# THE PERMEABILITY OF THE ROMANIAN BORDER AND THE INTERNATIONAL TOURIST MOVEMENT IN THE PERIOD 1994-2008

**Alexandru ILIEŞ**

University of Oradea, Department of Geography, Tourism and Territorial Planning – TSAC,
1 University St., 410087, Oradea, Romania/ University of Gdansk, Department of Geography and
Regional Development, 4 Bazynskiego st., 80-952 Gdansk, Poland, e-mail: ilies@uoradea.ro

**Dorina Camelia ILIEŞ**

University of Oradea, Department of Geography, Tourism and Territorial Planning – TSAC,
1 University St., 410087, Oradea, Romania, e-mail: iliesdorina@yahoo.com

**Cezar MORAR**

University of Oradea, Department of Geography, Tourism and Territorial Planning – TSAC,
1 University St., 410087, Oradea, Romania, e-mail: cezarmorar@yahoo.com

**Marin ILIEŞ**

"*Babeş-Bolyai*" University of Cluj-Napoca, Extension Sighetu Marmaţiei,
6 Avram Iancu St., 435500, Sighetu-Marmaţiei, Romania, e-mail: iliesmarin@yahoo.com

**Abstract**: The dynamic of the European political space, the changing role and functions of the border, the EU enlargement to the East are phenomena that have profoundly affected the Romanian economic system in general and the tourism in particular. By analyzing a comprehensive basis of official statistics of the number of tourists arriving in the Romanian political space, between 1994-2008, we determined the main tourist transmitting areas, the volume, structure and direction of these flows, the official tourist offer use and the used type of transport infrastructure. This approach aims to identify effective solutions mainly in development strategies, the diversification and promotion of Romanian tourism system based on facts arising from visits conducted in Romania in the period under review, by over 80 million tourists mainly Europeans.

**Key words**: Romania, tourism, tourist flows, international tourism, tourist destination, emitting area.

\* \* \* \* \* \*

## INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the 2nd and the 3rd millenniums the European political space knew deep structural-political and socio-economic changes. On the same geographical area, which can be considered "*support for the development of a new spatial order*" (Forster, 2000, 11), with the fall of the Socialist system and

specific planned economy the most important changes were: multiplying the number of states; changing role and functions of state borders, expanding the market economy to the Center and East, extending the area marked by "the free movement of people" and the amplification and diversification of international flows and the EU and NATO enlargement and the inclusion of new members from the former Socialist system etc. Also, the impact of the new EU external borders and in particularly the Eastern one generates significant changes on the border human flows and to the key factors contributing to the size and restriction of the international movement in this area. Given that the number of human resources, the structure and dynamics is the most important modeling agent of a territorial political system, we believe that a detailed analysis of tourist flows in the Romanian space, of the directions to it and from it, represents an important step in the current political and economic context. It is a process for identifying, understanding, defining and integrating of the elements and mechanisms that can cause the continuous modeling, *turistification* (Cazelais et al., 2000), self regulating and adaptation mechanisms of territorial European political systems and subsystems.

### THE CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAME

The concepts used are those determined by the flow of international tourist arrivals built from the foreign visitors to the Romanian tourism system. The survey is based on information obtained from the official statistics source and from border police. By using proved tools in the literature (Ianoş, 2000; Dinu, 2002; Muntele & Iaţu, 2003; Cocean, 2005) we analyze quantitative and qualitative the characteristics generated by the volume, structure and intensity of international tourist flows (Cocean et al., 2002; Cândea et al, 2003; Ciangă, 2006). There are analyzed the quantitative and qualitative parameters that structure and size the international tourist flows by the number of foreign tourists entering the country, by the number of officially turned the tourist offer (including accommodation) and also by means of transport. For example, changing the role and functions of the borders, the rhythm and dynamics of an appropriate/inappropriate temporal segment causes deep structural-functional mutations of the territorial system or subsystem, by the size, dynamics and structure of tourist flow.

### THE ANALYTICAL COMPONENT

The quantitative and qualitative components of a territorial-political system modeled at local and regional level by the tourist flows, by the inter-dependencies between them and natural and anthropogenic determinants. The configuration of the tourism flows is based on (Williams, 1998): the absolute and relative geographical position, the morphological characteristics of the landscape, the accessibility, the communication system, the specific quantitative, qualitative and structural of the human resource, the economic development level, the socio-economic and political conditions etc. To all this must be added the fact that the border is physically, mentally, politically, culturally and socially constructed (Sofield, 2003), whose components, mechanisms and operating principles required to be decoded and understood in order to be relocated in new functional systems integrated structures.

