Comparative Evolution of Tourism in the North-Eastern Region of Romania, Subcarpathia of Poland and Central Slovakia

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Abstract. In the context of the increasing importance of the E.U. regional development policy, the aim of this paper is to present a comparison among the North-Eastern Region of Romania with two similar regions: Subcarpathia from Poland and Central Slovakia from Slovakia; the comparison focuses on the general development, as well as, on the tourist activity, and looks for similarities of the North-Eastern Region with the other two. In Subcarpathia and Central Slovakia, one can observe increases in tourism, especially due to a better organization and E.U. adherence of these countries, an opportunity of which our country should also profit from.

Keywords: tourism, regions, GDP, accommodation places, overnight stayings, tourism intensity

INTRODUCTION

Creating medium size territorial units in the European Union (called regions) aimed at efficient absorption of the EU funds for regional development and the possibility of interpreting and researching regional statistics.

Regional development means not only boosting and diversifying economic activities, stimulation of investments in private sector, unemployment reducing and standard of living improving, but also a whole system of sustaining and adapting durable actions which converge with the competence fields of the region (Puscasu, 2000).

Regional development policy strengthens the role and the responsibilities of local public administration and of regional bodies in the economic and social development of localities and regions, along with the diminishing involvement of governmental institutions in these issues (Ungureanu, 2006). This policy is an essential part of local autonomy, being oriented towards reducing the existing regional disparities by focusing on stimulating a balanced development and on the revitalization of disadvantaged areas (with delayed development).

The existence of high differences between EU regions, in terms of income and development, led to the creation of regional policy, which transfers resources from richer to poorer areas. The purpose of this policy is the modernization of disadvantaged regions, in order not to lag behind compared to the rest of the Union (http://europa.eu/pol/reg/index_en.htm).

This policy is also an instrument of financial solidarity and an important force for cohesion and economic integration. Solidarity involves bringing benefits to poorer regions and their inhabitants, and cohesion means that all would benefit from reducing regional disparities.

The regional development policy is based on the Structural and Cohesion Funds, or Structural Instruments, which are those methods of financial assistance through which the
European Union operates to eliminate economic and social disparities between regions, in order to achieve economic and social cohesion. They occupy the second place as share of EU budget for European policies and include: European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and Cohesion Fund (http://anaf.mfinante.ro, www.fonduri-structurale.ro).

In this context, the present analysis was conducted at a regional level, regions having increased their importance in the EU policies, and in the possibilities of accessing funds for development is rather high. Among the activities that can be financed is tourism, which is an increasingly important activity and which is the object of this analysis.

This article aims at highlighting the evolution of the tourist activity in some regions of Poland and Slovakia, especially after their accession to the EU in 2004, and finding similarities or differences with the North-Eastern region. For this reason, two similar regions in many respects were chosen, with the latter one: a relatively low GDP compared with the national average, an average tourist activity growth, opportunities to practice mountain tourism. Based on these considerations, regions PL32: Podkarpackie (Subcarpathia) and SK03: Stredné Slovensko (Central Slovakia) were selected (Fig. 1).

The focus of this paper lies on the progresses recorded by the indicators of overall development and of tourist activity before and after the EU adhesion. Before considering the two regions compared with the North-East region, a brief overview should be done.

Fig. 1. The localization of the RO21 North-East, PL 32 Subcarpathia and SK03 Central Slovakia
MATERIALS AND METHODS

BRIEF OVERVIEW ON RO21- NORTH EAST, PL32 - SUBCARPATHIA AND SK03 - CENTRAL SLOVAKIA REGIONS

The North-Eastern Region is bordered at north by Ukraine, at east by Moldavia and to the south and to the west with other regions of Romania. It has a population of 3,732,583 inhabitants (17.29% of the population of Romania) and a population density of 101.3 inhabitants per square kilometer. The region is characterized by a harmonious combination of all forms of relief, 30% mountains, 30% sub-Carpathian landscape, 40% plateau. The diversified relief has areas with hills and plains, which are suitable for a variety of crops, but also mountain areas where tourism activities can be developed (www.adrnordest.ro, www.inforegionordest.ro).

