

## TRADITION AND ADAPTABILITY – FACTORS OF RESISTANCE AND REBIRTH OF TOURISM IN ROMANIA IN THE CONDITIONS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION<sup>1</sup>

Nicolae CIANGĂ\*, Ștefan DEZSI\*

**Abstract:** Even from Roman times, the Romanian space has been an example of bathing and leisure arrangement and capitalization of the thermal waters, similar to those of Italy, Gallia, Germany and Pannonia. The modern period was characterized by a gradual tourism capitalization of the hydromineral and thermal resources, of the potential of the Carpathian Mountains, the Black Sea, the Danube Delta, as well as the urban and rural cultural landscapes, at the same level as other European countries famous for their tourism. These were included in the domestic and international tourism system, due to tourism planning which increased the number of accommodation places, eventually reaching almost 500,000 places (beds). The temporarily unfavorable social, economic and political conditions such as the two World Wars, the communist centralized political-economic regime and the period of transition towards the market economy, have determined moments of stagnation and regress, subsequently overrun by legislative, economic and fiscal politics, which managed and will manage to align the Romanian tourism to the European standards.

**Keywords:** tourism potential, stages of tourism development, tourism strategy, tourist arrangements, European tourism integration

**I.** Romania is characterized by a large diversity of geographical, natural and human conditions, organically linked to a varied morphology, unfolded from the level of the Black Sea up to more than 2000 m altitude, and a social and historical evolution over a period of two millennia.

The complex natural geographical ensemble was conditioned by a levelling of the major geographical components. They are proportional in area and symmetrical as regarding location, including: the Carpathian mountainous region in the central part, the subcarpathian region of plateaus and hills, and then the region of plains, in the outer part. One may add the 245 km long shore to the Black Sea.

This geographical amphitheater with a long geological evolution, diversified lithology and genesis, acquired throughout the time a special landscape diversity (glacial, volcanic and karst morphology), as well as a natural source that imposes and determines Romania from a tourism point of view.

This is represented by the mineral waters with a complex hydrochemical composition. On the whole, with over 3,000 sources, Romania is among the European countries with the most representative hydromineral potential. One may especially remark the bicarbonate gas mineral waters and the dry CO<sub>2</sub> emanations with a purity up to 99%, related to the longest Neogene volcanic chain of Europe, belonging to the Eastern Carpathian region.

---

\* “Babeș-Bolyai” University of Cluj Napoca, Faculty of Geography, Clinicilor Street, 5-7, 400006, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, e-mail: cianga@geografie.ubbcluj.ro, stefan@geografie.ubbcluj.ro

<sup>1</sup> This article was accomplished by the PN II – IDEI 505 project's contribution, financed by CNCSIS

The concentrated salted mineral waters, especially present in salt lakes formed in ancient salt mines, some of them dating from Roman times; and the thermal mineral waters from the Western part of the country.

The latter made up the object of the first spa-type arrangements for leisure even since the Roman antiquity.

Other natural components, such as the Black Sea seaside and the Danube Delta, having major implications in the Romanian and international tourism, should be added to these.

The diversity and value of the civilization and cultural heritage is the result of a long social and historical evolution. During this period, the preeminent autochthonous components based on Latin and Christian parentage have been enriched with exogenous influences all along the Middle Ages up to the Modern Age, determining the presence of multicultural features, such as those of Transylvania.

The tourism in Romania capitalized, throughout the time, natural and human resources, and without major exceptions ranged among the general tendencies of European tourism. Generally, it went over the same stages and had similar characteristics, but it recorded gaps and periods of decline determined by major political events, such as the two world wars and, not the least, the establishment of totalitarian social, political and economic relations over a few decades, and the (two) transitions from one social and political system to another.

**II.** One of the main arguments of the Romanian tourism, as a phenomenon and, in time, as an economic activity with a growing importance, is that of the **age and traditions** accumulated over a long period of time in capitalizing the natural and human resources which are attractive from a tourist point of view.

One should notice, in this sense, the use of thermal waters even since Roman times, in the province Dacia Felix. Thus, they got to complex cure and leisure arrangements, using the technology of Roman baths, similar to those of Italy, Gaul or Britannia (Bath-Aquae Sullis).

