

Resilience of Romanian Tourism to Economic Crises and Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: -In recent years, tourism industry has become a very important sector within the national economy and for this reason, the tourism industry in Romania is considered to have an important role in achieving the objectives defined by the European Commission through the Agenda 2020. The resilience of Romanian tourism to economic crises is characterized by the involvement of all social and age categories in tourist activities, the tourist promotion of Romanian destinations in international circuits, the complexity of the forms of tourism within the destinations in Romania, the expansion of forms of tourism in disadvantaged areas, etc. During the economic crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, tourism represented a means of growth, development and capitalization of rural spaces for the locals because, during the restrictions imposed by the authorities, the majority of tourists chose tourist stays in rural areas due to the calm, peaceful and wonderful scenery with a lot of experiences as horse riding, climbing, hiking, etc. The geographical location of Romania underlines a variety of natural components and landscapes, which outline partly the country's tourist potential: the Romanian Carpathians, the Danube River, the Black Sea with its coastline, the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, the Danube Gorge, flora and fauna of Romania and the man-made landmarks (monasteries, churches, etc.).

Key-Words: -economic crisis, resilience, Romanian tourism, tourist destinations, tourist arrivals, tourist overnight stays, Covid-19 pandemic

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1 Introduction

The study aims at analysing the tourism sector in Romania during the two economic crises of 2008-2009 and 2018-2020. In order to analyse the current and future progress of economic crises, the following general objectives of the study were taken into consideration: (1) to review and understand the notion of economic crisis from a theoretical point of view and (2) to analyse tourist flows as statistical indicators in the 2008-2009 and 2018-2020 periods.

The general hypothesis of the study is that the economic crisis represents a multilateral, dynamic, and variable concept in time and space spreading with an unimaginable speed across the borders of a state; these extreme events caused a rethinking of the laws and also the direction of economic development of the nation.

Analysing the coordinates on the Globe, Romania is located at the intersection of the 45° parallel northern latitude with the 25° meridian eastern longitude.

The territory of Romania extends along 4°37'59" latitude, which means 525 km, the extreme points being in the south of the city of Zimnicea (Teleorman) at 43°37'07", and in the north in the village of Horodiștea (Pălăniș commune, Botoșani county) at 48°15'06" N.

The 25°E meridian marks the halfway point between the eastern and western limits of Europe, respectively Yekaterinburg (the Ural Mountains) and Lisbon (near Cape Roca).

In terms of longitude, Romania extends along 9°25'40", over 743 km, the extreme points being in the west, Beba Veche commune (Timiș county) at 20°15'44" E, and in the east in the city of Sulina (Tulcea county) at 29°41'24" E.

Regarding the position on the continent, Romania is located in the south of Central Europe, at the contact with Eastern Europe and Balkan Europe, a position underlined both by the distances of approximately 2,900 km to the northern part of the continent (Cape North), western part (Cape Roca) and eastern part (Ural Mountains), and only 920 km, in the south, to Cape Matapan or Tainaron (in the peninsular Greece), as well as by the position given by the geographical coordinates.

Resilience can assimilate into the idea of securing systems in the face of environmental changes, but, like any insurance, it comes with a series of inherent limits and even implies the possibility of its disappearance.

The basic characteristics of resilience can be summarized using five essential terms, [1]:

- awareness of the assets and systemic resources, but also of the vulnerabilities and risks to which the system is subject. Information and real-time processing of information are essential;
- diversity of elements and capacities, ideas and sources of information, technical elements, and human resources, even if they become redundant and, as such, reduce the efficiency of the system in the short term; however, they can be essential to deal with crises;
- integration – by coordinating functions and actions between component subsystems, at different scales, for example, the ability to bring together disparate views and elements, act together, and release new coherent alternatives through transparent communication and information sharing;
- organization – which allows dealing with situations of major disturbances without major malfunctions or catastrophic collapse; ability to "fail safely";

- adaptation – the ability to adjust to changing circumstances by developing new plans, implementing new actions, and changing behaviours. Thus, following the analysis of the five essential terms of post-Pandemic SARS-CoV-2 resilience, we can say that the flexibility of the system is essential and implies the ability to use one's resources for new purposes or the functional modification/diversification of some elements/subsystems.

