

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE TOURISM OF THE SOUTH – MUNTENIA DEVELOPMENT REGION

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ABSTRACT - The South-Muntenia Development Region can be characterized by major differences between the districts that compose it. This situation reverberates on the level of the tourist activity, from tourist potential point of view, as well as technical and town endowment or tourist traffic. The biggest differences are between the north district, more developed from tourist point of view, being helped by the variety of the relief's aspect, and the ones from the south of the region, that are not so developed, with a small landscape architecture and investment attractiveness.

Key words: tourism, development region, regional differences

In tourism's field, in comparison with other fields of the tertiary sector (transports, telecommunications, trade), the available capitalization of resources and improvement goes on in a slower rhythm. Generally speaking, only those resources are exploited, from tourist point of view, which are accessible, very well known and have a level of endowments and amenities to satisfy the tourists' demands.

In Romania, the organized tourism's industry does not have such an old history; the end of the nineteenth century represent the appearance of the first arranged resorts, including a big number of hotels, villas and chalets. On the first place, it was situated spa tourism, followed by mountain tourism and by seaside tourism. In the course of time up to now, investments have been made in the well known tourist units. Year by year, tourist programmes have been promoted and accomplished on a category of recognized resources.

The spatial distributions of the tourist resources in Romania is heterogeneous: so, there are some regions with a high degree of concentration of cultural and natural attractions, such as Braşov, Alba, Prahova, Sibiu, Constanţa, Maramureş, Suceava, Caraş-Severin, Vâlcea, Covasna. The other counties have tourist resources too, but these are less known. Moreover, there has been no special interest for creating amenities to valorise those goods. The accent has been put on weekend, holiday, and spa tourism, and considerably less on transit and occasional tourism.

In this context, it can be demonstrated that in time and space, many differences in the development of tourism in counties and resorts, towns and villages, have been accumulated. The phenomena of the existence of these differences after 1990 has increased even more, considering that a big part of the amenities have fallen into ruin, being considered in a short time as non-profitable.

The realization of an economic and spatial balance brought into attention the problem of regional development. As the economic theories say, in regional projection, resources are better used and can be restructured faster. In 1997, as a consequence of the Romania's integration in the European Union, The Green Charter-The Policy of Regional Development was elaborated, through PHARE Programme. After that, some legislative and judicial measures have been taken in order to put into work the eight regional development agencies.

These development regions include associations of three up to seven counties without holding their own judicial independence, but the functional one, from the economic viewpoint. The foundation is represented by a freewill partnership focused on the achievement of common projects. These

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regions are remarkable for a certain rapprochement of spatial values and for the demographic range. These are very important aspects for making common investments and for fiscal facilities.

Out of the eight economic regions, South-Muntenia Region has an area of 34,453 square kilometres, a population of about 3.3 million people and includes the counties of Argeş, Dâmboviţa, Prahova, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Ialomiţa, Călăraşi. The predominant relief is represented by plain and river meadows, with low altitudes, between 5 and 150 meters. In this context, the mountains represent only 9.5%, the hills and the plateaus 19.5%, while the plains and the river meadows 70.7%. The majority of the urban population is concentrated in Prahova county, which has eight towns, while in the other seven districts, the population lives mostly in the countryside.

This region faces at the moment an obvious industrial decline, because the very big industrial factories have not been replaced by an important number of other economic units.

The existence of some unpractical mono-industrial or agrarian structures has led to financial blocking and high unemployment rate. Besides these negative aspects, we can notice some important positive aspects: the presence of five European roads (E 574, E81, E 70, E 85, E 60), as well as A1 (Bucureşti-Piteşti) and A2 (Bucureşti-Constanţa) highways. The modernized public roads are more in comparison with others – Teleorman 39.1% and Călăraşi 40 % (in 2006). Moreover, we can notice a high density of them in Argeş county – 44 km/km², while, in the other south districts, the density is only 25-30 km/km².

South-Muntenia Development Region is advantaged by the presence of the Danube River in the southern part and of nine important railways that connect this part with some other districts and important customs (Giurgiu, Bechet, Stamora-Moraviţa, Porţile de Fier II, Negru-Vodă, Reni, Ostrov, etc).

The entire region holds numerous tourist resources, but these are not valorised at the same level at the moment. The well-known districts for efficient tourism are Prahova, Argeş and Dâmboviţa, where there is a greater variety of natural and cultural resources. The resorts situated in the Prahova Valley, Bucegi and Pietra Craiului National Parks are very well-known, as well as Vălenii de Munte, Slănic Prahova, Pucioasa, Amara – the last ones being spa-resorts. The Danube River, as well as the Ialomiţa, Argeş and Dâmboviţa rivers have many attractive natural landscapes, even less capitalised through permanent, organized tourist activities.

