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THE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ASPECTS OF THE TOURISTIC DEMAND IN THE ROMANIAN MOUNTAIN RESORTS

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Abstract. Our paper's aim is the quantitative and qualitative description of the touristic demand in the Romanian mountain resorts. In order to achieve our goal, we will quantify some important aspects regarding the touristic circulation and the economic results in these resorts and we will present the profile of the tourist that arrived in the mountain resorts.

Keywords: touristic demand, survey, mountain resorts

1. THE MAIN MOUNTAIN RESORTS IN ROMANIA

Poiana Brasov is located in the south-east of Transylvania, 13 km away from Brașov at an altitude of 1 030 m. The skiing domain offers great conditions for this sport both for the beginners and professionals. The vicinity allows trips in some medieval towns (Brașov), some churches like Prejmer, Harman; the Bran castle is 25 km away, as well as the peasant fortress from Râșnov.

In the same Brașov County, 145 km North of Bucharest, between Postăvaru and Piatra Mare Mountains, is located the Predeal resort. It is the highest urban settlement in Romania, situated at an altitude of more than 1 000 m. It offers good conditions for skiing both at day and at night. The resort has also artificial snow. The neighboring chalets offers the best trips to the tourism objectives located at maximum 25 km away (Sinaia with Peleş Castle and George Enescu Museum, Brașov with the Black Church and Schei district.

Close to Bucharest, around 125-135 km away, as well in Prahova County, three famous resorts are located revealing in brief the history of the Romanian mountain tourism from two different perspectives: Sinaia, the resort with skiing tracks up to 2 000 m altitude both for advanced and beginners, and Azuga, that has two skiing tracks designed in the last years. Azuga and Bușteni offer all the conditions required by a mountain fan. Recently, the works for a new skiing track were begun. All these resorts are located at an altitude between 800 and 950 m, while the tracks reach even 2 000 m.

Păltiniș, a resort located at an altitude of 1400 m, in Sibiu County, in the north of Cindrel Mountains, offers the best conditions for skiing and snowboard as well as for hiking in the neighbourhood.

Vatra Dornei in Suceava County gained the fame of one of the best active tourism resorts in the north of the country, alongside the spa reputation.

Beside these resorts, the skiing facilities are to be found in different corners of the country: Aries Valley or Băișoara Mountains in Apuseni Mountains; Bran in Bucegi Mountains, Sugas near Sfântu Gheorghe, in Covasna County, Harghita - Mădăras and Izvoru Mureșului in Harghita County etc.

2. THE OBJECTIVES OF OUR RESEARCH

Our paper's aim is the quantitative and qualitative description of the touristic demand in the Romanian mountain resorts. In order to achieve our goal, we will quantify some important aspects regarding the touristic circulation and the economic results in these resorts and we will present the profile of the tourist that arrived in the mountain resorts.

The objectives of our survey are:

- the quantitative and qualitative description of the touristic demand in the Romanian mountain resorts, with respect to :
 - o the number of arriving tourists,
 - o the preferences of incoming tourists, with respect to comfort class,
 - o overnights by Romanian and foreign tourists,
 - o the average duration of a stay,
 - o the net use of bed places.
- the description of the tourist in a Romanian mountain resort

The objectives will be attained using a series of periodic inquiry, held in the receiving structures, using a special designed questionnaire. The units are representative from several points of view - structure, comfort level as well as from the distribution point of view. The size of the sample is chosen after a close analysis of the touristic demand during the last years.

3. MOUNTAIN RESORTS DEMAND

During the last 7 years the evolution of arriving tourists in the touristic receiving structures had a quite fluctuating trend, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Total	4 920 129	4 874 777	4 847 496	5 056 693	5 638 517	5 805 096	6 216 028
Mountain resorts	756 380	749 991	699 948	747 830	836 298	827 952	882 846
Percentage	15,37%	15,38%	14,43%	17,78%	14,83%	14,26%	14,21%

Source: INSSE – Online Tempo Time Series, www.insse.ro

The total number of arriving tourists in the mountain resorts has been increasing during the last 3 years, but the percentage in total arriving tourists is decreasing.

The evolution of number of arrivals in the main establishments during June 2006 – June 2007 is presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

	jun 06	jul 06	aug. 06	sep. 06	oct .06	nov. 06	dec. 06	jan. 07	feb. 07	mar. 07	apr. 07	may 07	jun 07
Total *	589	793	852	559	531	471	401	358	403	449	483	583	716
Mountain resorts *	68	90	105	81	75	64	79	65	76	65	71	76	90

** - thousands tourists*

Source: Buletin Statistic Lunar nr. 6/2007, p. 100

During the last year, the mountain resorts had received a number of 882 846 tourists, 64,3% of which preferred hotels, hostels and hotels for youth, 12,8% of the tourists were hosted in villas and urban tourists boarding houses, 8,9% of them chose rural tourist boarding houses, 7,9% - tourist chalets and 5,4% preferred inns and motels.

In aspects regarding the allocation of the touristic demand with the comfort class, 14% of the tourists that visited the mountain side resorts preferred the 4 – star units, 27% had chosen 3 star units, 43% - the 2 star units and 12% - the 1 star ones.

