

HUMAN RESOURCES TRAINING - ESSENTIAL CONDITION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETITIVENESS IN THE TOURISM FIELD IN ROMANIA

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***Abstract:** Romanian tourism can be an important factor for long-term economic growth if it is properly sustained and developed. The country's potential is huge, but it has remained equally inappropriately capitalized, even though there have been many debates about the possibilities at our disposal. Recent studies regarding the competitiveness of Romanian tourism show that Romania has been positioned behind less developed countries or located in less attractive areas for tourists. Current analyses of tourism competitiveness included factors such as the country's economic capacity, promoted policies and conditions for tourists, infrastructure and tourism potential of the country. An important aspect regards the human resources and the tourism labor market. The tourism industry uses extremely varied labor force, but less and less prepared to deal with current requirements. The process of providing a touristic service has become quite complex and entails the full involvement of employees if we want a high level of satisfaction for tourists. In Romania we are seeing worrying signs that in the near future we will become deficient in the well prepared human resources sector. Human resources improvement is necessary for the economic performances growth, developing a career in tourism, and reducing personnel variations.*

***Keywords:** competitiveness, economic growth, human resource management, staff training, tertiary sector/tourism*

Introduction

The influence of globalization is very visible in the tourism industry. The last decade has made major changes in addressing global tourism services. Quality is defined in terms of several dimensions, the satisfaction of tourists is carefully monitored, the tourist packages are extremely varied, and there travel possibilities are multiple. Many countries have turned tourism into the main pillar that support the economy. Basically, the largest share of GDP represents the tourism, exploited to the smallest detail in an attempt to create a certain country identity and bring long-term income.

Tourism as a concept has seen new interpretations. By tourism, we no longer refer only to travel. Some authors claim that the influence of globalization is so great that tourism has entered another dimension, characterized by changes in the organization of required logistics for transport

on regional or even global structures, the emergence of international rules of conduct applicable to both providers and tourists, the development of different forms of tourism and / or the operators specialization on a specific sector or a certain category of services (Dobrea and Ștefănescu, 2008: 41).

The same source states, in a correct appreciation of the business environment in the context of globalization that "*Romania needs to make many changes in order to become competitive in the tourism field*". If we take into account the international analyses of specialized bodies in the tourism area, we find our country either in the last positions or hardly in the middle, the claim becoming impossible to contradict.

World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)¹ annually publishes figures on the contribution of the tourism sector to the Gross Domestic Product. According to the statistics provided by this institution in 2014, Romania has contributed with 4.8% to GDP². In 2015 the evolution is up to 5.1%. Even with this growth, our country occupies a much lower position than other states, being ranked on the 154 place out of 184 countries included in the analysis.

In 2016³, we stayed at about the same level, registering an insignificant increase of 0.1%. With a weight of 5.2%, Romania fails to make progress in supporting the economy through the tourism sector. If we want to understand exactly the situation we are in, we can look over the data of Greece which, in the same reference year the tourism industry had a contribution to GDP of 18.6%, about 37 billion dollars⁴. Greece's forecast for 2027 stands at 23.8%, i. e. about a quarter of GDP will be covered by the tourism industry. This, however, means that each indicator of increasing competitiveness involvement and strategic thinking in tourism are a major concern.

For Romania, forecasts for the next ten years are gloomy, ranging to 5.8%, which indicates a very low annual growth rate. We even allow ourselves to appreciate that we are seen as a country in which we will not achieve much, but we will just register a stagnation, being pleased to stay on the same level. The question is *what can we do* to improve the situation, to increase tourism's contribution to the GDP, to stimulate demand so that we can generate new jobs in such a beautiful field? And obviously, *what are the priorities?*

Many authors have pointed out that infrastructure is the main reason why Romanian tourism does not develop as it should. In specialized journals, more and more voices criticize the situation in which our country finds itself and

¹ WTTC (World Travel & Tourism Council) = represent a global authority for the economic and social contribution on Travel and Tourism field. <https://www.wttc.org/>

² <http://sp.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/countries-2015/romania-2015.pdf>

³ <https://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/countries-2017/romania-2017.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic-impact-research/countries-2017/greece-2017.pdf>

emphasizes that *"besides the fact that we are having a poor infrastructure (lack of highways, troubled national roads and services of dubious quality), the Romanian authorities do not know how to use the few resources we have (air connections, cruises on the Danube, or free advertising from the foreign press)"*. (State Diana, 2014).

Infrastructure is a sensitive subject because of its demanding of high financial resources and strategic thinking where decision makers are often deficient. However, infrastructure is not the only problem in the development of Romanian tourism. We can also remember the prices of tourist packages, often higher than those in the highly appreciated countries, with a diversified offer. In this context, it is clear that the tourism sector needs a strategic relaunch and needs to be addressed through competitiveness.

