

Social Tourism – an Alternative Form of Tourism in Romania

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ABSTRACT

Social tourism is a particular form of tourism practiced by social groups with limited income and oriented to their cognitive, cultural and recreational needs. Concretely, the term "Social tourism" is based on tourism services offer a low price. These holidays may be accompanied or educational services and/or therapeutic benefit services. They may also be specially built camps for use by persons with disabilities. On the other hand, social tourism can refer to highlighting of tourist sites and natural heritage, cultural, artistic, historical or geographically isolated areas less known, thus pursuing economic boost through the development of poor areas tourism impact on local communities. This paper proposes to identify which are and on what does social tourism programs in Romania. The paper is structured as follows: introduction to the social tourism in Romania, social tourism programs, tourism indicators and conclusions.

KEYWORDS

Social tourism, Calypso, ANAT (The National Association of Travel Agencies from Romania), ANTREC (National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism), OPTBR (Organization of Spa Tourism in Romania)

JEL Classification

L83, O19

Introduction

Interminable period of transition to a market economy, traversed by our country, profoundly affected the Romanian economy. In the present circumstances few people can afford the "luxury" of enjoying travel constantly.

Tourism has become a dynamic sector, both in the global economy and developing countries, its development being done simultaneous with the development of other sectors, leading to the creation of new jobs, thus ensuring a certain standard of living and, ultimately, improved quality of life⁴. However, this tourism development should not harm the environment or social and cultural development of the country, therefore, tourism as an economic activity must be connected to the concept of sustainable development is an activity dependent of nature and cultural heritage resources of each society that sells these resources (processed or not).

In research in recent years, economists have assessed the impact of social tourism's importance for both categories: for tourists, but also for the country's tourism activity. Minnaert, Maitland, Miller(2009) in "Tourism and social policy - the value of social tourism" shows importance of Social tourism for low income groups in terms of the benefits it can bring, both in the short and medium term. McCabe (2009) in "Who needs a holiday? Evaluating social tourism" showed that the problems faced by disadvantaged families and the benefits it feel to be supported to take a vacation are both comprehensive and policy-relevant.

The implications for the way in which Social Tourism is provided focus on the need for adequate support to participants during and after the holiday [...] Social Tourism will not provide the same benefits automatically for every participant, so welfare agents need to be aware of their role in

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⁴ <http://www.eu-turistul.ro/impactul-turismului-asupra-economiei.html>

the process and how they can influence outcomes – and must be trained and resourced to do so - Minnaert et al (2009).

It is clear that a holiday can have demonstrable impacts connected with many areas of current Government policy on: health and well-being, particularly in relation to the treatment of stress related illnesses and disorders but also in a range of other potential treatments of holistic and alternative therapies; in terms of children on Education, child growth and development, social inclusion, skills development, life satisfaction. Holidays can connect with general policy on communities and social inclusion; family stability and cohesion; feelings of happiness and life satisfaction/quality of life; possible improvements in mental health, particularly stress and stress-related illness; work and return to work policies - McCabe (2009).

The main objective of all initiatives for tourism development should be full realization of individual potential of everyone, both as a person and as a citizen. This objective relates to facilitating universal access to tourism - including families, youth and older people - means absolutely necessary for it to fight inequality and exclusion of cultural differences, of those with limited possibilities or those living in the developing countries⁵.

Hunziker defines social tourism as „the relationships and phenomena in the field of tourism resulting from participation in travel by economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged elements in society - Scott McCabe et al (2012).

World Tourism Organization has confirmed in its Manila Declaration the mission and objectives of social tourism, which can be defined as following: to make tourist leisure accessible to the majority, including youth, families and elderly people, by providing an exceptional economic opportunity. The concept of social tourism then covers all these topics and more⁶.

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 24), each individual has the right to rest and leisure time, as well as a limit of working hours⁷. However, these rights are far from being universally accepted, with a large percentage of population in developing countries worldwide having no access to leisure and travel opportunities. To address these issues, the concept of social tourism has been developed as an important means in the struggle against limited abilities of those living in developing countries.