Romania has an extremely complex situation generated by the profound changes that took place in the last 20 years, especially politically, economically

and therefore impacting the tourist flows. Faced with new challenges arising from successive position and rapidly outside the EU and NATO and then inside EU and NATO, the most difficult phase to overcome will be the adaptation to a position "*on the edge of abundance*" (Lichtenberger, 2000, 406).

In most cases, these territorial systems border area at the edge of the EU, the opened borders and increased international mobility of the population is characterized by inconsistency (crossing with visa/visa-free), all these reflected in the economic development and living standards of population. This attitude is reflected in the attitude of the resident population in the EU external border areas and where, because of general and specific security measures, the population located on both sides of the border outlines their views diametrically opposed in terms of social status and understanding of the concept of cross-border cooperation. In terms of structure, the foreign tourist flows includes two categories (Ilieş et al., 2011; Figures 1 and 3): those who use the official accommodation infrastructure and those who are not registered in such structures, using accommodation from friends, relatives or acquaintances.
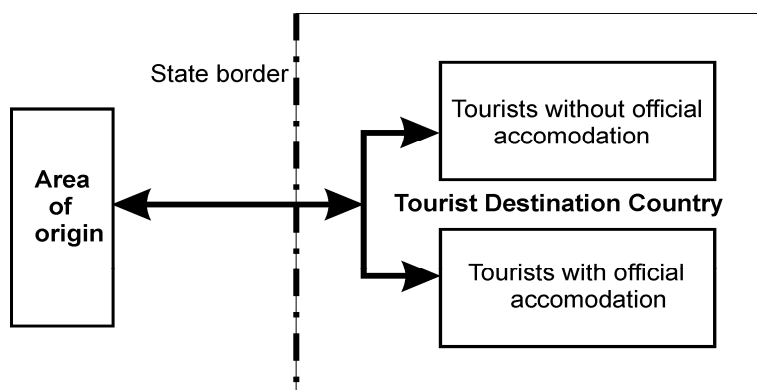


**Figure 1.** Tourist flow according with official registration at tourist destination areas
(Source: Ilieş et al., 2011)

## THE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE PARAMETERS SPECIFIC TO THE TOURIST FLOWS

The intensity, dynamics and volume of the cross-border flows shall be sized and directed according to socio-economic and political context of the area of origin and the destination. In this study there are analyzed the border areas quantitative, quality and spatial parameters of the tourist flows, setting up areas, their technical support favoring the border permeability and finally the transportation used for this purpose. Also, an important role in determining the size, orientation and structure of tourist flows is played by the quality and diversity of the tourist offer. The spatial tourism phenomenon in terms of tourist mobility is subject to an extensive complex of factors which come together in the structure of quantification that became "*classic*" (Ciangă, 1998) also the regional distribution of specific elements. Similarly, the economic development through tourism will adapt and (re)size according to the tourist offer and the determined flows. From the structural point of view, for the period 1990-2008, tourist flows are analyzed in terms of inputs and outputs of the Romanian political territorial system in the volume generated by tourists emitting areas.