The most important ones were Thermae Dodonae-Germisara, present-day Geoagiu Băi, Aquae-Călan and, most of all, Ad Aqua Herculi Sacras ad Mediam, present-day and famous Băile Herculane. Here, the size of the curative arrangements, villas and temples impressed the famous Austrian archaeologist Theodore Mommsen who studied them. Their curative value and the use of thermal waters in this purpose during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries are epigraphically proved by the votive tabulae discovered within the baths.

The social, historical, economic but also cultural time gap of Eastern Europe was greatly determined by the long-lasting penetration of Asian peoples, until the first half of the second millennium (the Tartars and the Turks being the last), but it was also due to the essential (mainly cultural) effect created by the great break which took place in 1054 within Christianity.

The consequences of this situation lasted for a long time, influencing the taking over of curative capitalization tendencies only towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in a geopolitical context that was different from the present one.

It determined the setting up of the first spas and then the expansion until the individualization of a true system of watering and climatic resorts.

The first arrangements were also related to thermal waters and were realized on the territory of the ancient Roman spa of Băile Herculane, which became one of the oldest in the world. The capitalization of hydromineralization continued with another deposit, more to the North (Băile Episcopiei-Oradea).

Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the start of the next century, one may notice the capitalization of the gas mineral waters of the Eastern Carpathians through the creation of watering resorts (Borsec, Slănic Moldova, and Vatra Dornei).

The same happened in the West (Buziaș), or due to salt mineral waters in the Subcarpathians (Bălătești) or in the Transylvanian Depression (Ocna Sibiului, Bazna).

A double tendency is noticed as the hydromineral resources and the curative effects were researched and known. First, the already existing resorts were developed, extended and modernized; then, new resorts appeared and became known, capitalizing other hydrochemical types of mineral waters, such as the sulphurous and sulphuretted ones (Călimănești-Căciulata, Băile Govora, and Olănești).

At the same time, one may notice a diversification due to the development of Carpathian mountainous leisure tourism. The first mountain resorts were set up (Sinaia, Păltiniș), as well as the first mountainous arrangements concerning infrastructure, accommodation of chalet type, means of communication, such as mountain roads and tourist paths, in highly attractive tourist mountain ranges (Bucegi, Ceahlău). One may notice, as well, the beginning of the maritime tourism on the shores of the Black Sea, with the first seaside resort, Mamaia.

The inter-war period is characterized by a complex tourism with a unitary strategy of development, the support and stimulation of private initiative, especially in the case of the development of a new generation of small, local resorts, and the beginnings of the mass (social) tourism.

One should notice the setting up of state-owned institutions, such as the National Office for Tourism, which coordinates certain fields and tendencies at national level.

The development of the watering university education and the stimulation of scientific research in the field of tourism are added to these.

Tourism in the contemporary period is marked by two distinct stages. During the first stage, a system originated in the Soviet Union has been introduced by force.

It was based on the centralization, planned and imposed nationalization, with the passage of all objectives in the ownership of the state, determining almost two decades of decline and stagnation in tourism.

Then came the opening towards the Western world, the massive infusion of capital generating the explosive growth and diversification of tourism infrastructure, the existing types of tourism, the tourism education and instruction at all levels.

All these allowed Romania to enter for a short period of time (15 years, 1960-1975) in the large international tourism circuits coordinated by important tour operators, like Neckerman. It was the time period of the largest investments in the Romanian tourism, realizing very complex categories of tourism arrangements, one after the other.

First came the arrangements of the Southern part of the Black Sea shore, over a length of 60 km, where the accommodation capacity grew from 50,000 places to 120,000 places, in fact the largest investment in Romanian tourism comprising 10 seaside resorts and other two for pupils and students.

Second, there was the massive implementation of hotels and bathing bases in the watering and mountain resorts, some of them becoming famous during this period – like Poiana Brașov, which became the most representative mountain

resort for winter sports in Romania and perhaps the only one which provides qualitative tourism parameters comparable to those of the average Alpine resorts.

Then came the building of hotels in most of the towns (especially in large cities) and the adjustment to the European car-driving tourism by building motels and camping sites.

Unfortunately, preeminence was given to the egalitarian, social system, so to objectives with average or low comfort, the equivalent to the present two-star hotels, for mass, predominantly domestic, tourism, with a few exceptions regarding the capital city, Bucharest, several cities with tradition in tourism, such as Brașov, Timișoara and Cluj-Napoca, or resorts of the Southern seaside.

One should also mention that during this period, the first hotel belonging to an International chain of the former socialist system – Intercontinental – was built at Bucharest in the 70s.

At the end of this period of growth, the accommodation infrastructure of Romania exceeded 360,000 places.