Currently millions of people worldwide are welcomed by the social tourism that appeals to all budgets and age groups. Such tourism is seen as a promoter of economic growth, offering an exceptional economic opportunity and generating a continuous flow of investment and people, which, in turn, contributes to regional development, encourages the transfer of resources from rich economies to poor countries and promotes national and international wealth.

Social tourism is aimed at benefiting the whole community by contributing to the economic and social development of regions and citizens as the whole. All the players in the tourism development are subject to the same expectations of professionalism and competence, whether facility managers or entrepreneurs, guides or tour organizers, entertainers or educators⁸.

Long before the promotion of social tourism by international tourism institutes and organizations, the concept of sustainable tourism has been adopted and expressed in the following objectives: to provide neglected regions with fresh resources; to reconcile environmental protection and tourism development; to generate local cultural, social and economic benefits. Regarded as one of the engines for regional development, tourism should never lead to local population's exploitation, destruction of its culture or uncontrolled invasion of a region.

Protection of the natural environment has always been and remains one of its primary goals, dominated on personal or commercial gain of individuals and organizations.

The European Union is trying to promote social tourism through Calypso program. The program spanned for three years (2009-2011)⁹.

In the first year was attempted to awareness this economic and social phenomenon, empowerment the European representatives and creating a mechanism based on reciprocity, allowing certain target groups (elderly, disabled, families who face social difficulties, pupils and students) to

⁵ <http://steconomice.uoradea.ro/anale/volume/2006/economie-si-administrarea-afacerilor/66.pdf>

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/tourism/files/docs/calypso/presentations/toulouse_larsahlin_en.pdf

⁷ <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>

⁸ <http://www.syl.com/travel/theconceptofsocialtourism.html>

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/tourism/calypso/index_en.htm

spend their holidays in other member states, based on thematic programs and coordinated by authorities (national, regional, local) in their respective countries.

In 2010 it passed to the application of a complex exchange of tourists, Calypso is considered a post-crisis recovery solution of tourist activity on five lines of action: creating jobs in hospitality, season extension, increasing mobility within EU (and thus travel to inter-union) and, last but not least, the development of local / regional affirmation of the areas involved in social tourism.

Calypso success depends largely by realistic profiling and identifying real needs of four distinct groups of tourists: children, elderly, needy families and people with disabilities.

The arguments are more and much important for the tourism industry, but hoteliers are facing the difficulty of the project, that is exposed in details¹⁰:

- Success depends on the method of payment exchange between the two countries involved, because we are dealing with different living standards and costs, the EU is a heterogeneous structure
- That the exchange to be fair and challenging for both parties, have established similar conditions of transport, accommodation, facilities, entertainment, tours and excursions, even if some of the extra services are paid individually, they contribute to the overall value of the package
- F & B needs a special plan (cost of raw materials, food restrictions, culinary culture of the country they come from tourists, vegetarian diet and low calories) required special equipment and entertainment group adapted to the profile of tourists
- It is necessary the support of national and regional authorities, municipalities, charitable organizations, parishes, unions and other social partners volunteer tax cuts and transport rates at different visits, excursions, activities
- There is a perception barrier, the categories covered by the Calypso is dissociated from the idea of profitability, social success, not ideal for hotel customers hence scepticism towards this project
- Average length of stay is more than five days of usual holidays
- Fear of losing domestic tourists if they are presented other destinations, even if in return will come foreign groups that are more difficult to address and satisfied
- Calendar differences in the case vacations, holidays and tourist seasons in different European countries
- Financial and liquidity crisis issues, lack of qualified personnel and support staff need, especially for people with disabilities
- Unclear at national and Community legislation, the need for tourism and hotel certification homogeneous in all EU countries
- Need to allocate special funds for Calypso European generates risk of distortion to competition in the tourism market.

Romania took part in this project in collaboration with a region in Spain and one from Hungary. The project was cooled "HEALTOUR". Romania was represented in this project by the National Institute for Research and Development in Tourism. Results are expected in the near future.

At national level in Romania runs a series of programs with a social purpose. In the following we will talk about some of them.