**The border permeability** by the density and number of border crossing points is the basis for the orientation of the cross-border tourist flows, for their size, for the qualitative and quantitative parameters of the transport network, and for the specific means. The analytic component should consider the border permeability in terms of: *technical issues* - the number of border crossing points and their morph-functional characteristics (figure 2), namely accessibility to tourist destinations and *legal issues* - facilitating/hinder access (visas, bureaucratic crossing points etc). From this point of view, the 7 Romanian border areas are of great functional diversity, from the increased accessibility for domestic EU sectors to difficult accessibility for external EU border (figure 2).
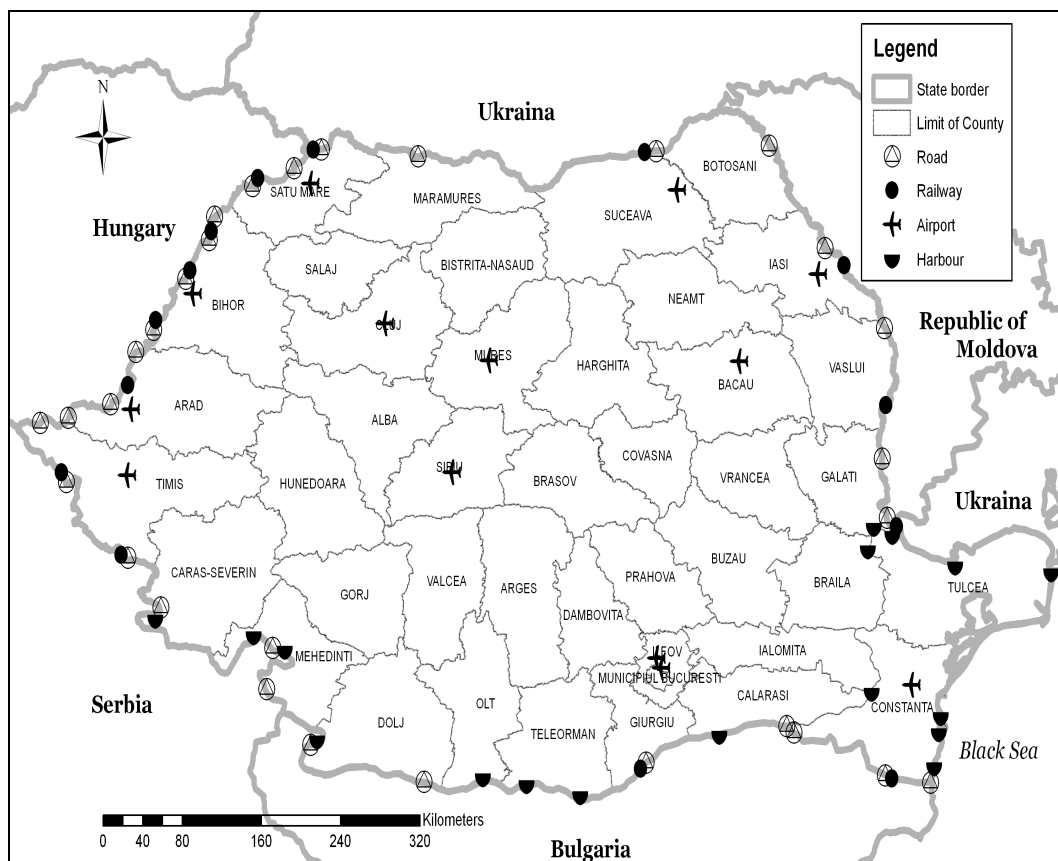


**Figure 2.** Romanian borders and cross-border points typology and territorial distribution
(Data sources: Romanian Police Guard; www.politiadefrontiere.ro)

Difficult formalities at border crossing points, especially at the external EU border, retain the people from visiting another country and makes harder the free flow between the parties. **Border passing legislation and agreements** signed by Romania and neighboring countries, reflected almost in strict visa regime in few intervals of the period, determined continuously reorganization of the international tourist flows. "*The visa game*" was reflected strongly on tourism activities, generating according to the implementation of freedom/restriction of movement juxtaposed systems in the visa periods and early stages of integration

in the non-visa periods (Ilies et al., 2012). For example, for the cross-border flows on the Romanian-Ukrainian border, where apparently the Romanian citizens have the advantage to travel freely in the space of Ukraine, in terms of development of the tourism phenomenon, the use and development of infrastructure and service revenue growth, the advantage of the tourist system belongs to the Ukrainian side as it is less restrictive. Moreover, differences in prices between the two border systems emphasize the imbalance in favor of Ukrainian part, which in the context of proximity tourism and quality services, can record considerable progress towards the Romanian side (Ilies et al., 2012).

