategies and social responsibility programmes in supporting tourism destinations, for instance, “Riva Del Garda Action Statement for Enhancing Competitiveness and Sustainability in Tourism” (2008).

2. Methodology and data

Starting from the above aspects, the *tourism-sustainable regional development* relation will be outlined in our analysis being guided by the following considerations:

- tourist activity has a major impact on economy. On the one hand, it has positive influences on the environment and on the community (the increase of the employment rate, greater contribution to GDP, better quality services, higher salaries, larger production, capital generation, higher local budget by collecting taxes, attracting investors in the area, etc.) and on the other hand, it can generate negative effects (high pollution degree, more accentuated polarisation, etc.) (Saarinen, 2006; Cernat and Gourdon, 2012);

- most studies on the evaluation of the economic impact of tourist activities usually take into account data concerning the number of arrivals, the income per tourist, the average accommodation duration and other economic indicators. Unlike many studies that consider the physical and human environment only, Miller, et al. (2010) presents a series of indicators that cover many sustainability-related aspects: environment issues, labour force employment, financial leaks in the system, level of customer satisfaction, consumption behaviour, the social responsibility degree of tourism companies, etc. Depending on the correlation level between variables, actions towards developing strategies for increasing the number of arriving tourists, facilities for extending the duration of the stay, etc., can be taken ;

- Ko (2005), HwanSuk and Sirakaya (2006) consider that most studies related to the sustainable development of tourism are descriptive, their conclusions being based on qualitative and subjective data, and having no rigorous methodology. After the identification of this gap in literature, the mentioned authors developed a conceptual framework for the evaluation of sustainable tourism based on eight dimensions: political, economic, socio-cultural, production-related aspects, impact on the environment, ecosystem quality, biodiversity and environmental policies. Every dimension is assessed considering more quantitative and qualitative indicators, which are scaled and grouped in order to measure the sustainability of a tourist destination;

- the analysis of tourism types, the problems encountered by tourism companies (hotels or travel agencies), the analysis of foreign tourists arrived in the country, of those that leave, of less popular touristic areas are elements that raise interest in the research related to sustainable tourism. Official statistics in Romania, released by the National Institute of Statistics, present in the report “Tourism of Romania” important information, such as: tourist accommodation capacity in Romania on types of structures, comfort categories, tourist destinations, tourist accommodation, indices of net use of the running tourist accommodation, the activity of travel agencies, categories of tourism on development regions, international travels registered at frontiers, the touristic demand of Romanian residents, data that can help in statistically calculating various indices of competitiveness in tourism: the index of price competitiveness, offered infrastructure and service quality, openness towards customer and society’s needs, technological level, respecting environmental standards, the quality of human resources in the tourism industry, etc. For the purpose of measuring the global competition of travels and tourism in a country, the WEF annually calculates an index, as the aggregated

arithmetic mean of more variables: regulation framework of tourism policies, of business in tourism, environment, infrastructure, natural and cultural resources, affinity for travels and tourism, etc. According to this index, in 2013, Romania was ranked 68th out of 140 analysed countries, obtaining a score of 4.04 points, on a scale from 1 to 7, where 7 stands for maximum competitiveness. France, in return, is ranked 7th, scoring 5.31 points, registering a decrease as compared to 2011, when it was ranked 3rd. In fact, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Spain, UK, USA occupied the top positions.

Unfortunately, at NUTS 2 level (regional level, according to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics), data related to the above-mentioned indicators are either incomplete or fully lacking and, thus, the attempt to quantify the impact of tourism on the economy is a quite difficult one. Therefore, by using official statistics, such as Eurostat, UNWTO, Oxford Economics, variables that define 3 functions to be analysed were collected: *the impact function* (F1), *the stability function* (F2) and *the convergence function* (F3) with the purpose of underlining the contribution of tourism in the two countries (Romania and France) to the development and convergence at the regional level. Each function consists in certain variables, which best define their meaning. Considering that the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies in France and the National Institute of Statistics in Romania do not have regional statistics for each of the selected indicators, each value of the indicators was selected by consulting the webpages of the development programmes corresponding to each particular region. This is how the narrow selection of certain indicators, listed under figure no. 8, is explained.