1. Social tourism programs in Romania

These programs are part of the "Holiday in my country", a project that brings together many different promotional campaigns, received with great interest by the public¹¹:

- "Early bookings",
- "Seaside for all",
- "A week in the mountains",
- "Balneary week of recovery",
- "Holiday in the countryside",

¹⁰ http://www.hrbexpert.ro/articol/354/Turismul_social_Programul_Calypso.html

¹¹ http://anat.ro/presa/comunicat_de_presa_anat_lanseaza_zile_gratuite_de_vacanta_14_08_2012.html

- "Danube Delta for all"

In each edition, the programs have managed to attract tens of hoteliers on the coast, and the mountain resorts of tradition and hundreds of travel agencies all over the country.

In the following we detail four of the programs listed above (which are the most important in our opinion):

1.1 A week in the mountains

The program was first launched in autumn 2008¹². It is organized by the Romanian Tourism Employers Federation, together with "The National Association of Travel Agencies from Romania"¹³.

In the first year rates for a stay without meal services, hotels or villas were two stars of 158 lei, while three star prices reached to 258 lei. The four-star hotel, stay costs 358 lei.

This fall was released the September edition of the program. The program aims to increase the number of tourists in the mountains.

This program aims to provide access to rest of a large number of Romanian tourists and also to use capacity more efficiently hotel in the mountains.

Following the favourable results obtained through "A week in the mountains" in previous editions, Romanian Tourism Employers Federation wants to continue this initiative by launching the program for the period October to December 2012, keeping prices unchanged from last year.

Conditions for ongoing of this program are: length of stay being 5 nights, starting Friday and ending Sunday, between 22 October to 21 December 2012;

Prices for a place a stay of 5 nights, free meal services, including VAT, are: hotel, mansion, chalet 2* - 161 lei / holiday; hotel, mansion, chalet 3* - 259 lei / holiday; hotel, mansion 4* - 368 lei / holiday.

According to Tourism Employers charges under this program are 60-70% lower than in the summer. The commission gave to travel agencies is approximately 15% (including VAT) of the value of the services.

Seats will be sold to all categories of tourists and requests will be honoured in the order entries and the number of places available. So far, through this program it have been made available about 500 seats per series, which means that in the 9 series about 4500 people will be able to spend a week in the mountains on favourable terms¹⁴.

Program participation has seen an upward trend. First edition (Fall 2008) was attended by 24 hotel structures with a capacity of 650 seats, second edition (Spring 2009), attended 54 structure hotel with a capacity of 1488 seats, third edition (Fall 2009) have 55 attended the hotelier with a capacity of 1700 seats. The 2010 edition was attended by 98 hotel structures with a capacity of over 4170 seats. Rates, per person, no meal services, for a package of 5 nights remained stable during the 4 editions, those in category 2 star 161 lei, 258 lei 3 star and 359 lei for 4 star categories¹⁵.

Most tourist structures participating in the program locates in Prahova and Brasov. Other participants are from the Western Carpathians, Bucovina, Olt Valley.

Media promotion of accommodation and travel agencies that will run this program will be made by the Romanian Tourism Employers Federation¹⁶.

1.2 Seaside for all

"Seaside for all" was released by the Association Seaside - Danube Delta in fall 2007. "Seaside for all" is dedicated to tourists who wish to spend their holidays at the seaside in off season at special prices, the spring underway periods (3 May to 14 June) and fall (September 1 to October 15)¹⁷.

¹² <http://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/social/a-inceput-programul-o-saptamana-la-munte-pentru-toate-buzunarele.html>

¹³ <http://www.ziare.com/stiri/turisti/o-saptamana-la-munte-revine-in-2012-afla-cat-costa-si-cat-dureaza-1154343>

¹⁴ <http://horeca.ro/articole/hoteluri/2720-patronatele-demareaza-programul-o-saptamana-la-munte.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.anat.ro/minipreturi/munte/istoric.php>

¹⁶ <http://www.fptr.ro/programe-fptr/o-saptamana-la-munte.aspx>

¹⁷ <http://www.anat.ro/minipreturi/litoral/istoric.php>

"Seaside for all" it was released in the fall of Association Seaside - Danube Delta, Romanian Tourism Employers Federation (FPTR), National Association of Travel Agencies (ANAT) and employers on Seaside¹⁸.