This relevant period was followed by the general social and economic decline of the entire Eastern European system, which had a negative impact on all the components of tourism.

The second stage, after 1989, was marked by the efforts of rejoining the market economy. They highly influenced tourism and often inculcated upon it opposite tendencies and directions.

**III.** During all this time and taking into account that tourism manifested as a very sensitive sensor to all major social, economic, political and historical changes, one may notice a **cycle** with different durations and intensities, reflected in growths and declines, and remarkable comebacks in time, which make up the support of its viability (Fig. 1).

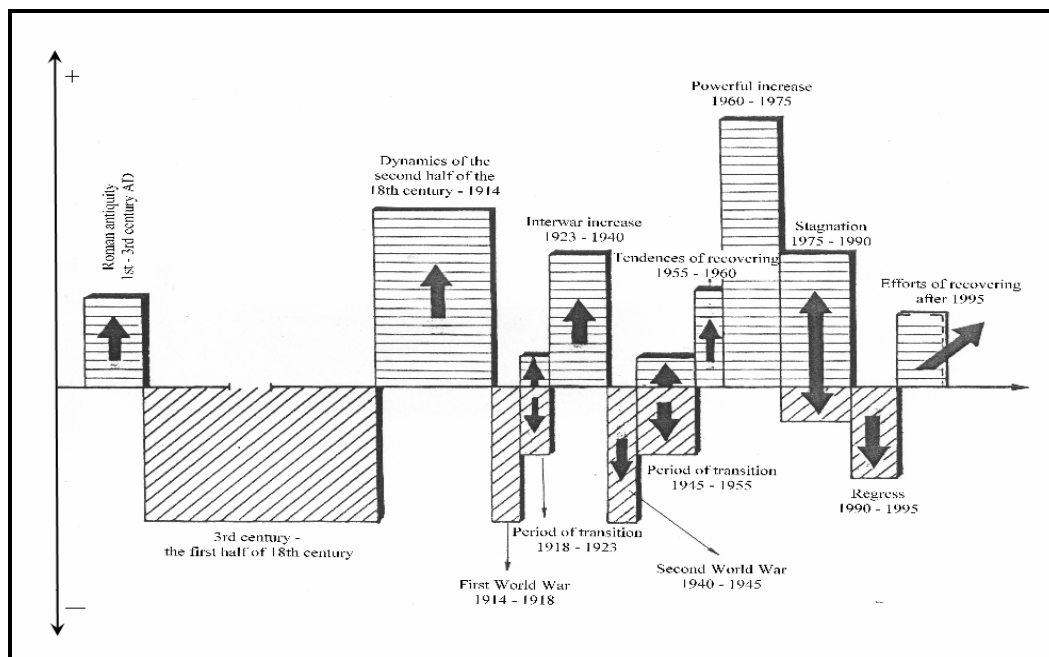


Fig. 1 Stages and Tendencies in the Historical Evolution of the Romanian Tourism

Thus, one may notice the development of remarkable incipient forms of curative tourism in Roman times, especially at Băile Herculane, where the bathing establishments were comparable to those of the central Roman provinces.

After the long period of the curative phenomenon disappearance in Europe during the Middle Ages, the modern period witnessed a two-century development of tourism, with quantitative growth and spatial expansion of establishments.

There was also a typological diversification specific for most of Europe: from bathing tourism to leisure mountain tourism, seaside tourism on the shores of seas and oceans, and the cultural tourism which developed mostly after the Second World War.

This development which included Romania was temporarily slowed down and even stopped for brief periods of time, due to the two world wars, each time followed by explosive growths in terms of tourism infrastructure and increasing number of tourists.

**IV.** Unfortunately, the “30 golden years” of European tourism, between 1945 and 1975, were not so beneficial and not for the entire period, for Romanian tourism. This was due to the authoritarian communist system which imposed many social, economic and political restrictions, eventually determining its isolation.

**The inconsistent policies** of development determined a cycle to be covered in just a few decades, from the deep postwar decline, to stagnation, then to a 15-year remarkable growth which reflected a **rapprochement to the European tourism model**.

Then came the fall which led to the disintegration of the entire Eastern European system (Fig. 1).

In tourism, this became manifest by the general degradation of tourism infrastructure and services.

The lack of financial resources and care for the conservation, modernization and adjustment to the new global tendencies determined the catastrophic decrease of the international demand for the supply of Romanian tourism.