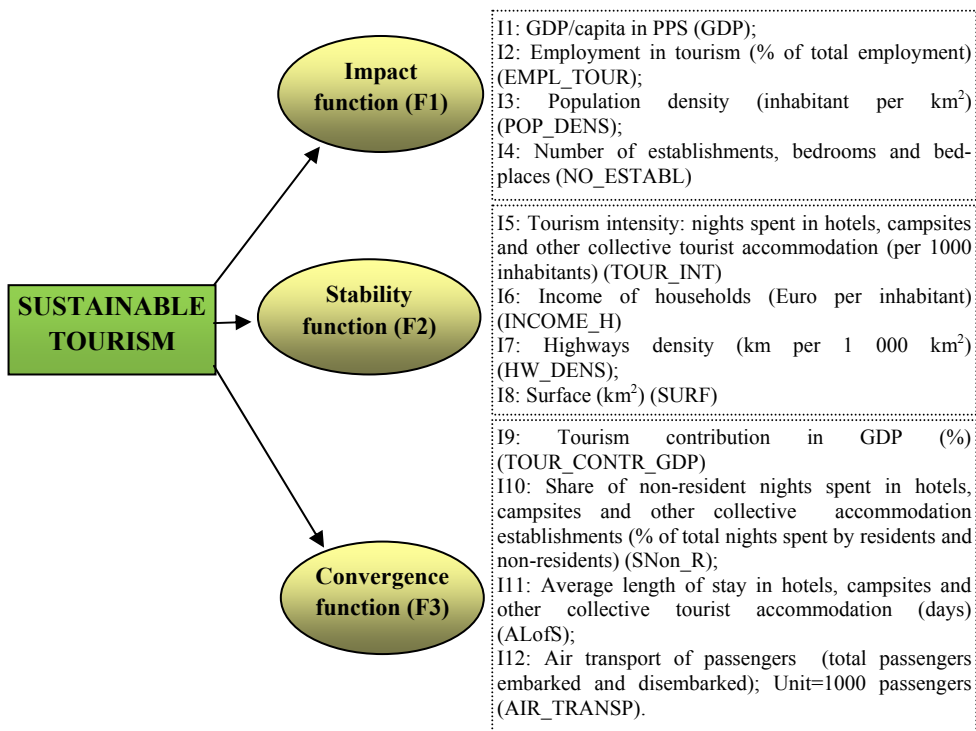


Figure no. 8. Indicators of the analysis

Source: own representation

Moreover, based on the obtained results, the analysis allowed to specify, in the conclusions, the multiplier factors that determine increasing economies of scale in the tourism industry and thus generate a decrease in competitiveness gaps between developed and convergence regions.

3. Results and discussions

Our approach outlines which regions are effective in terms of competitiveness in tourism and which ones are non-effective. Thus, in the first stage, we considered a system of equations for each function defined above.

$$F1 = \alpha_1 * x + \varepsilon_1$$

$$GDP = (EMPL_TOUR + POP_DENS + NO_ESTABL) * x + \varepsilon_1 \tag{1}$$

$$F2 = \alpha_2 * x + \varepsilon_2$$

$$TOUR_INT = (INCOME_H + HW_DENS + SURF) * x + \varepsilon_2 \tag{2}$$

$$F3 = \alpha_3 * x + \varepsilon_3$$

$$TOUR_CONTR_GDP = (SNon_R + ALoF + AIR_TRANSP) * x + \varepsilon_3 \tag{3}$$

where α represents the variables that compose each function and ε is the standard error. After applying regression, we obtained the following results (table no. 1):

Table no. 1: The matrix of indicators

Indicators	F1	F2	F3
I1. (GDP)	1.000	-	-
I2. (EMPL_TOUR)	.730	-	-
I3. (POP_DENS)	.535	-	-
I4. (NO_ESTABL)	.447	-	-
I5. (TOUR_INT)	-	1.000	-
I6. (INCOME_H)	-	.675	-
I7. (HW_DENS)	-	.449	-
I8. (SURF)	-	.147	-
I9. (TOUR_CONTR_GDP)	-	-	1.000
I10. (SNon_R)	-	-	.399
I11. (ALoS)	-	-	.469
I12. (AIR_TRANSP)	-	-	.543

Source: own calculations

We find that there is a strong relationship between I1 and I2, which explains the interdependence between GDP and EMPL_TOUR in proportion of 73%. Another intense relationship is between TOUR_INT and INCOME_H (67.5%). Starting from these results, to make a clearer distinction between regions, in a second phase of research, we calculated a *tourism index (TI)*, based on which we grouped the regions analyzed in *mature tourist destinations* (index values between 0.5-1.0), *medium to high tourist destinations* (0.25-0.49), *medium to low tourist destinations* (0.1-0.24) and *tourist destinations in the early stage* (below 0.1). TI takes values between 0 and 1, where 1 represents the maximum

intensity of tourism in a region. Having as a starting point the study ESPON (2006), TI will be computed as a weighted average between TOUR_INT, TOUR_CONTR_GDP, EMPL_TOUR, NO_ESTABL, HW_DENS as follows:

$$TI_{ij}=(X_{ij}-\min X_i)/(\max X_i-\min X_i) \quad (4)$$

where TI_{ij} represents the intensity of tourism; X_{ij} - the value of variable i in region j , and $\max X_i$ and $\min X_i$ - the maximum and minimum values of the variables considered. In table no. 2 the results obtained are shown.