**Arrivals of foreign visitors in Romania.** Becoming a tourist destination country is derived from tourism supply and product quality which in turn guides and dimensioned the number of foreign tourists and expand their area of origin. Corresponding statistics for the period 1994-2008 recorded that officially entered Romania a number of 87.403 million foreign tourists with an average of 5.8 million tourists per year (Figure 3). Compared to this average value the less specific entries in the Romanian space dates from 2002 (4.794 million), 2001 (4.938 million) and 1998 (4.831 million). The most important number of foreign tourists who visited Romania characterized the period 2006-2008, reaching to 8.862 million foreign tourists in 2008 (Figure 3). The greatest increase with 27.9% marks 2007 when the number of foreigners who visited Romania has grown by 1.7 million compared to year before. During this period of 15 years there were characterized the downturn interval 1994-1998, 2001-2002 and 2005, when it was registered the largest decrease from the previous year (-11.5%).
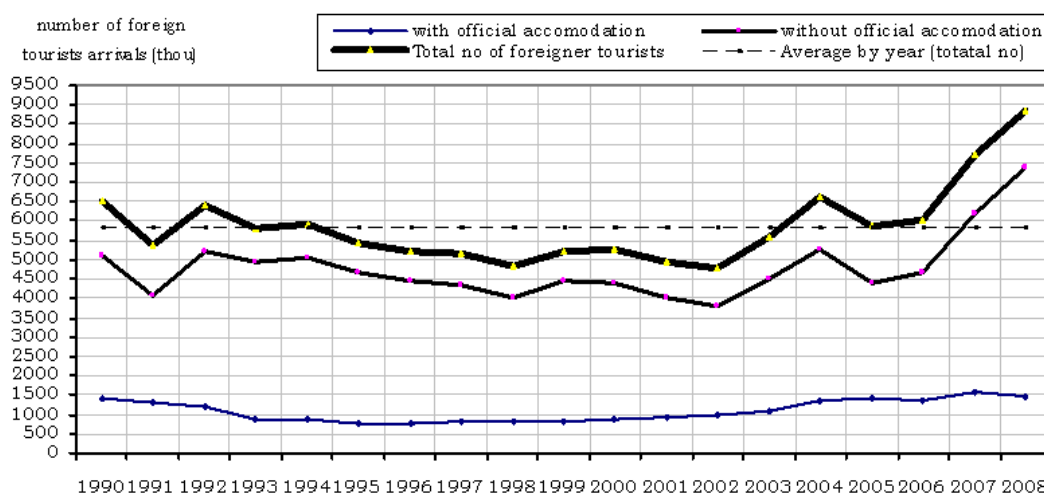


**Figure 3**. Romania. The tourist flow considering the number of arrivals of foreign tourists: total no; with and without official tourist accommodation in period 1990-2008
(Data sources: Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 2010; www.insee.ro)

After outlining areas of origin, for example in the year 2008 about 95% of all foreign tourists from the European political space, particularly from Romania's neighbors. The share of European tourists reached 97% in 1994 and the lowest values of 94% were recorded in 2005 and 2006. In the same year 2008, about 2.35% from foreign tourists came from Asia, of which about 1.0% mainly from Israel, U.S. 1.5% and Africa (mainly Egypt) 0.2%.

In the European political space (including Russia and Turkey) in 1994 the biggest tourist emitting area for Romanian tourist coincided with the neighboring states of Romania. Among them, according to official statistics, the most important were (Figure 4): Bulgaria 1.022 million (17.3%), Moldova 0.803 million (13.6%), Serbia and Montenegro 0.634 million (10.7%), Hungary 0.628 million (10.6%) and Ukraine 0.593 million (10.0%). A second area, more dispersed consisted of: Turkey 0.535 million (9.1%), Russia 0.443 million (7.5%), Germany 0.203 million (3.44%), Czech Republic 0.121 million (2.05%) Italy 0.093 million (1.6%), Slovakia, Poland, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Belarus, Macedonia, France, Austria etc (Figure 4). We notice that the dominant area of tourists who visited Romania overlaps with that of neighboring countries represent 62% (3.680 million) of total foreign tourists.
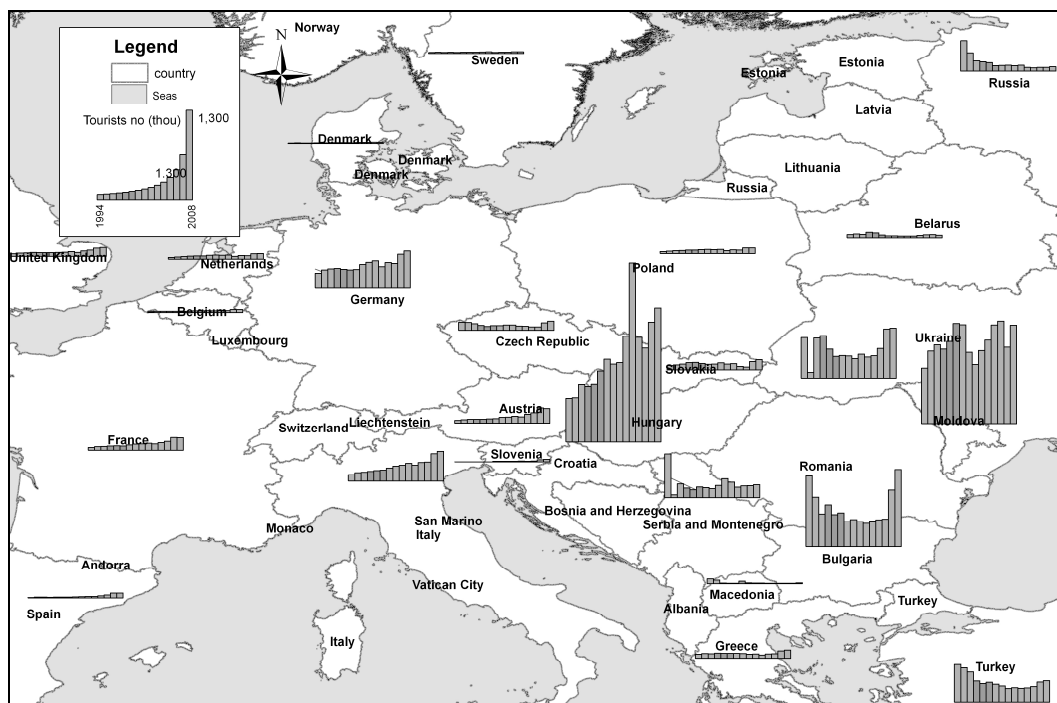