Prices for this edition for a stay of 6 nights / person remained unchanged from the previous edition and start from¹⁹: 549 lei - 5* hotel, with breakfast; 439 lei - 4* hotel, with breakfast; 379 lei - 3* hotel, with breakfast; 279 lei - 2* hotel, with breakfast; 240 lei - 3* hotel without breakfast; 209 lei - 2* hotel without breakfast; 179 lei - 1* hotel without breakfast.

Tourists have benefited from an additional option: All Inclusive option that ensured all 3 meals - served in buffet, drinks included, free for children playgrounds, swimming pools, sun beds and umbrellas on the beach²⁰. All Inclusive rates for stays of 5 nights / person starting from: 695 lei for 3* hotel, 795 lei for 4* hotel, 895 lei for 5* hotel.

As has been done every time, tourists who buy this package received a voucher attraction (free entry to one of the objectives of tourist interest in Constanta: Museum of Art and the Museum of National History and Archaeology). Access to these sights was made with the voucher that came with the package tour from any agency ANAT in the country.

Those interested in purchasing a vacation package of this type could contact travel agencies members of ANAT (National Association of Travel Agencies in Romania). "Seaside for all" had an official website where visitors could find all the information about offers²¹.

„Seaside for all”, reached on the 11 edition, is a program where hotel patronages and travel agents have shook hands in order to attract tourists on the Romanian coast during low season. In the program were 40 hotels with over 3,500 seats dedicated to program. Overall for this edition were about 7,000 seats.

1.3 Holiday in the countryside

Program run by ANTREC (National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism) began Sunday, 16.09.2012. The twentieth edition of this special program "Holiday in the countryside" took place from 16 September to 2 November and offered tourists stays of five nights at special prices.

Program recipients were all categories of tourists who want to discover village life, traditions and places, hospitality specific to this type of tourism and wished to serve a traditional meal with dishes specific to their chosen areas.

Accommodation package for this program, "Holiday in the countryside", offered stays of five nights / six days on pensions 2 daisies at a price of 150 lei / person. For 3 and 4 daisies pensions, rates are priced for a stay of 195 lei / person. In this price is included five nights in a double room, first night was related to Sunday. Each guest house participating in this program will provide the breakfast with no charge.

Counties that had pensions in the program this fall were: Arges, Alba, Brasov, Cluj, Covasna, Florida, Neamt, Prahova, Sibiu and Suceava²².

In 2012, ANTREC expected to increase occupancy rates by 50%²³.

This program was first launched in spring 2003 by the National Association of Rural Ecological and Cultural Tourism / ANTREC / together with the Ministry of Tourism. 5,000 places were available for the entire period, when tourists spent 5 nights in agro touristic pensions at a price of 64.9 lei. In this program were involved pensions in over 40 cities and 16 branches of the National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism²⁴.

ANTREC currently has over 2500 members with over 7,500 rooms for tourists²⁵.

¹⁸ <http://turism.acasa.ro/oferte-turistice-27/s-a-lansat-programul-litoralul-pentru-toti-pentru-vara-2012-166240.html>

¹⁹ <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/programul-litoralul-pentru-toti-cat-costa-in-septembrie-un-sejur-la-mare-9962217>

²⁰ <http://www.mondonews.ro/Litoralul-pentru-toti-editia-de-toamna-2012-Preturi-mici-la-cazare+id-47289.html>

²¹ http://www.anat.ro/minipreturi/litoral/agentii_turism.php

²² http://www.antrec.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=191%3Aantrec-a-lansat-programul-qvacane-la-arq-toamna-2012&lang=ro#

²³ http://www.adevarul.ro/financiar/Vacante_la_tara-sejur-Asociatia_Nationala_de_Turism_Rural-vacante_in_Romania-turism_in_Romania-turism_rural_0_695330595.html#

²⁴ <http://www.ziuaconstantia.ro/rubrici/economic/antrec-constantia-a-aderat-la-programul-%22vacanta-la-tara%22.html>

²⁵ <http://www.euogites.org/member.php?lang=EN&id=RO>

1.4 OPTBR programs

Programs that promote members OPTBR (Organization of Spa Tourism in Romania) are: "A week of recovery", "Balneary decade", "Come to baths", and "Balneary Wellness". Programs packages include accommodation, meals and treatment in hotels of 2, 3 and 4 stars.