From the socio-economic point of view, it can be said that the North-Eastern region is behind the other ones, due to geographical and historical conditions. One of the possible directions of development of the eastern area, is that of becoming a transit service area for products from countries of the former USSR, along with other economic areas as the region's traditional wood processing industry and textile industry that have grown significantly in the recent years (since 2001).

The North-Eastern Region also has a high tourism potential in the counties of Bacău, Neamt and Suceava, because of the beautiful places, clean air and water, mountain areas and the extraordinary cultural and religious heritage.

Among the attractions of this picturesque region, which gives local color, we mention the well-known hospitality, folk traditions, customs, Moldavian culinary specialities, traditional wine tasting and the vineyards from Husi and Cotnari.

The main types of tourism that can be practiced here are: cultural tourism (museums, ethnographical, artistic tourism), religious tourism, therapeutic spa tourism, leisure tourism, transit, agro-tourism.

The west part of the region (Suceava, Neamț, Bacău counties) have a valuable tourist potential, largely underdeveloped, but which may be included into the European tourist circuit by implementing appropriate measures; one can mention various types of tourism: religious (Putna, Neamț, Sucevița, Moldovița Voroneț, Humor, Arbore, Agapia, Văratec, Dragomirna, Bistrița, Zamca, Secu, Sihăstria, Cașin - many of these monasteries being in UNESCO patrimony), therapeutic spa tourism (Vatra Dornei, Câmpulung-Moldovenesc, Bălți, Oglinzi, Slănic Moldova, Târgu Ocna), ethnographic tourism, agro-tourism, rural tourism, sports tourism (mountaineering, hunting, fishing, extreme sports - paragliding, rafting, tourist orientation, mountain biking, skiing).

Bucovina’s originality, as well as the particular specificity of villages, with a high degree of civilization, may become important in the long-term tourism, with sports, leisure and health optimization activities (Vatra Dornei, Solca, Cacica and Bistrița and Moldova Valley).

The Subcarpathia region is in southeastern Poland, bordering the other three regions in north and west, and south east with Slovakia and Ukraine. The landscape of the region is varied, the northern part including high plains and hills, while the southern part is mountainous. Approximately 35% of the region is forested, of which over 45% are under legal protection including two national parks, 10 national landscape parks, several areas and nature reserves. It is to be noticed that the Bieszczadzki National Park is included in the international UNESCO biosphere reserves (Encyclopædia Britannica Online).
The surface of the region is 17,844 km\(^2\) with a population of about 2,097,000 inhabitants; population density is 118.7 inhabitants per km\(^2\). Agriculture is practiced on about half of the region and industry is also well represented (http://regiony.poland.gov.pl/podkarpackie).

The region is one of the most attractive tourist places in Poland and even in Europe because of its natural and cultural values. There are favorable conditions for recreation and tourism. More and more people choose the recreational centers and agro-tourism farms for holiday destinations. Here one can practice mountain tourism, and skiing in winter time. There are over 40 ski lifts for all ski fans.

In addition, here one can practice active tourism, as well as hiking expeditions in the mountains or forests. There are many routes that allow the discovery of the area's natural beauty.

One can also practice cycling, as well as canoe (the route along the river San Przemyśl is one of the best known). Riding can be practiced in various centers and the Bieszczadzki National Park has special routes. Other active tourist attractions are the paragliding or the off-road tracks for driving sport utility vehicles.

The biggest tourist attraction of the region is the Bieszczady, the European readjusted wildlife oasis. The value of this place is given by nature, the landscape and the cultural values, all of which have been discovered for tourism between the wars.

The existence of a unique climate is due, among others, to traditional wooden houses, to historic Orthodox churches and chapels, along with picturesque mountains. Many of such buildings were brought together in outdoor museums such as the Folk Museum in Sanok.