**Figure 4**. Arrivals of foreign visitors in Romania, by main origin countries (1994-2008)
(data sources: Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 2010; www.insee.ro)

In the period that followed there were numerous changes in the structural aspect in the total annual tourist flow, under the influence of political and economic framework marked mainly by EU enlargement and integration. In 2008, a year after Romania's EU accession a number of foreign tourists increased to 8.862 million, with 14.76% compared to 2007, the year of integration. Compared with 1994, the EU space remained the main area of origin, representing 95% of the total, substantial changes being made at the state of origin. The main emitting area remained that of the neighboring countries except Serbia, deeply affected by its citizen's visa requirements to enter Romania. In this case the number of tourists decreased from 0.634 million in 1994 to 0.184 million in 2008 and representing mostly a local border traffic and tourism business. Thus, in 2008 the major emitting countries neighboring Romania: Hungary 22.0% (1.950 million),

Moldova 16.1% (1.429 million), Bulgaria 12.5% (1.114 million) and Ukraine 8.2% (0.730 million), while the Serbs were only 2.1% (0.184 million). In the second area consists of non-contiguous countries the most numerous tourists came from Germany (0.522 million), Italy 4.9% (0.433 million), Turkey 3.4% (0.303 million), Poland 3.1% (0.277 million), Austria 2.36% (0.210 million), France 2.06% (0.183 million), Slovakia 1.67% (0.148), Czech Republic 1.52% (0.135 million), United Kingdom 1.44% (0.128 million), Greece 1.33% (0.118 million) etc. Compared with 1994, in 2008 we find a similar area of origin for the 8.862 million tourists, but with a different distribution among the states. All neighboring states except Serbia (with about 0.450 million drop in tourists) send a greater number of tourists, but the most important state is Hungary, followed by Moldova and Bulgaria. In the category of tourists emitting states not bordered by Romania stands Germany (with an increase of 0.319 million tourists), Italy (+0.340 million), Poland (+0.158 million), Austria (+0.169 million), France (+0.143 million), United Kingdom (+0.090 million), Slovakia (+0.087 million), the Czech Republic etc. In contrast, massive drops were registered in Turkey (-0.232 million), Russia (-0.380 million), Macedonia and Belarus. In the Americas, the U.S. record in the same period a slight increase from 0.049 million tourists in 1994 to 0.137 million tourists in 2008. Also, Israel has tripled the number of visitors sent to Romania from 30,000 to 96,000 people. It should be noted that most tourists are on holiday and visiting friends and relatives (for neighboring states) and business in those states which are not bordered by Romania (especially Italy, Turkey, Germany etc).
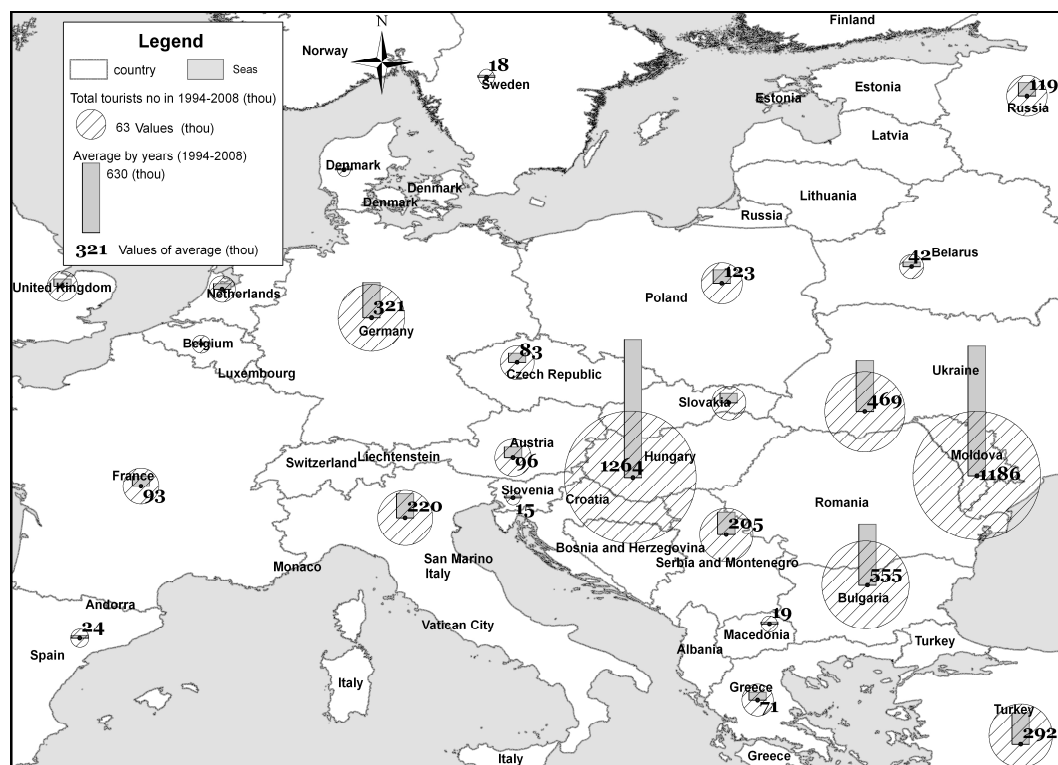


