

STUDENT'S CORNER

TYPES OF NICHE TOURISM IN ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT

Tourism represents all the relationships that can result from the movement and the holidays of peoples that spend time outside their residence, people who are not motivated by a permanent establishment or a gainful activity.

From this brief definition, it can be said that the tourism industry is one of the most important industries of a country or a region and it is an industry which generates capital, jobs and creates the image of a country / region.

Noteworthy is that the tourism industry is constantly evolving and with the acceleration of technical progress, the tourism industry is also growing. This evolution cause the appearance of new types of tourism, which gradually turns into tourism market niches.

This article aims to identify and describe the two major forms of tourism, and to emphasize the importance of each of them on the tourism market in Romania. The structure of the article comprise: a brief introduction, the relation between mass tourism and niche tourism, tourism niche in the literature, niche tourism types and conclusions related to niche tourism development in Romania.

Keywords: *niche tourism, mass tourism, tourism market, Romania*

Jel Classification: *M2, R5, L83*

Introduction

Tourism represents primarily "a form of recreation along with other activities and forms of leisure" and involves "temporary movement of people to destinations outside of residence and the activities performed in the time spent in those destinations" (Minciu, 2001, p. 11).

Year 2014 is the sixth year of economic crisis for our country. However, Romanian people want to travel further, a trend which is reflected by increases in both, the domestic tourism and in the outgoing tourism, increases registered in the last year.

Trips, have a direct impact on both categories of tourism participants, the inhabitants of the areas directly involved in tourism and tourists; however the tourism activity is a way (in some cases only) that develops higher, all types of resources and in particular, the natural ones: the beauty of landscapes, curative qualities of mineral or thermal waters, climatic conditions.

Rightly considered as the world's most dynamic industry, tourism has become in the recent decades, a mass fact, diversifying its ways and means of attracting tourist flows.

The great evolution of the tourism in the current period, meant for many countries, an important way to increase foreign exchange resources. It is no less true that this activity has grown from human needs (such as knowledge, information, health, leisure), exceeding, the purely economic aspect, being a useful way of leisure and, also, for education.

Given that tourism is expanding much more online, than ever, it highlights clearly the increasingly trend of tourists who choose their own airline reservations, accommodation. Also, many tourists use smartphones and tablets to download applications they are interested in. This trend causes the appearance of new types of niche tourism.

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1. The relation between mass tourism and niche tourism

Nowadays, tourism production takes two forms that are becoming more recognizable, such as: mass tourism and tourism niche or specialized tourism.

Mass tourism is a form of tourism that govern, the most, the tourism offer, of any kind, followed by a mass consumption, represented by its services that are offered to the tourist, and which can result in accommodation, food, leisure and public utilities.

The concepts mentioned above, the offer and consumption are part of the tourism fact and constitute important parts of the economy. These components can be deduced from the increasing number of accommodation establishments and catering establishments (especially by converting the residential houses into pensions), leisure elements, the development of transportation and the increase of their capacity.

In the early days of packaged holidays the inexperience of consumers and their unfamiliarity with cross-cultural travel, coupled with a lack of organisational infrastructure and relative high costs against incomes, generated a need to provide systems that could deliver cost-effective, predictable forms of tourism that generated homogeneous holidays. On the surface, it is easy to see how such systems have influenced market behavior (Novelli, 2005, p. 2).

The classic mass tourism was intended, especially, to the crowds and had as main motivation, the outing from their daily home, looking for the opposite side of work and it was used as a propaganda way during the Cold War to support the superiority of capitalism. A typical product of mass production.

Nowadays, the mass tourism can be regarded as any industrialized process designed to meet the needs of a market which is increasingly wider.

The mass tourism is interpreted as a large-scale phenomenon, the production, supply, trading of tourism services are standardized, have rates relatively fixed and are addressed to a mass of clients.

Also, among the defining elements in characterizing of mass tourism, we can mention elements such as competitive prices, but also different systems adopted by the tourism organizers, like travel packages with an average duration of one- two weeks and buffet table system.

As we assist at the production demassification issue, we also state the radical change occurred in this type of tourism. Naturally, no one will give up consumer society, or at holidays abroad.

Thus the mass tourism continues to dominate the global tourism market, it also began to appear increasingly more specific types of tourism, described by the need to satisfy a growing number of tourists, which are characterized by needs and different affinities.

The term of niche tourism has become first in marketing, where the need to find new markets and new customers represent efficiency of their products / services.

Niche Tourism arose as a reaction to mass tourism, which is distinguished by the quality of tourists, which support the sustainable development of tourism objectives, the support of the local communities.

This type of tourism is determined by motivation, behavior and experience, both production and consumption. Niche tourism offer is addressed to a small, but constant number of tourists, with a net income greater than mass tourism tourists followers.

2. Tourism niche in the literature

Some experts consider that we can talk about different niches in tourism, including specific and well defined types, such as cultural tourism, rural tourism, sports tourism, segmented by other tourism niches (geo-tourism, gastronomy, cyclo-tourism). On the other hand, tourism niche is focused on a very specific and relatively stable tourism market, which made it difficult to separate them, because its conjunction and complexity.

International literature treats, especially, mass tourism, because of its generally and complex nature that occupies on the tourist market, but a specialized study that integrates all types of niche tourism has not yet been developed, nor on national or international plan.

Niche tourism is, also seen as a response to an increasing number of more sophisticated tourists demanding specialist tourism products. It means that some destinations can focus their offerings to differentiate their tourism products and compete in an increasingly competitive and cluttered tourism environment. This critical appraisal presents an exploration of various forms of niche tourism wine, student, festivals and events and yoga/wellness. How destinations develop themselves to create unique products and images, which appeal to the tourism market, is a critical component of the niche tourism.