If we make a careful analysis of the present tourism structures, we can notice once again the strong differences between counties. Otherwise, we can also notice the void of interest of some local and county administration for capitalising those few natural and cultural tourist objectives, kept for generations (Călăraşi, Teleorman, Giurgiu).

Table 1. Tourist accommodation capacity and activity in 2006

Country/Development region/County	Accommodation capacity		Arrivals (thou)	Overnight stays (thou)	Indices of net using the capacity in function (%)
	Existing (places)	In function (thou places-days)			
Romania	287158	56499.9	6216.0	18991.7	33.6
<i>South Development Region</i>	20827	6367.1	627.3	1940.5	30.5
Argeş	4837	1319.8	105.3	259.9	19.7
Călăraşi	541	198.9	14.1	83.0	41.7
Dâmboviţa	2062	740.6	60.9	248.6	33.6
Giurgiu	899	204.6	19.6	63.1	30.7
Ialomiţa	2539	608.9	41.6	288.6	47.4
Prahova	9234	3075.5	371.2	966.1	31.4
Teleorman	715	218.8	14.6	31.2	14.2

Source: Institutul Naţional de Statistică [National Institute of Statistics]

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Table 1 and figures 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 illustrate the assessment of the tourist accommodation capacity and activity in the counties included into this region.

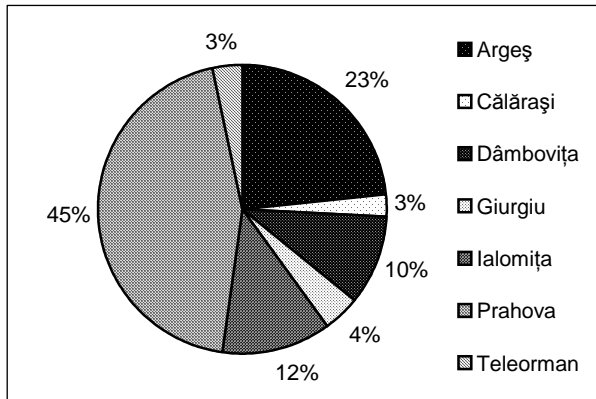


Figure 1. Accommodation capacity – existing places (2006)

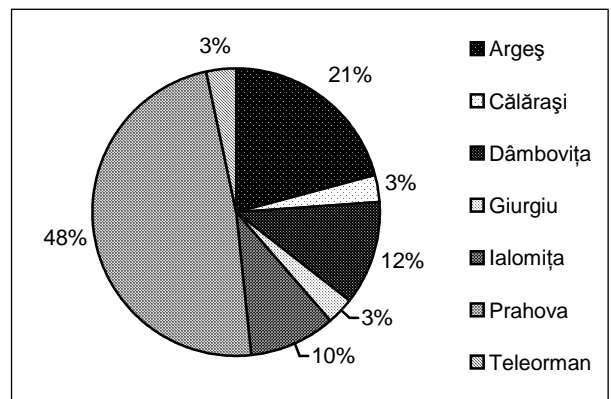


Figure 2. Accommodation capacity in function (2006)

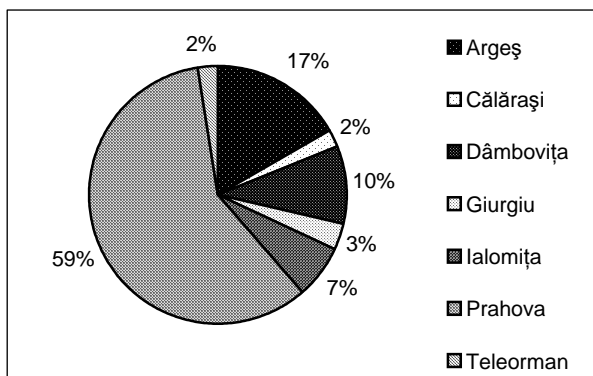


Figure 3. Arrivals (2006)

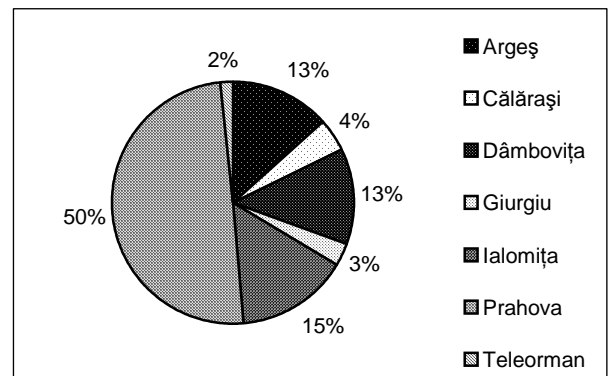


Figure 4. Overnight stays (2006)