The evolution of overnights in the main touristic accommodation structures during the last 12 months is presented in Table 3:

Table 3

	jun '06	jul '06	aug '06	sept. 06	oct. '06	nov. '06	dec. '06	jan. '07	febr. '07	mar. '07	apr. '07	may '07	jun '07
Total*	1.85	2.94	3.35	1.75	1.49	1.37	0.96	0.81	0.91	1.18	1.28	1.57	2.17
Mountain side resorts*	0.15	0.23	0.27	0.18	0.16	0.14	0.18	0.16	0.17	0.13	0.14	0.15	0.19

* - million nights tourist;

Source: Buletin Statistic Lunar nr. 6/2007, p. 101

We can add to these facts some others, which will complete the description of the demand in the Romanian mountain resorts:

- the number of tourists that arrived in the mountain resorts during June 2007 was aprox. 90 000, 8,8% more than in the same month of 2006,
- from all the tourists that stayed in the mountain resorts during June 2007, almost 77% were Romanians, and only 23% were foreigners, while the same proportion in June 2006 was 24%,
- the total number of overnight stays in the first 6 months of 2007 was 7,92 million nights – tourist, almost 25% less than the same period of 2006. The total number of overnight stays in the mountain resorts during the first 6 months of 2007 was 0,94 million nights – tourist, almost 10% more than during the same period of 2006,
- from a total of more than 190 000 days tourist in June 2007, 84% were Romanian while 15,9% - foreigners,
- the average duration of a stay in June 2007 was 2,1 days/tourist, the same as in June 2006,
- the degree of net use of tourist accommodation bed places was 24,3% in June 2007, 4,3% more than in the same month of 2006.

4. THE SAMPLE

The market research was conducted in 39 accommodation units from most of the mountain side resorts from Romania. The sample is composed from 25 hotels, youth hotels and hostels, 2 motels, 5 villas, 4 tourist boarding houses, 3 touristic chalets. The distribution of these 39 accommodation units by comfort is: six 4 – star units, eleven 3 star units, nineteen 2 star units and three 1 star unit.

From the geographical distribution point of view, in our marketing research we included units from the main mountain resorts - Sinaia, Bușteni, Cheia, Predeal, Pârâul

Rece, Poiana Braşov, Bran Secu, Borşa, Păltiniş, Câmpulung Moldovenesc, Durău, as well as Vatra Dornei.

5. THE PROFILE OF A TOURIST IN THE ROMANIAN MOUNTAIN RESORTS

In order to outline the profile of the tourist in the mountain resort, we distributed a number of 200 questionnaires in the main mountain side resorts, mainly from the Prahova Valley, region with the biggest touristic afflux in this form of tourism. The resorts included in our sample were Sinaia, Buşteni, Cheia, Predeal, Poiana Braşov, Bran, Pârâul Rece, Păltiniş, Secu, Voineasa, Durău, Câmpulung Moldovenesc. We have chosen a number of 39 units (hotels, villas, touristic complexes), of different comfort levels.

The results of our questionnaire can be synthesized as follows:

- A) The main means of transport used by the tourist, in order to come to mountain side resorts is the automobile (65% of our respondents had chosen this means of transport), followed by bus (18%) and train (16%);
- B) The most of our respondents had an age ranging from 35 – 49 years (34%), followed by the 20 – 34 year group (33%) and 50 – 64 year group (23%);
- C) The education level of the typical tourist in a mountain side resort is medium and high – 40% of our respondents had a medium level of education while 53 % of them had a high level of education;
- D) Regarding the sum of money spent by the tourists included in our sample, most of them answered that they spent more than 1500 RON, here included most of the foreign tourists, 20% of the tourists spent a sum of money between 500 and 700 RON, and 16% of them spent between 900 and 1100 RON.
- E) The opinion of the tourists regarding the quality of the services is as follows:
 - in what concerns the accommodation, 57% of our sample found these services to be very good, 36% found it good, only 6% answered that these services are of a poor quality;
 - regarding the food services more than 67 % of those asked found these services very good, 29 % of them think these services are good;
 - regarding the recreation services, a half of those who were asked said these services were very good, while 33% said they are good;
- F) The main purpose of the tourists that come to a Romanian mountain side resort is leisure (60%), followed by entertainment (20%) and business (10%);
- G) 88% of the respondents were Romanians; only 12% were foreigners, mainly from Switzerland, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium and Israel.

CONCLUSION

Tourism in post-communist Romania is currently in a state of uncertain transition. Although the country has an extraordinarily rich and diverse tourism potential (which can rival anywhere else in Europe), Romania is also a vivid illustration that the potential does not equate with tourism demand.

In terms of demand, international arrivals are stagnant, and domestic tourism has declined. In terms of supply, much hotel accommodation is deteriorating and in need of investment, while there is also a shortage of expertise, training, and a general understanding of the market economy among tourism workers.

In the short term the prospects for Romanian tourism do not look promising. There is likely to be little significant upgrading of the hotel sector except in the largest cities, international demand is unlikely to increase significantly, and domestic demand will continue to fall. Until the government has implemented macro-economic reform, tourism will remain a low political priority.

On medium to long run, much will depend on the survival of the current administration and its success in achieving the macro-economic restructuring which Western analysts consider essential if the country is ever to achieve prosperity. Economic growth will revive domestic tourism and will make available more capital for investment in accommodation; it will allow the further growth of a private sector in tourism; and it should mean increased funding for the Ministry of Tourism, allowing more advertising and promotion. Moreover, an environment of political and economic stability plays an important role in making the country more attractive for potential tourists. In the longer term Romania could enjoy the tourism boom experienced in the former communist countries of Central Europe.

In particular, the country has the potential to relaunch itself as a destination for alternative forms of tourism, and the development of rural and heritage types in Transylvania could, if successfully promoted, play a major role in contributing to local economic growth. However, the process of transition in Romania is still not complete, so that future tourism development in the country will continue to be strongly dependent upon broader political and economic developments which are beyond its control.

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