Competitiveness aspects. Influence factors and indicators

In the field of tourism, competitiveness issues are carefully monitored, becoming a topic of great interest to countries that have wished to capitalize on their full tourist potential. A statement that we find in the literature and which we consider extremely important is that, in the context of globalization, *"the prosperity of nations is measured by the level of competitiveness on international markets"*. (Dobrea și Ștefănescu 2008:41).

Competitiveness is, however, a complex concept, consisting in summing up more indicators. As other authors mention, measuring competitiveness requires multidimensional study of a broad spectrum of indicators, among the most important being the number of tourists entering a country or region (Mazurek, 2014:73). Specialist literature highlights the fact that a fair appreciation of a country's competitiveness also requires analyzing the ability of the reference country to cope with extremely strong competition, in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, in a profitable manner on the market (Pirău, 2011:213).

The issue of competitiveness in tourism is addressed in a complex manner by the World Economic Forum⁵ (W.E.F). With a modern vision of the field resulting from the approach of activities based on stakeholder theory, WEF publishes a comparative analysis of the situation where tourism is found in a country every two years and provides information on the indicators that can be used to determine the correct situation. For 2017, W.E.F signals four main pillars needed to analyze the degree of competitiveness, as follows:⁶

1. Enabling Environment – includes aspects about business environment, safety and security, health and hygiene, human resources and labour market, ICT readiness;

⁵ World Economic Forum, committed to improving the state of the world, is the International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation <https://www.weforum.org/>

⁶ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TTCR_2017_web_0401.pdf

2. T&T Policy and Enabling Conditions – includes information about the Prioritization of Travel & Tourism, International Openness, Price competitiveness, Environmental Sustainability;

3. Infrastructure – one of the most important obstacles in the development of Romanian tourism - is treated by an analysis about Air Transport Infrastructure, Ground and port infrastructure, Tourist Service Infrastructure;

4. Natural and Cultural Resources – involves analysis at the Natural Resources and also the Cultural Resources and Business Travel.

Following the comparative study of the W.E.F reports from 2008 and 2017, we note that we are at the same level. Basically, if we look at the general picture, we find that for almost ten years we have not evolved at all. If in 2008⁷ we ranked on the 68th place among the 134 countries included in the study, in 2017⁸ we are also ranked 68 out of 136 analyzed countries, but with lower indicator values.

The general picture is presented by W.E.F. as follows:

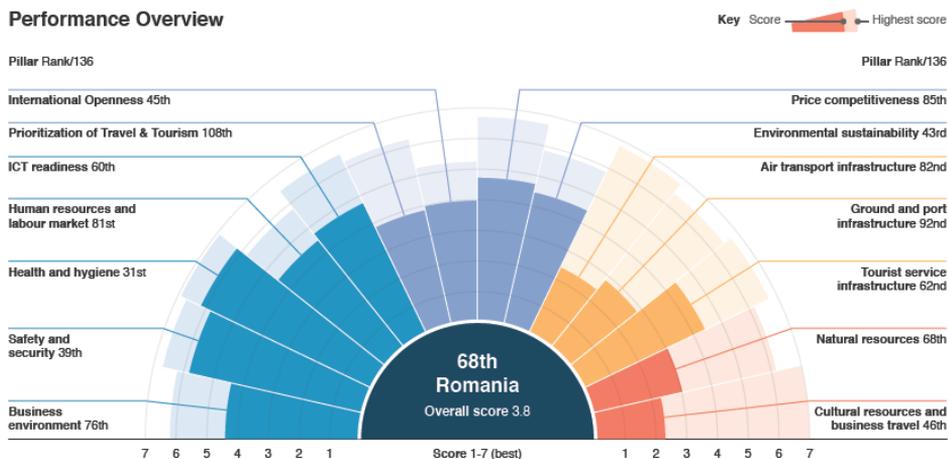


Figure 1 - General Competitiveness Framework for Tourism for the Year 2017

Source: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-travel-tourism-competitiveness-report-2017> , page 300

In a recent study based on the W.E.F. Reports, it was mentioned that “to remedy the situation and improve these indicators we need to be proactive in term of performance management, which should lead to developing and implementing a new strategy for Romanian tourism” (Curta, 2016:44).

Country management should focus on analyzing the degree of competitiveness in all areas of activity. Only this way can we correctly define and understand the position of the country in relation to the other states.