According to the authors in [2], the main general characteristics of a resilient city are:

1. Reflectiveness – to use the past for decisions about the future;
2. The wealth of resources and the organization of alternative ways that allow access to them at any time;
3. Robustness – a well-designed, built and managed city;
4. Redundancy – the presence of specific reserve capacities created to adapt to disturbances;
5. Flexibility – decision maker's willingness and ability to adopt alternative strategies to respond to changing circumstances, [3];
6. Inclusivity – the emphasis placed on consulting urban actors in decision-making, stimulating civic sense, and ensuring a minimum of social equity by eliminating large disparities in terms of access to basic livelihoods;
7. Integrativeness – to bring together a unitary whole with functional relationships between the elements of the system constituted by the city.

2 Problem Formulation

The origin of the term can be found in the science of the strength of materials, [4].

In sociology, resilience has been integrated as the ability of human communities, [5], to cope with external disturbances and shocks, which are the result of social, political or environmental changes, [6].

In "The Science and Practice of Resilience", resilience is seen both as a philosophy and a methodological practice at the same time, [7].

Studies carried out by OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) show that countries can be subject to a wide range of economic shocks (financial crises, sovereign debt crises, commodity price fluctuations, etc.), which can increase risks and insecurity for citizens, investors, governments alike. In this context, it is necessary to increase the resilience of countries to adverse shocks, defined as the ability to limit potential vulnerabilities, reduce the probability of

crisis occurrence and improve the economy's ability to cope with these shocks, [8].

Currently, the concept of resilience is associated with the scientific, social, economic, political fields. Thus, many forms of resilience have taken shape linguistically and functionally over time, such as psychological resilience, biological resilience, urban resilience, institutional resilience, economic resilience, financial resilience, political resilience, social resilience, etc., [9].

The resilience of Romanian tourism to the economic crisis – Covid-19, refers to the ability of the economic sector to recover or adapt to the negative effects and also to the new trends, requirements and preferences of tourists who bought tourist products with the risk of contracting the SARS-CoV-2 virus, during the March 2020-March 2022 period when the restrictions were lifted.

If at the beginning resilience had a metaphorical meaning, when we analyse systems that face various disturbing factors and support points of disequilibrium, one can notice that they have the ability to resist and return to the initial state, [10]. The concept was also used by other fields, such as economics, engineering sciences, ecology, tourism, environment, etc., [9].

The tourism crisis generally involves the occurrence of disruptive events with a significant impact on the organizations in the sector, such as unfavourable economic changes, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, political instability and bioterrorist threats, [11].

Tourism creates economic, social and environmental benefits favourable to different destinations in Romania, representing one of the most energetic branches globally, as well as an important generator of changes and creator of new jobs, [12].

As such, tourism is one of the economic sectors in which entrepreneurship is encouraged, [13, 14] because this economic sector is very dynamic due to the rapid changes in the behaviour of tourists who want to purchase totally new holidays.

From an economic approach in countries with properly exploited tourism resources, tourism can also represent an important source of development or recovery of the national economy, [15].

With all the statements of researchers who support the development of the Romanian tourism sector, a weak point of Romania, compared to other tourist destinations, is the poor transportation infrastructure, i.e. the road and railway network.

2.1 Methodology

The main objective of this research is the analysis of the tourism sector in Romania (at the national level), throughout the 2008-2009/ 2018-2020 period, before the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and during the economic recession, determined by the terrible SARS COV-2 virus.

The analysis is performed at the national level and consequently offers a deeper investigation of the resilience of tourism to the economic crises in Romania.

The data at the national level used in the present research refers to the 2008-2009 period. The 2018-2020 period was selected to cover both the onset of the economic crisis caused by SARS COV-2 and the entire period of recession.