**V.** On this background, one may notice a new **rebirth** after 1989, with inherent contradictory manifestations, characteristic for the transition towards the tourism market economy which has a longer duration in Romania, having slow yet visible effects.

During the first years after 1989, there was a general dismemberment of the centralized authoritarian economy, in the context of the legislative vacuum and the slow process of making up the new laws and regulations meant to meet the new inherent changes.

On this background, a general decline of income is noticed, highlighted by an increasing inflation.

During this first time period (1990-1995), the tourism infrastructure, especially the accommodation establishments, diminishes from 350,000 beds to 280,000 beds, because old units, not attractive for tourists, were taken out of the system, while other units were either given back to former owners or privatized and temporarily closed for modernization, or even changed their function.



Fig. 2 Stages of establishing spa tourism system in Romania

**Legend:** 1. Resorts from Roman antiquity; 2. Balneoclimatic resorts after the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century; 3. Resorts from the period 1850-1918; 4. Resorts between the Two World's War; 5. Resorts developed in the last 50 years; 6. Balneoclimatic resorts; 7. Mountainous climatic resorts; 8. Maritime resorts; 9. European highways; 10. Limits between the main geographical regions.

Due to these tendencies, the accommodation capacity of villas decreased by 70%, that of the chalets by 68%, the same as the one of camping sites. The low quality of tourism supply determined the decrease of (especially international) tourism demand.

It is noticeable the adoption of the international classification system, from one to five stars. Initially, it was just formally done, but then a quality control system was thoroughly applied.

This generated the modernization process of the hotel network which imposed the two-star category as the main one, providing an average comfort, then the modernization of almost 100 hotels which were brought to a three-star standard and that of the 20 four-star and five-star hotels, located mostly in the capital, in few of the cities with tradition in tourism and the resorts which are quite convincing in providing the best image for Romanian tourism – Mamaia, Poiana Brașov, Sinaia.

The privatization of tourism units was frequently an inconsistent process and often performed without respecting the rules of market economy, which frequently led to the lack of professionalism and to opportunism in tourism. This brought bad turns, especially related to management in tourism. The process mostly ended in 2000 and 2001.

The international investments in tourism were less substantial as compared to neighbouring countries such as Hungary or Bulgaria, due to the

less stimulating legislation and an often unattractive business environment.

However, one notices the entrance on the Romanian tourism market of several international hotel chains (like Hilton, Holiday Inn, Marriott, Best Western, Ibis) which either bought representative hotel units, especially in the capital (for instance, Athenee Palace by Hilton) and modernized them to reach the specific standards of the hotel chain, or built new hotels.

However, there was a field which adapted to the rules of the market economy even faster than the setting up of the legislative framework: *rural tourism*, which became a viable alternative to already known traditional types of tourism. It developed in regions already known by tourists, especially with rural original cultural landscapes.

It is characterized by territorial diffusion, but there are already a few regions which became known for rural tourism, like Maramureș, Bucovina, Brașov, Alba-Țara Moților. It is perhaps the most dynamic component of present-day tourism, having an already proved impact upon the domestic and international tourism market.

One of the issues raised on an average run is the rehabilitation and reorientation of watering and mountain tourism, the oldest in Romania, by changing the mentality related to the capitalization and organization of activities based on a valuable, yet well preserved, natural resource – the mineral and thermal waters.

One notices the start of the modernization of one of the components without which tourism cannot overrun its present condition – the communication infrastructure. It begins with the building of motorways that would link Romania with the other countries of the European Union, then it should continue with the modernization of the network of national roads and even of those roads which lead to the tourism objectives located in the mountains or in the rural space, which are generally difficult to reach nowadays.

Finally, a deep mentality change would be absolutely necessary, as well as the application of concepts like sustainable development and ecocodevelopment, because environmental protection and tourism should coexist.

## REFERENCES

- CIANGĂ, N., (2001), *România. Geografia turismului (partea I)*, Edit. Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca;
- COCEAN, P., (1996), *Geografia Turismului*, Editura Carro, București;
- COCEAN, P., (1997), *Geografia turismului românesc*, Editura Focul Viu, Cluj Napoca;
- DEZSI, Șt., (2006), *Patrimoniu și valorificare turistică*, Edit. Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca;
- MUNTELE, I., IAȚU, C. (2003), *Geografia turismului. Concepte, metode și forme de manifestare spațio-temporală*, Editura Sedcom Libris, Iași.