In the field of tourism, ensuring competitiveness is necessary and we must make a change at the level of each indicator if we want to increase the

⁷ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCompetitivenessReport_2008-09.pdf

⁸ <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-travel-tourism-competitiveness-report-2017>

values that we have. Infrastructure is important, but political, economic, health and hygiene, employee training or country security are just as important. These are aspects whose improvement will be reflected in other areas, not just in tourism.

In this field, it is extremely important to provide competitive tourism products and services comparable to countries with a large number of tourists. Also, labor force issues, staff training and involvement in providing high-quality services are other factors that can influence the decision to purchase a tourist package.

In the country's management the idea of creating a strong competitive advantage must be developed, which is not easy considering the existing gaps. Things can not be changed overnight. Competitiveness involves strategy, long-term vision. As in the rest of the activity fields also in tourism there is a strong need to ensure continuity between plans and strategies implemented at the governmental level. It is a necessity that the specific activities carried out by all the actors involved to be finished and with a high degree of dynamism.

However, it is important not to lose sight of ongoing reporting to market, both internal and external requirements. The competitiveness of a country in the field of tourism must be assessed in terms of its ability to achieve the highest performance in this field.

OECD⁹ highlights as the most important indicators of measuring competitiveness in tourism are (Dupeyras and MacCallum 2013:7-8):

- tourism Direct Gross Domestic Product;
- inbound tourism revenues per visitor by source market;
- overnights in all types of accommodation;
- exports of tourism services;
- labour productivity in tourism services;
- purchasing Power Parity (PPPs) and tourism prices;
- country entry visa requirements;
- natural resources and biodiversity;
- cultural and creative resources;
- visitor satisfaction;
- national Tourism Action Plan.

Whatever indicators of maximization of competitiveness we take into account, it is important to note that the sustainable development of Romanian tourism is in a relationship of strong dependence on the development degree of other related fields.

9 OECD = is a multi-disciplinary inter-governmental organisation that governments work together towards a stronger, cleaner, fairer global economy.

Human Resources - a factor for increasing competitiveness in tourism

The raising of the training level of tourism personnel is regarded as an endogenous factor influencing the evolution of tourism (Snak, Baron și Neacșu, 2001:49).

A possibility for decision-makers both at governmental and organizational level in the field is to implement the policy based on "multiple qualifications" (Abrudan, Forosigan and Demian. 2007: 64). The importance of human resources in tourism is undeniable, and employees' skills must be carefully checked and proven to meet current requirements.

The importance of human resources in tourism is undeniable, and the skills of employees must be carefully checked and proven to offer a response to current requirements.

The development of tourism activities has certain characteristics such as high labor mobility, a high degree of physical fatigue, a physical and psychological discomfort due to the fact that services are provided in the opposite direction to the tourists' program (for example in the case of holidays). Besides these aspects are also the intellectual ones. Human resources must be trained periodically and with a well-structured program, depending on the specifics of their activities and also in conformity with previous training so that they can meet the new requirements and tourism technologies.

The literature suggests that the development of tourism activities requires a high level of training and a high adaptability to complex situations. Employees are the interface between the organization and the tourists that we want to make them to return. So, the employees are very important in the whole process. They must know at least one international language and must be able to provide the most accurate information about the tourist values of the country or region in which they operate.

Continuous training provides some safety and generates the desire to make a career in tourism. Aspects related to the quality of the services provided are also significantly improved. And we know that the quality improvement must be a strategic objective for all organizations.

Conclusions and suggestions

Strategic management in the tourism industry involves addressing activities in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, focusing on the activities according to internal and external market requirements. Romania is at the point where it can no longer work the way it does in present. Population expectations have increased significantly, especially in regard to the new government. It is rightly expected after years of regress or stagnation, a sustainable economic growth and development of all areas of activity. The tourism sector engage around 200,000 employees. They represent a force that contributes significantly to the attraction of new tourists in our country. Appropriate training and

continuous improvement is required to increase the quality of the workforce. If we continue in the same way, there is a risk of becoming deficient in this respect as well. Benefits of perfecting human resources are multiple, such as: increasing interest in developing a career in the tourism industry, improving product quality and especially specific services, improving Romania's image internationally, attracting new tourists and obviously increasing the contribution the tourism sector has to the GDP of the country.

We draw attention to the fact that the new tourism strategy needs to be taken into consideration on two dimensions: on one side, in terms of *gaps reduction* and inequalities created to other states, and on the other side by *improving the strengths* that can lead us to competitiveness growth. Reducing gaps requires general infrastructure improvement, attention to comparative or lower pricing, development of tourism packages and inclusion of innovative elements, investment in areas with tourism potential, improvement of hygiene and health conditions etc.

Improving strengths involves investing in improving human resources, maintaining the economic, social and political environment under conditions of stability, promoting numerous natural resources, etc.

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