On "A week of recovery"²⁶ program the breakfast version includes six nights' accommodation, two day treatment procedures and medical examination on arrival, based on medical recommendation, at a rate per person in double room of 330 lei for a two star hotel and 360 lei for three stars. Version with the same services, but with two meals a day, costs 470 lei to 540 lei in two stars to three stars hotels.

Those who choose the program "**Balneary decade**"²⁷ enjoy nine nights' accommodation, full board during the stay and treatment at least seven days, with two procedures per day, plus a medical consultation at the beginning of the stay.

Prices at a two star hotel are 710 lei per person for a stay and a three-star facility grows to 830 lei per person.

"**Come to baths**"²⁸ program supposes six nights accommodation with full board, two procedures per day (minimum five days of treatment) and a medical consultation. To purchase this package is necessary a doctor recommendation and a copy of the pension coupon or a certificate for the payment of social security.

For two-star hotel package price is 625 lei per person, and the three stars cost rises to 750 lei.

"**Balneary Wellness**"²⁹ includes three night's accommodation, two days half-board, a festive meal, access to pool, sauna, gym, two procedures of spa and a massage or beauty maintenance session. For three stars hotel package costs 625 lei per person and for a four star the tourist have to pay 650 lei.

To benefit for treatment it is necessary a recommendation from a family doctor or a health specialist, insurance and proof of payment or copy of the pension coupon. These offers can be purchased at any travel agency or directly from the service provider.

Nearly 40 hotels participate in the program in resorts like Amara, Băile Felix, Băile Herculane, Băile Olănești, Băile Tușnad, Buziaș, Călimănești-Căciulata, Covasna, Ocna Sibiului, Pucioasa, Sângeorz-Băi, Saturn, Stâna de Vale, Eforie Nord, Lacul Sărat, Slănic Moldova, Moneasa, Turda and Vatra Dornei.

These attractive discount offers are designed to facilitate widest possible access for potential customers - from all social categories - to a vacation or health recuperation during the winter season/spring season.

Special offers for spa tourism have become a tradition on Romanian tourism programs market. Above programs were well received by direct beneficiaries (whose numbers grew continuously) and spa tourism companies, the number of participants enrolled in previous programs editions are quite high: 32 companies, with 42 hotels in almost all resorts spa. These programs were adopted and practiced by other firms and companies that are not members of OPTBR, which demonstrates the need for such programs.

Programs were used with the same rates since the spring campaign of 2009, although in this period the prices for utilities, food and cleaning increased as well as the inflation rate.

However, considering the fact that from 1 January 2012 have already registered and are announced further price increases for major utilities (gas and electricity, fuel), it was necessary to adapt rates of these programs with the real situation in the market and as a result, they increased on average by 5-8%³⁰.

²⁶ <http://www.paralela45.ro/sejur/o-saptamana-de-refacere-romania>

²⁷ <http://www.anat.ro/decada/index.php>

²⁸ <http://www.gandul.info/news/programele-o-saptamana-de-refacere-in-statiunile-balneare-sunt-valabile-in-perioada-16-septembrie-10-decembrie-10034011>