Table no. 2. Tourism index in French and Romanian regions

Region code	Region	TOUR_INT	TOUR_CONTR_GDP	EMPL_TOUR	NO_ESTABL	HW_DENS	TI
FR10	Île de France	0.220	1.000	1.000	0.716	0.980	0.783
FR21	Champagne-Ardenne	0.084	0.551	0.036	0.103	0.392	0.233
FR22	Picardie	0.078	0.520	0.046	0.110	0.549	0.260
FR23	Haute-Normandie	0.078	0.499	0.050	0.105	0.686	0.283
FR24	Centre	0.114	0.489	0.079	0.252	0.451	0.277
FR25	Basse-Normandie	0.197	0.468	0.050	0.205	0.275	0.239
FR26	Bourgogne	0.128	0.395	0.057	0.211	0.431	0.244
FR30	Nord-Pas-de-Calais	0.049	0.405	0.139	0.203	1.000	0.359
FR41	Lorraine	0.077	0.499	0.082	0.162	0.392	0.242
FR42	Alsace	0.148	0.619	0.096	0.184	0.706	0.350
FR43	Franche-Comté	0.105	0.447	0.029	0.122	0.255	0.191
FR51	Pays de la Loire	0.183	0.666	0.121	0.395	0.451	0.363
FR52	Bretagne	0.201	0.656	0.129	0.487	0.039	0.302
FR53	Poitou-Charentes	0.260	0.551	0.054	0.263	0.235	0.272
FR61	Aquitaine	0.324	0.582	0.146	0.564	0.294	0.382
FR62	Midi-Pyrénées	0.204	0.645	0.125	0.541	0.275	0.358
FR63	Limousin	0.115	0.499	0.014	0.117	0.314	0.211
FR71	Rhône-Alpes	0.258	0.676	0.432	0.992	0.549	0.581
FR72	Auvergne	0.159	0.395	0.043	0.267	0.294	0.231
FR81	Languedoc-Roussillon	0.440	0.656	0.132	0.531	0.392	0.430
FR82	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	0.391	0.739	0.382	0.901	0.471	0.576
FR83	Corse	1.000	0.697	0.011	0.163	0.000	0.374
RO11	Nord-Vest	0.012	0.169	0.018	0.169	0.000	0.073
RO12	Centru	0.032	-0.018	0.000	0.378	0.000	0.078
RO21	Nord-Est	0.000	0.100	0.004	0.173	0.000	0.055
RO22	Sud-Est	0.037	0.000	0.032	0.229	0.000	0.059
RO31	Sud - Muntenia	0.003	0.148	0.014	0.144	0.137	0.089
RO32	București - Ilfov	0.018	0.234	0.029	0.000	0.569	0.170
RO41	Sud-Vest-Oltenia	0.005	-0.043	0.000	0.098	0.000	0.012
RO42	Vest	0.016	0.142	0.011	0.150	0.000	0.063

Source: own calculations

According to TI, only three French regions qualify as *mature tourist destinations* (1): Île de France, Rhône-Alpes and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. Regarding *medium to high tourist destinations* (2), we find that there are 12 regions, all in France. Only one region in

Romania, Bucharest-Ilfov is classified as *medium to low tourist destination* (3) while the other seven regions in Romania are, unfortunately, *tourist destinations in the early stage* (4). There is no region in France in the latter category. The distribution of regions in compliance with TI is represented in figure no. 9.