For instance, one can name two such tourist objectives: the church from Haczowa, dating from the 15th century, which is the oldest wooden church in Poland, and at the same time, the largest wooden church of Gothic style in the world and the complex of Blizne with the wooden church from the XVI\(^{th}\) century, both registered on the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage list.

The other region that we selected as landmark for comparison is Central Slovakia. It is bordered by the Western Slovakia region in the southwest, by Czech Republic in the northwest, Poland to the north, Eastern Slovakia to the east and Hungary in the south-east.

It has a population of 1,350,366 people and an area of 17,982 square kilometers, the average density being of 75 inhabitants per square kilometers.

The landscape is predominantly mountainous, with an increasing altitude from south to north, where the Tatra Mountains are. Lower altitude areas exist only in the south, particularly in the valleys of rivers.

Agriculture is practiced on only one sixth of the region’s surface, especially in the south, and in the mountains there is an alpine economy (breeding of cattle, sheep, goats).

Forests occupy about half of the region and timber industry is the most developed in the area. Mining is also important. Banská Bystrica is the regional capital.

Most industrial facilities are concentrated in river valleys and activate in most fields.

Tourism is now present mainly in the mountainous northern part, the main attractions being mineral water resorts, winter sports and fishing. Also it is worth mentioning the natural parks from Demänovská Valley and Súlov Rocks where there are caves.

As far as the surface goes, Subcarpathia and Central Slovakia are approximately of equal surface, they only differ in population, in Central Slovakia being significantly lower, mainly due to the high relief. The North-Eastern region is much larger than the other two, but as population density and diversity of landscape it resembles the other two. The likeness can
be seen from the perspective of tourism that can be practiced in all three regions, namely
mountain tourism.

Next, it was analyzed the comparative evolution of the one of the most important
general development indicators – GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Regarding this indicator,
from the available data from Eurostat, between 2002 and 2006, it appears that in terms of
absolute values, PL-32 has increased by about 32%, SK-03 with 57% and RO-21 with 79%.

![Fig. 2. GDP in the period 2003-2006 in the regions PL32, SK03 and RO21 (millions Euro)](source)

Expressed in terms of GDP per standard capita purchasing power, which clears the
differences in absolute size between regions, providing a more clear image, the situation is as
follows: the general trend of growth between 23 and 32% between 2003 and 2006, but large
differences maintain, so the PL-32 region recorded a value of about double compared to the
North-Eastern region and in SK-03, the value is somewhere between the first two.

![Fig. 3. GDP in the period 2003-2006 in the regions PL32, SK03 and RO21 (standard purchase power/inhabitant)](source)
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part will be dedicated to present the evolution of the major indicators in terms of tourist activity. The first indicator, on which the attention will be dropped, is the number of accommodation places. The highest accommodation capacity is in the SK03 region, about 3 times higher than in the other two. Moreover, here is recorded the highest increase in both absolute and relative expression, increasing by more than 10,000 overnight stays in the period 2001-2008, which means an increase of 22%, compared to only 11% RO21 (approximately +2,000 overnights) and -4% in PL32. After 2004, the year of accession of Poland and Slovakia, one can observe that only in PL32 region there was a steady increase in the number of places in the last four years, while in Slovakia, the real increase occurred in 2007 and 2008.

Fig. 4. Accommodation places in the period 2001-2008 in the regions PL32, SK03 and RO21

One of the key indicators of tourism activity, the number of overnight stays, is shown in evolution in the period 2001-2008. Thus, it is noted that from the three regions analyzed, SK03 has by far the largest number of overnight stays, more than double than the value of the two other regions. Viewed in dynamic, the increases from this period were the following: PL32: 45%, SK03: 8%, RO21: 19%. If a look is taken at things in terms of time, before and after 2004, it can be observed that the PL31 region has recorded a steady rise since 2004 and in Slovakia after 2005, and the EU membership seems to have played an important role in these increases, particularly because of the willingness of citizens from the older EU Member States to discover the new Member States.
Since the three regions are not identical, neither in size, nor in number of inhabitants and tourist activity, and to complete the picture of the tourist activity, it will showed how things are from the perspective of the importance of tourism in these regions, using the report number of overnight stays for 1000 inhabitants.