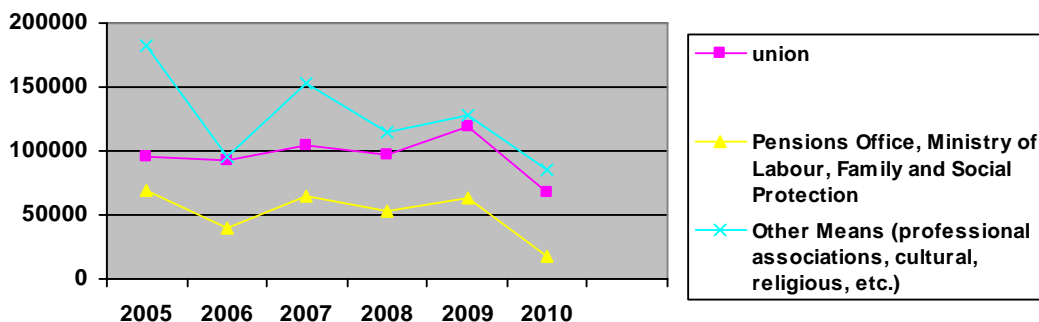
²⁹ <http://www.mediafax.ro/economic/oferte-speciale-in-statiunile-balneare-cat-costa-o-saptamana-in-programele-decada-balneara-si-hai-la-bai-10034327>

³⁰ <http://www.spas.ro/noutati/>

2. Domestic situation of resident's leisure journeys

Below we present the domestic situation of resident's leisure journey and business, on touristic areas according to journeys organizer starting with 2007 and ending with 2011:

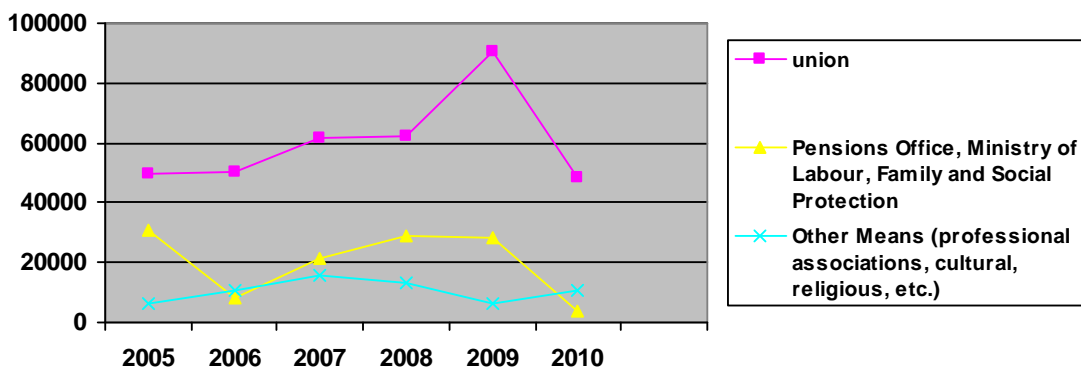
Figure 1 Total domestic trip of residents by journey organizers



Source: Data according to the Statistical Yearbooks of Romania: 2006, 2008, And 2010

Analyzed period is the one afferent to the years 2005 to 2010. Be noticed that for the three categories of organizers we have a downward trend in terms of number for organized trips. Be noticed that in 2010 were organized the lowest number of trips. According to specialists the year 2010 has been the most difficult year for Romania since the beginning of crisis. 2008 and 2009 were years sacrificed largely due to electoral campaigns.

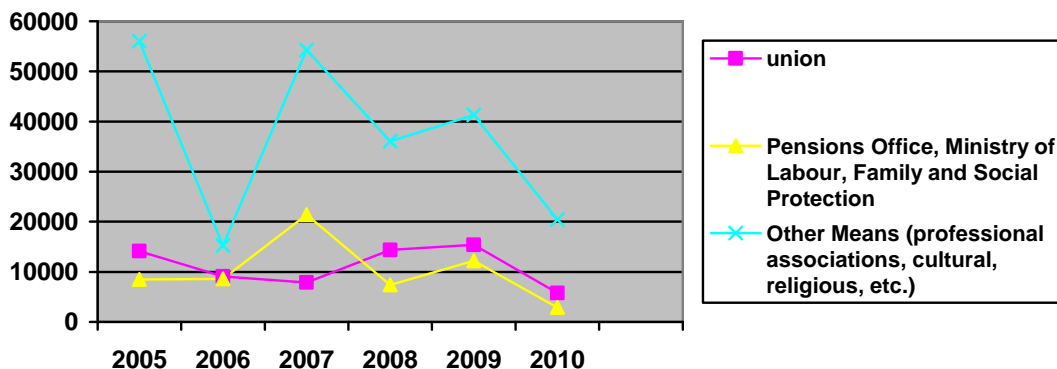
Figure 2 Domestic trips by residents on the seaside