**Figure 5**. Total and average by year of arrivals of foreign visitors in Romania, by main origin countries (1994-2008)
(data sources: Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 2010; www.insee.ro)

**Intensity visits.** Another interesting aspect derived from the total number of tourists who visited Romania between 1994-2008. Regardless of political or economic circumstances, this indicator reflects the consistency of the population's interest in a particular state, to the Romanian tourist area. Thus, 83.3 million of the European tourists who came to Romania in a period of 15 years (Figure 5), the most numerous were the Hungarians 22.7% (18.957 million) and Moldavians 21.4% (17.788 million). Compared to the total population of the states concerned we notice that virtually every Hungarian was at least twice in Romania, while for Moldova every citizen was over 4 times in the Romanian political space. Far away there are: Bulgaria 10% (8.321 million), Ukraine 8.4% (7.041 million), Turkey 5.2% (4.378 million), Germany 5.8% (4.807 million), Italy 3.9% (3299 million), Serbia 3.7% (3.076 million), Austria 1.463 million, 1.238 million Czech Rep., France 1.392 million, 1.057 million Greece, Poland 1.845 million, 1.313 million Slovakia, United Kingdom 1.002 million, 1.790 million Russia, USA 1.339 million, Israel, etc. 0.84 million. At the same it should be noted that the mentioned countries can be grouped into two categories: the upward trend (Hungary, Moldova, Bulgaria, etc.) and the downward trend (Serbia, Russia, Turkey etc).

Another interesting aspect on foreign tourists' preferences results from the **ratio between the number of arrivals in Romania (registered at border points ports) and number of officially registered tourist accommodation** with at least one night stay (Figures 1 and 3). The resulting difference is crucial in terms of foreign tourist option to the implementation of official Romanian tourism offer in relation to the unofficial version involving cost (accommodation to friends and relatives, visiting tourist objectives free of charge etc). Also for tourists coming from neighboring states, it does exist the version of returning to their home version on the same day, which does not involves accommodation costs in the official structures. The officially registered data the number of tourists entering Romania and who did not call for the official accommodation is on average 18% from the total official inflows. The upward trend from 14% in 1994 to 20% in 2008 is to be noticed, the maximum being 24.5% in 2004. As absolute values in 2007, about 1.55 millions foreign tourists used the services official accommodation.