Another reason for selecting the 2008-2009/2018-2020 period was the availability of statistical data, the exception being the data related to the national GDP (Gross Domestic Product) which are available for the 2013-2025 period; the data are available online for any researcher on the website of the National Institute of Statistics (NIS, TEMPO-ONLINE).

2.2 Economic Crisis Caused by Covid-19

From a tourist point of view, Romania has a huge and diversified natural tourist potential, which represents the country's richest resource.

Over time, the global, European and national economy has faced various economic crises, which have affected all sectors of activity, especially tourism.

The global economic crisis of 2009 had a strong effect on Romania (Fig. 1), which has an economy based on consumption and credit, not on a development market. Those who had to suffer as a result of the crisis remained unemployed or even with drastic salary reductions due to bankruptcies in the private sector, the withdrawal of investors to other countries, etc. In the last 19 years, the country has operated based on the "market economy" model, which was based on the privatization of all state industries, from all sectors of activity: agriculture, communications, transport, heavy industry, tourism, etc. During this period of crisis, the revenues obtained from Romanian tourism decreased, but everything depends on the duration of the crisis. "In 2009, operators will only survive if they become truly competitive. The pessimistic forecasts for the 2009 tourist year can motivate domestic operators to practice cheaper and better quality tourism", [16].

The people in this field claimed that Romanian tourism should have taken advantage of this economic crisis to attract foreign tourists from

Europe, but this had no clear support because the number of tourists decreased by almost 10 percent (%). Thus operators should have thought of new solutions to attract tourists, such as holiday packages at attractive prices.

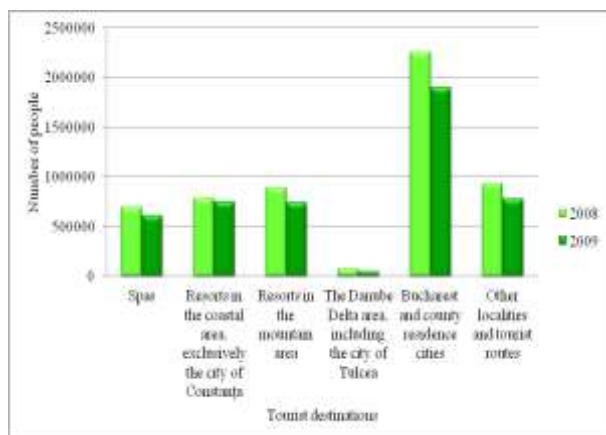


Fig. 1: The arrivals of Romanian tourists in different national destinations in the 2008-2009 period (number of tourists)

Source: data processed by authors according to NIS, [17]

The effects of the 2009 crisis on Romanian tourism referred to:

1. "The financial crisis will hit non-specialized travel agencies and hotels that bet on high profits without, however, offering competitive service packages, according to the officials of the National Association of Tourism Agencies (NATA)";
2. If Romanian tourism will adapt to the effects of the global economic crisis, and will offer quality services at a price, it will gain;
3. The economic crisis led hoteliers to reduce service packages by 30% in 2009;
4. "In the current financial context, Romanian tourism either matures or dies completely" (Virgil Munteanu, general manager of the Delta Resort, 2009).

The anti-crisis solutions were as follows:

✂ Romanian tourism must adopt a fiscal policy that would benefit the tour operators in the off-season, not only during the three months of the summer season;

✂ Providing holiday vouchers;

✂ The most aggressive promotion of Romanian tourist destinations abroad with the largest investments.

In conclusion, the effects of the economic crises of 2009 and 2018-2020 were perceived differently by Romanian specialists in tourism. There were solutions, but more difficult to put into practice

because in the 21st century they did not face such a virus.

The economic crisis of COVID-19 in 2020, according to the estimations of the World Travel and Tourism Council, determined worldwide a decrease in the tourism industry by 80% compared to the year 2019. Comparatively, during the economic crisis of 2009, the decrease was 4 %, [18]. The measures and travel restrictions adopted by all the governments of the world to stop the spread of the coronavirus have seriously affected global, European, and national tourism, from large hotel chains, tour operators, and even small entrepreneurs, with 2020 being the most catastrophic year from the entire history of tourism.