Niche tourism it is shaped and searched by a more discerning and experience seeking tourist consumer (Ali-Knight, 2011, p. 15).

3. Types of niche tourism

The main types of niche tourism, observed and developed in Romania include:

- *Gastronomic tourism*, existing, especially in the northern areas, Moldova and Maramures, areas, that are characterized by traditional dishes and customs sacredly preserved;
- *Hunting and fishing tourism* in areas Tarcaia (Neamt), Caras-Severin, Danube Delta;
- *Tourism heritage (historicaland memorial)*: Bran Castle, Peles, Corvin;
- *Wine tourism*: represented by Wine Road passes through the towns of Filipeștii de Târg, Băicoi, Boldești, Bucov, Pleașa, Valea Călugărească, Iordăcheanu, Urlați, Ceptura, Fântânele, Tohani, Gura Vadului, Călugăreni;
- *medical-spa and spa tourism*: at the famous resorts Govora, Călimănești, Băile Herculane, Băile Felix;
- *Pilgrimage tourism*, represented by organized tours in the monasteries of Moldavia and Transylvania;
- *Ecotourism*. This type of tourism is recognized for names such as "gentle tourism", "green tourism", "ecological tourism" and "ecotourism". In this category we find two areas certified by the General Assembly of the European Commission for Tourism, Zărnești and Piatra Craiului;
- *Extreme sports tourism*, which also include the high jump with elastic rope (bungee jumping), moto-cross, mountain climbing, adventure racing, aggressive skating, extreme skiing, mountain biking, snow boarding, free diving, caiac- canoeing, rafting.
- *Tourism spelunking*: Topolnița cave, Karst Complex Zăton - Ponoare, Izverna Cave, Buhui Cave.

Certainly, online and niche tourism are two directions for the Romanian tourism.

At the workshop organized by the Tourism Market blog in 19.02.2014, "**Future in tourism: tourism online and niche tourism**", the blogger, Pirnog Dragos (Explore Travel) - has highlighted the importance of tourism niche by his presentation related to "Niche tourism is a solution for the future of tourism?" and made some remarks related to niche tourism and its development, closely linked to the progress in the online environment, and revealed that:

- Mass tourism can destroy certain destinations and therefore some tourists avoid it;
- We need niche tourism consultancy, in some countries consultancy it is increasing;
- Examples of niche tourism: responsible tourism, cycling, adventure tourism, culinary tourism, tourism events;
- Advantages: high loyalty, membership of a group or community, low competition in the field, customers looking for an alternative to mass tourism, the focus is on the product and not on price;
- The niche tourism results, do not come overnight and is ideal to create packages based on experience;
- Examples of packages created by Explore Travel, a real success for the enthusiast tourists: Explore Photo - Safari in Kenya, Uganda Photo Expedition alongside Dan Dinu, Explore Music - Tournament U2, Depeche Mode, Robbie Williams, etc. Explore Adventure - Explore Kenya, Tanzania Classic, Nepal Adventure.

These are really some unique packages, some of which are unique on the market in Romania, made by experts, which is addressed to another category of travelers, with other preferences (Velea, 2014).

Conclusions

Although the niche tourism is not as well developed in Romania, compared to other EU countries, we can observe that our country has much potential for development, resources and, also, development opportunities.

One of the trends, that marks the development of niche tourism in Romania, refers to the online tourism market that is increasingly fast, and highlights a more serious need for online services, developed to be more accessible and performant, that has to be dedicated and must belong to a group.

Perhaps the essential condition of this type of tourism is that the organizer must know very well that niche to see in it an opportunity to do business and to make a plan for this purpose, and also to be passionate about the business itself.

In the same time, Romania should focus on niche tourism in the next five up to seven years, respectively, it should be addressed to cultural tourism or the social classes, while the mass tourism market is already occupied by countries that have invested about 20 years to reach this type of tourism, such as Greece or Turkey, appreciated the specialists at the Hospitality Forum organized in Bucharest. (Business 24, 2008)

Interesting to note is that the Romanians began to choose, due to the easy access to the Internet, more and more personalized holidays, holidays "signature" type, built according to the time, budget, and according to what tourists want from their vacation, appreciates representatives of specialized travel agencies. For a vacation, the average price of a custom package is 1,700 euros / person for staying at the beach. Also, Romanians who choose circuits "signature" pay, a price about 3,000 euro / person.

Another trend which was observed in the niche tourism, is the way that tourists are booking and paying. For the years 2015 is expected, in addition, an increase of over 30% of demand for exotic destinations (Maldives, Caribbean, Asia), an increase number of early-booking appointments and online reservations, even if they will be doubled by information received on the phone, says Cosmin Marinof, sales manager TUI TravelCenter part of Eurolines Group. Also, buyers are becoming increasingly fastidious and pay more attention in organizing their holidays. (Focus Energetic, 2014)

Comparing the mass tourism along with the niche tourism, we can observe that:

Comparison between mass tourism and niche tourism

Table no. 1

Mass tourism	Niche tourism
- standardized prices	- Customized prices for each holiday, depending on services required
- homogeneous services	- specialized services
- it addresses to a large number of tourists that have low up to medium income	- it addresses to a limited number of tourists that have a medium up to a high income

Source: made by author

Thus we can say that Romania has special areas such as Viscri (rural tourism), Delta Dunării (fishing and birdwatching) and Nera River and Crisul Repede River (rafting) Padiş plateau, Crystal

Cave from Mina Farcu and Meziad Cave (mountainbike and tourism spelunking) which can attract followers tourists of niche tourism.

As a conclusion, the tourism market in Romania will certainly become more specialized and focused on online platforms, with a growing emphasis on communication and promotion, where the niche tourism will take place primarily.

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