### Transports and Communications network

The state practice performance in hospitality and tourism industry shows that tourism is dependent on the quality and quantity of network communications and transportion routes. The favorable elements of the Romanian tourism are: the existence of pan-European corridors, national airports (new international routes can be added), river cruise etc all these marked by a low degree of connection with international systems (Figure 2). The question of costs required upgrading the existing ones and building new structures comes up. The characteristics of transport systems may be considered the cause and effect of regional contrasts (Ilies G, 2007) and correlated with the ports of entry creates determining relationships to guide tourist flows especially to the sense of entering the country.

An important aspect that can be the basis of the Romanian tourism development strategy and of the most profitable developments, fast and useful transport and communication networks, results from the analysis by *means of transport of the foreign tourists* who visited Romania (Figure 6). Thus, for the period

1990-2008 stands out the dominance of the road transportation whose share increased from 56% in 1990 to 77.7% in 2008. Annual average is 4.3 million tourists/year with extreme values of 3.5 million tourists in 1998 and 6.8 million tourists in 2008. The rail roads transportation came on the second place in 1990 with a share of 36% and about 2.3 million tourists. Gradually, their share has fallen dramatically, with a sharp decline after 2000, at a minimum of 2.9% in 2008 and only 0.253 million tourists carried. In parallel, the air transport by increasing the flights and the number of airlines operating on the lines for Romania increased from 0.271 million tourists (4.1% of total) in 1990 to 1.46 million tourists (16.55% total) in 2008. The shipping is distinguished by the constant number of tourists (about 0.173 million/year) and share (3.0% annually). The largest number of tourists who came to Romania by water was in 1990 (0.242 million) and in 2008 (0.262 million). The trend in 2008 compared to 2007 was the growth of road transport, constancy for water transport and the reduction for rail and air.
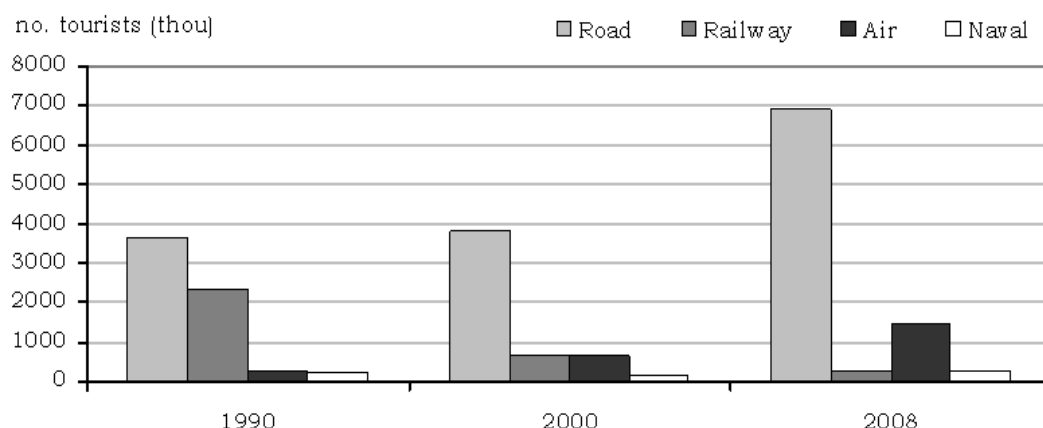


**Figure 6**. Total  arrivals of foreign visitors in Romania,
by means of transported used in 1990, 2000 and 2008
(data sources: Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 2010; www.insee.ro)