From this perspective one can see that SK03 region has by far the largest number of overnight stays per thousand inhabitants, which shows the high scale of the tourism activity in the region. The PL32 region, although far behind the first one at a big difference, recorded an almost double value than the North-Eastern region. It is to be noticed that after 2004, they had an increase in tourism intensity, PL32 registering an increase of 35%, SK03 of 8% and North-East of 14%.
Although there are no regional data regarding the number of foreign tourists from the EU, of those available at country level, one can see the general trend: Slovakia registers 45.9% foreign tourists from total tourists in 2006 (compared with 35.4% in 2000), Poland 20.6% (up from 14.1%) and Romania only 17.1 from 12.2%. The tourism revenues as contribution to GDP, at national level, reveals the following situation in 2006: 2.8% in Slovakia, 2.1% in Poland versus 1.1% in Romania, these values being pretty low compared to other E.U. countries (Eurostat).

The comparative situation on tourism activity reveals that Central Slovakia has about twice as many places compared to Subcarpathia and the North-Eastern regions, the latter situating itself on the last place. And in terms of number of overnight stays, one can see the same configuration. Regarding tourism intensity, one can observe that the corresponding amount of Central Slovakia is approximately three times higher than Subcarpathia and over six times higher than the North-East region.

CONCLUSIONS

Tourism can become a central component of national economy, which leads to important changes in territorial profile, contributing to rising economically and socially some less developed or with poor resources regions. The North-East Region, as well as Subcarpathia, has a considerable potential for developing mountain tourism or cultural and religious tourism. In Subcarpathia one can observe a revival of tourism, stronger than in the North-East; one of the causes for this fact is the poorly developed infrastructure. Tourism has been growing after the EU accession, as seen in the two regions of Poland and Slovakia, as we can forecast a continuation of its development in the North-East region, too, although the first years after accession, the increases were relatively small. The opportunity to be exploited is attracting tourists from EU. Given the relationship between tourism and general development indicators, it can be forecast an increase of the development indicators in this region (Scutariu et. al., 2009).

Intensifying tourist activity in the North-East region can bring profound regional implications such as training unemployed people in tourism activities, development of other tourism related economic activities, rising living standards especially in rural areas by increasing income from tourism, etc. The North-East region should follow the example of Subcarpathia in terms of stimulating the emergence of small guesthouses. Involvement of authorities and the use of European funds are important in this respect, as well as for supporting infrastructure works.

Regarding the future development of tourism, a series of measures can be systematized to achieve this purpose; they can be initiated by the central and local authorities, and by bodies to implement regional development policy, having in view some issues, including:

- Development and enhancement of the tourism resources, encouraging households to tourism activities;
- Training specialists in the field of tourism at regional or local level;
- Support through assistance to entrepreneurs in terms of accessing grants and obtaining credits to start tourism activities;
- Support for entrepreneurs to obtain certificates of approval certificates of tourist establishments and getting licenses and professional certificates in the field;
- Training of local specialists in tourism issues.
Tourism can not be viewed separately, but along with the multiplier effects generated by tourism expenditure in the local economy. The tourist multiplier means that an initial expenditure made by a tourist in an area or a country, turns successively into incomes for other economic fields, linked directly or indirectly to tourism, until that money leaves the area or the economic region, generally by paying taxes, by economies, by imports, etc., which called losses from the system (Minciu, 2001).

The concept of multiplier effects arising from income / expenditure in tourism becomes relevant, since a significant number of industries benefit from the tourism sector activities, the value of the multiplier could be interpreted as a stimulus-response relation, opposite to the initial injection of expenditure on tourism.

REFERENCES