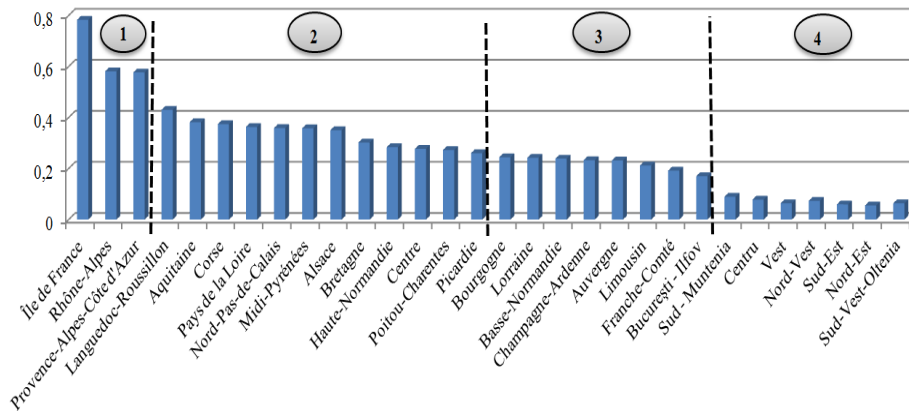


Figure no. 9: Grouping of regions according to the tourism index

Source: own representation based on TI index results

Figure no. 10 comes to support the relation between tourism and development, providing a relevant image on the correlation between the GDP/capita in PPS (EU27=100) and the tourism intensity.

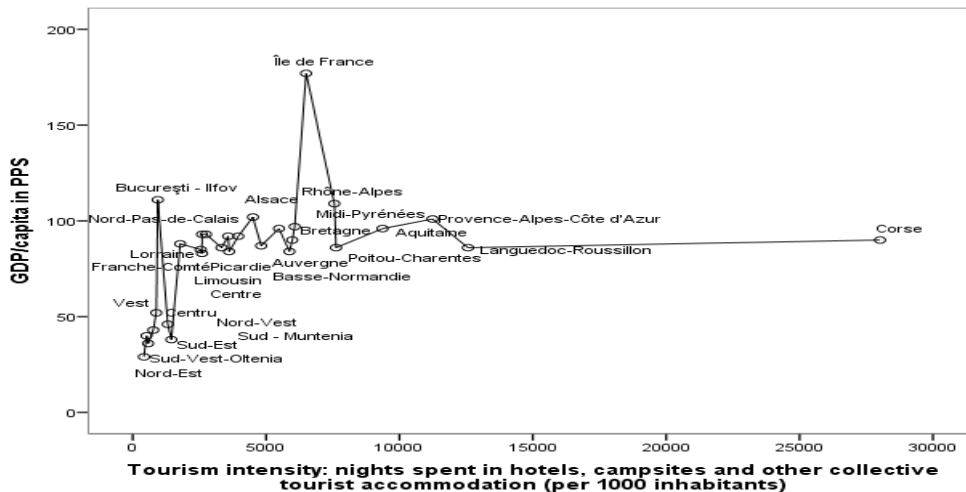


Figure no. 10: The interrelation GDP-tourism intensity-employment in tourism

Source: own representation

Therefore, the results show a tendency of increased tourism activities in developed regions. Regarding the convergence regions, it requires a rethinking of the strategies on tourism;

special emphasis should be placed on harnessing the natural factors, efficient management of resources, implementation of the principles of corporate social responsibility and sustainable development.

Conclusions

The multi-dimensional challenges with which the tourist sector from all over the world has to deal (globalization and market evolution, impact of tourism on the global economy, climate change, knowledge economy, the evolution in the field of human resources, productivity and competitiveness) require a special attention from governmental agencies, oriented towards developing a tourism based on social responsibility practices. An integrated governmental approach, which would encourage and support the increase of the competitiveness level and sustainable development of tourism, is needed. In other words, sustainable tourism should focus on creating synergies between the pursuit of tourist purposes and nature, landscape and cultural patrimony protection, promoting “environmentally friendly” transportation for leisure activities. This mainly implies an effort of investigating and discovering the best social responsibility practices for a sustainable development. Therefore, as the results of the study revealed, the Romanian regions may use the French experience as a good practice guide in terms of sustainable tourism, which would allow reaching a higher quality level, costs and time reductions, all with an impact on the development of tourist destinations. French regions managed to organise tourist branches by diversifying the urban offer, by structuring tourism in the nature and rearranging the tourist offer in such a way as to become attractive in all seasons.

Despite the financial crisis, France managed to keep itself among the most attractive tourist destinations in the world due to the ambitious policies devised for accrediting and favourably positioning a tourist destination as well as to its awareness of the beneficial effects of tourism on economic growth (income creation, job creation, properly trained human resources, scale economies, etc.).