Source: Data according to the Statistical Yearbooks of Romania: 2006, 2008, And 2010

During the analyzed period for seaside only the category „other organizers” managed to maintain the same level in comparison to the beginning of the period. The most dramatic decrease is observed in the case of organized trips by „pension offices, ministry work, family and social protection”, which was probably due to lack of money for such programs. Unions recorded a slight decrease compared to the beginning of period.

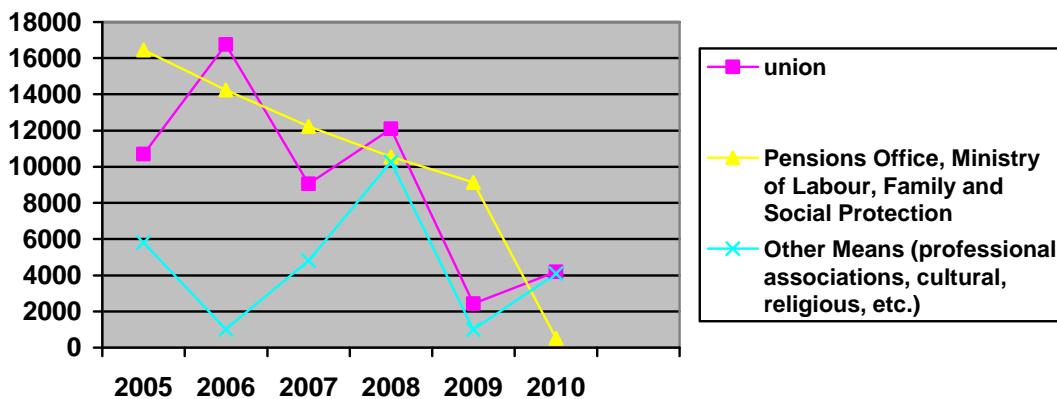
Figure 3 Domestic trips of residents on mountain area



Source: Data according to the Statistical Yearbooks of Romania: 2006, 2008, And 2010

For the mountain region the trend is descending. The most important decrease being recorded in the case of "other means". For case „other means” was registered a very high variations between the period of 2005 to 2007.

Figure 4 Domestic travels of residents on balneary resorts



Source: Data according to the Statistical Yearbooks of Romania: 2006, 2008, And 2010

For trips organized by the unions the decreased was of 60% and for those organized by „pension office and ministry” the decline has been of 97%. For trips organized by „union” we have register a slightly revilement in 2010. For „other means” the decrease is less pronounced (~ 30%) compared to the initial. We have very different data from year to year for trips organized by „union” and „other means”.

Viewed as a whole is ascertained the decreasing number of trips on the 3 main zones of travel, 2010 being the worst of the period that we analysis.

Conclusions

Romania is among the European countries that encourage social tourism. At this point social tourism in Romania covers four major areas of tourism, namely: coastal tourism, mountain tourism and rural tourism. Romania also has accessed European funds to develop and create tourism products for social tourism. An example of this is the program "Healtour" which aims to create transnational exchanges in social tourism.

Corina Martin, ANAT president said of the 4 programs that occur under ANAT custody following: "The increases in these special programs in each of the three years of the campaign and we are proud that we are able to induce such, more and more Romanians to travel on holiday in Romania. We must learn Romanians to choose the best offer, namely through a travel agent, choosing programs and special periods and performing early booking. So far we have not been assisted in promoting by the ministry, unfortunately. But I believe that the State has the obligation to become involved in attracting Romanians on holiday in Romania, to support the development of Romanian tourism"³¹.

Pleasing to the four programs is that they have not been cancelled or postponed in the current economic situation. Social tourism is for many Romanians the only opportunity to practice a form of tourism.

Acknowledgments

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³¹ http://anat.ro/presa/comunicat_de_presa__anat_lanseaza__zile_gratuite_de_vacanta____14_08_2012.html

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