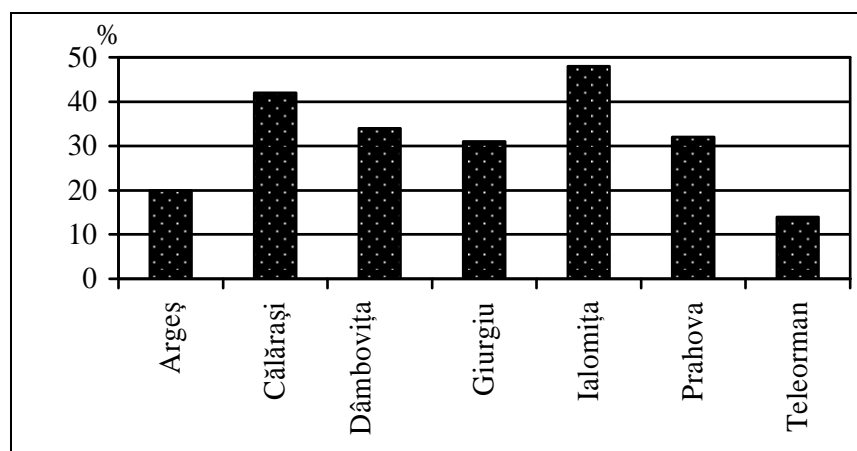


Figure 5. Indices of net using the capacity in function (2006)

As counties are concerned, the most important one is Prahova. In 2006, Prahova had about 52% out of the total number on accommodations in the South-Muntenia region, 49% of the rooms, 45% of the functional places, and 69% of stay days. We can draw the conclusion that the tourist attraction pole remains the Prahova Valley and the nearby mountains. On the last places, there are the counties of Călărași, Giurgiu, Teleorman. These districts do not have tourist resorts even if they have a beautiful plain landscape, as well as the Danube River meadows and lots of cultural sightseeing spots.

Between this hierarchy's extremities we can find the counties of Argeș and Dâmbovița that hold an important tourist potential, but less known and capitalised. Moreover, we can remark the southern counties that have not promoted economic partnership in order to develop tourism, some of the achievements being owed to local entrepreneurs.

Another aspect is the one regarding the tourist traffic, which shows the way of economic exploitation of the entire capacity of accommodation. Regarding the number of foreign tourists coming here, the South-Muntenia region generally has a ratio of 9%, this value being available for the number of overnight stays registered in the tourist amenities. In 2006, the occupancy degree was under the country's average.

Between the compounding districts of this region there are some very important differences. As regards incomings, Prahova county held 59 % out of the region's total and 50% out of overnight stays. On the last places we can notice Giurgiu with 3% and Teleorman with 2 %, values available for overnight stays and incomings.

These aspects indicate that Prahova county has an older tourist experience and that most of the investments have been made in the resorts situated in the Prahova Valley – Bușteni – Sinaia. Meanwhile, a tourist development in the Teleajen Valley, in the town of Vălenii de Munte and Cheia mountain resort is noticed.

In Argeș county, in the upper valley of the Argeș river and its tributaries, in the submontane rural localities, in the main cities such as Pitești, Curtea de Argeș, Câmpulung Muscel, there are remarkable tourist resources, but less included in tourist programmes and less promoted and known. The same situation is available for Dâmbovița county.

Meanwhile, we could try an activation of tourism in the southern counties. Thus, the reconstruction of the forest belt, the reforestation of degraded agricultural lands in order to put in practice some tourist activities. In this respect, in the counties of South-Muntenia Development Region, golf courses, riding areas, places for fishing and recreation, etc. can be realized.

Many investors consider plain as uncomely, but there are some remarkable landscapes and natural resources here, too. Many towns such as Giurgiu, Călărași, Alexandria concentrate important churches, museums, memorial houses, parks and public gardens.

The accomplishment of a SWOT analysis has the function of distinguishing the aspects that can allege the tourism's development and, at the same time, of the ones that can represent a hindrance. Thus, the four make-up elements refer to:

➤ *Strong points:*

- the presence of cross-European transport corridors;
- the nearby presence of airports; diversified tourist resources.

➤ *Weak points:*

- low-quality local roads;
- low use for the amenities belonging to the Danube harbours;
- very old hotels, most of them only 2 or 3 star-hotels built in the '80s;
- the sightseeing spots' advertising is missing in the southern counties.

➤ *Opportunities:*

- the extension or modernization of the access ways;
- the development of tourist cross-border cooperation with the Danube's abutter countries;
- the improving of the tourism logistics quality.

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➤ *Threats:*

- the differences between the well developed regions in the north and the less developed ones in the south can become higher and higher every day;
- improvement of the competition coming from the other regions of economic development, regarding tourist activities.

As a consequence of the presented facts, we can draw the conclusion that South-Muntenia Development Region has not exhausted all the conveniences of diversifying the tourist activities. This process imposes the economic investments to go on, as well as the attempt of changing the pole of tourist attractions from the Prahova Valley's resorts to others, close as value and interest.

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