Starting from the French experience, various directions of action, which tourist destinations in Romania could follow in order to extend the lifecycle of the products offered and make them more attractive, can be described as guidelines. Therefore, the creation of public-private partnerships through which general corporate social responsibility principles could be put into practice, on a larger scale, in tourism, should be encouraged. It is well-known that the low level of economic development in terms of tourist infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe attracts types of tourism with a low multiplication impact. For this reason, an association between regions could be created in order to reach joint objectives and measure tourism employment more precisely, as well as seasonality, modes of adaptation to tourist demands, etc. In this context, it is necessary to take into account the localisation factor, which, according to the New Economic Geography terms, is decisive in the tourism convergence process. The distance to a tourist destination, time, and transportation costs are often the aspects that underlie travel decisions. Consequently, if an infrastructure that would facilitate accessibility lacked, tourism would lose in a certain region. Therefore, this is how the last position, despite its meaningful attractions (Bucovina monasteries, Carpathians Mountains, etc.), in the ranking of the tourist destinations occupied by the North-East region in Romania can be explained. Moreover, the current investigation methods of the impact of tourism do not offer a clear image on its potential, especially in

terms of types, practices, etc. Therefore, an adaptation of tourism indicators in order to support development of this sector in accordance with the European model of sustainable development, depending on the national specificity, is necessary. Both on the NUTS 1 and NUTS 2 levels, it is necessary to generate new relevant statistical indicators, inspired from the French model, which would open the way to a relative uniformity of the databases (increase of the comparison degree, the analysis on the representation degree of the current data, the way in which they are integrated in various studies). In addition, the development of a monitoring platform and a sustainable management of the destinations is needed. The existence of an integrated evaluating and monitoring system of the tourism evolution in destinations is also needed because this instrument can add to a better assessment of tourism contribution to development and convergence by early identification of economic, social, environmental risks, opportunities, strategy adoption, policies, improvement of the tourism potential, a better demand knowledge, a more thorough obviousness of tourist activities, the decrease of tax evasion, which will finally lead to the increase of tourism contribution to GDP, employment etc.

For the purpose of creating more sustainable types of tourism, it is necessary to place emphasis on the peripheral areas, by increasing the involvement of competent authorities, of various professional categories, local population, in finding the weak points and turning them into potential advantages, which would attract tourists. In addition, the professionalism of the tourism actors is an objective related to the tourism development of every region, this being more necessary in areas without a long tradition in the field. Professional qualification generates sustainable jobs, but, at the same time, highlights, in a superior way, the regional tourism offer. This will be achieved by training youth at all levels, by improving professional capabilities of tourism companies' managers and employees, by attracting the potential tourism actors in the industry and by supporting the territories with tourism vocation. Therefore, a region interested in its development should invest in the initial training of tourism staff, by potentially expanding the educational and research offer. A series of programmes accepted and acknowledged at the international level already exists. They should be promoted and applied in tourism rather than draft new formulas that add more confusion both to the tourism industry and to the consumers.

According to the results of the performed analysis, if France aims at preserving the excellence position at tourism level, it must support an efficiency policy in supplying tourism products, as well as preserve the quality of the offered services in order to promote its tourism capital among national and international tourists. However, it is unlikely that foreign tourists be uninterested in France, considering the richness and variety of the products offered, although the competition with the developing countries, which advance quickly towards modern tourism and is perceptive to sustainable development, will continue to increase. Regarding Romania, efficient strategies, as well as evaluation mechanisms and proper regulations that will preserve tourist destinations, the population and environment are necessary, all these elements being possible only by consultation, consensus, joint actions, education, knowledge and experience exchange between stakeholders. In order to reinvigorate tourism, which is a field with great potential in Romania, there is a need to guide and provide mechanisms that will ensure the connection between participants, the achievement of a realistic diagnosis on the importance given to behaviour and social responsibility programmes in order to support tourist destinations from the stakeholders' point of view, of the good practices existing at the local level, thus enabling their transfer and comparison to the international ones.

Looking ahead, if statistics on the tourism industry would expand and would contain indicators related to the environmental and social components, the researches in this area would produce more meaningful results, closer to factual reality of each region, and in this manner authorized institutions can act better on each deficient element. Hoping that future researches will occur under the auspices of these goals, raises interest the achieving of some extensive comparative analysis between Romania and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, relatively comparable economically, on their positioning in the tourism industry, starting from various indicators that could define the three functions used in this study (the function of impact, stability and convergence). Thus, it could be seen the development potential of tourism in Eastern Europe, under which can be outlined remedies to improve the competitiveness of tourism.

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