Given the international trends, the increasing speed and travel time for tourism an important role is played by the air transport. In Romania, the air traffic is served by a network of 16 national and international airports, the number of passengers being in 2004 of 3.4 million compare to 2 million in 1999. If scheduled flights in 1999 had 95% of all passengers in 2004 the charter flights rose to 15% with a total of 0.5 million passengers. In parallel we are witnessing an increase in low-cost flights operated by Wizz Air, Blue Air, MyAir etc. (the table 4.8 (Master Plan, 45). In parallel, it had joined the company TAROM, a member of SkyTeam, a number of other 26 Romanian companies operating also the internal lines (CarpatAir, BlueAir etc). The largest numbers of passengers were registered at the airports in 2006 Henri-Coanda Bucharest, with 3 million passengers, followed by 0.6 million in Timisoara, the Bucharest Aurel-Vlaicu Airport with 0.385 million, 0.244 million at Cluj-Napoca and 0.111 million at Constanta. The concept of rail travel like the Orient Express is a niche product. Internally, the railway access is provided to the large urban centers and an important number of tourist resorts. In the Maramures Mountains operates the only narrow railway line on 60 km, a scenic mountain route. So it is the Oravita-Anina route, the oldest railway in Romania.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The Romanian tourism system modeling and adaptation to the international market requirements can be done through a detailed analysis of the international tourist flows in terms of number of tourists, the area of origin, destinations, travel motivations, length of stay and the means of transport used. Data analysis shows that the main gateway to the Romanian tourism is made up of road and railway border crossing points existing in the Romanian-Hungarian and the Romanian-Moldavian borderland, plus the international air ports of entry. Although the main motivation is not the tourist act itself, the main emitting area is made up of Romania's neighbors plus another group of large states of Europe such as Germany, France, Turkey, Russia etc. In the latter case a large number of people enter the Romanian space for business tourism. Another interesting aspect is the result of the ratio of total number of tourists entering the country and the number who have turned to tourism officials, with superior values to the detriment of the latter category (about 5 times less). Also, the dominant car use by the tourists arrived in Romania requires the development and modernization of roads, particularly those to the main tourist destinations.

**REFERENCES**

CÂNDEA, Melinda, ERDELI, G., SIMON, T., PEPTENATU, D., (2003), *Potenţialul turistic al României şi amenajarea turistică a spaţiului*, Editura universitară, Bucureşti;

CAZELAIS, N., NADEAU, R., BEAUDET, G., (2000), *L'espace touristique*, Presses de l'Universite du Quebec;

CIANGĂ, N., (1998), *Turismul în Carpaţii Orientali. Studiu de geografie umană*, Presa universitară clujeană, Cluj Napoca;

CIANGĂ, N., (2006), *România. Geografia turismului*, Presa universitară clujeană, Cluj Napoca;

COCEAN, P., (2005), *Geografie regională*, Presa universitară clujeană, Cluj Napoca;

COCEAN, P., VLĂSCEANU, G., NEGOESCU, B., (2002), *Geografia generală a turismului*, Meteor Press, Bucureşti;

DINU, Mihaela, (2002), *Geografia turismului*, Editura didactică şi pedagogică, Bucureşti;

FORSTER, H., (2000), *Noi condiţii – cadru pentru dezvoltarea unor centre urbane şi regiuni industriale vechi*, in Turism integrat. Banat şi Maramureş, Editura Intergraf, Reşiţa, pp. 11-26;

IANOŞ, I., (2000), *Sisteme teritoriale. O abordare geografică*, Editura Tehnică, Bucureşti;

ILIEŞ, A., DEHOORNE, O., ILIEŞ, Dorina Camelia, (2012), *The Cross-border territorial system in Romanian-Ukrainian Carpathian Area. Elements, mechanisms and structures generating premises for an integrated cross-border territorial system with tourist function*, in Carpathian Journal of Earth and Environmental Sciences, February, vol. 7, no.1, Baia Mare, pp. 27-38 (on-line version);

ILIEŞ, A., ILIEŞ, Dorina Camelia, CEZAR, M., JOSAN, Ioana, (2011), *Internal tourism movement and the main Romanian tourist destination in the period 1990-2008*, in Analele Universităţii din Oradea, Seria Geografie, no. 2/2011 (December), Editura Universităţii din Oradea;

ILIEŞ, Gabriela, (2007), *Ţara Maramureşului. Studiu de geografie regională*, Presa universitară clujeană, Cluj-Napoca;

LICHTENBERGER, E., (2000), *Austria. Society and regions,* Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, Vienna, 406;

MUNTELE, I., IAŢU, C., (2003), *Geografia turismului: concepte, metode şi forme de manifestare spaţio-temporală*, Editura Sedcom Libris, Iaşi;

SOFIELD, H.B.T., 2003. *Empowerment for Sustainable Tourism Development (Tourism Social Science Series)*. Pergamon, 5-7;

WILLIAMS, A., (1998), *Tourism Geography*. Contemporary Human Geography, Routledge, London;

***, (2007), *Master Planul pentru turismul naţional al României 2007-2026*;

***, (2008), *Planul de Amenajare a Teritoriului Naţional. Secţiunea a VI-a – Zone Turistice*, (*www.mdlp.ro*);

***, (2010), *Romania. Statistical Yearbook 2010*, National Institute of Statistics of Romania, Bucharest, (www.insse.ro).