The resilience of Romanian tourism to the economic crisis triggered by the coronavirus has changed the way people travel, with the airports closed and the implementation of quarantine in some tourist destinations, tourists chose to spend their holiday in Romania, choosing the natural ecosystem that offered safety. Even if they have not traveled abroad, the number of domestic Romanian tourists decreased drastically in 2020, compared to 2019, according to data provided by the NIS (Fig. 2).

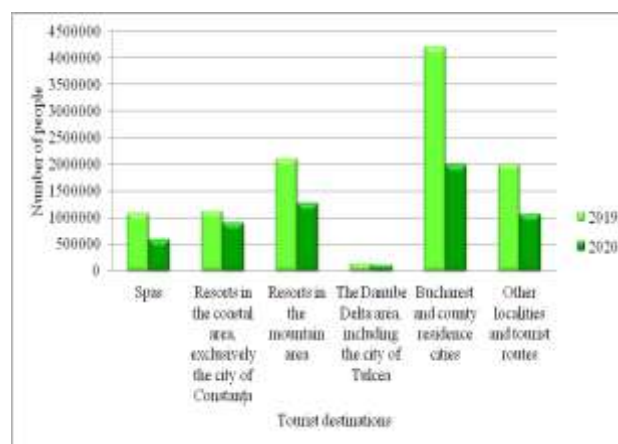


Fig. 2: The arrivals of Romanian tourists in different national destinations in the 2019-2020 period (number of tourists)

Source: data processed by authors according to NIS, [17]

3 Problem Solution

3.1 The Situation of Romanian Tourism Following the Impact Generated by the Covid-19 Crisis

Tourism is represented as a multipurpose network formed of several key elements, such as travel agencies and tour operators, accommodation service

providers, online service and information providers, tourist attractions and tourism management organizations (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3: The tourist system
 Source: World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), [19]

Tourism was one of the most affected sectors, both worldwide and nationally, as a result of the restrictions imposed by the authorities during the Coronavirus period, but also of tourists avoiding traveling to tourist destinations (seaside resorts, spa resorts, mountain resorts, the Danube Delta, natural and national parks, etc.) in Romania.

Thus, in Romania, all holidays were canceled during the "State of Emergency", but Romanians did not give up traveling, they opted for traveling within the country, to places as close as possible to home, and they chose as accommodation family guesthouses, hotels located in isolated regions, apartments and holiday villas, with the possibility of canceling the holiday without losing money.

A drastic decrease of almost 11 million people can be observed in 2020 (Appendix 1 and Fig. 4) in the total number of overnight stays, in contrast to 2018 and 2019, data recorded for hotels; the overnight stays of tourists in hotels, tourist villas, tourist guesthouses, and agro-tourism guesthouses are mostly represented by Romanians, because foreigners have not visited the country.

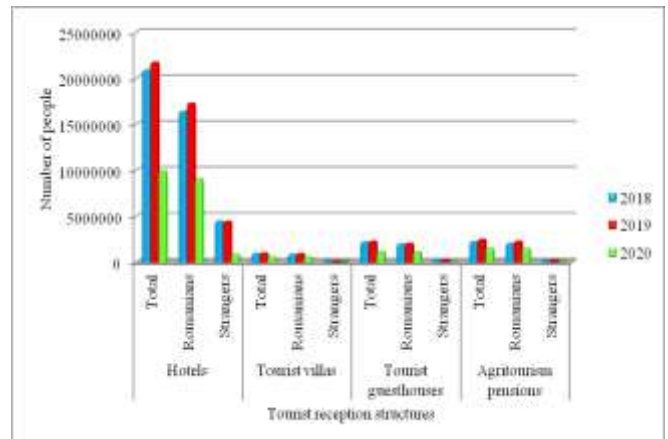


Fig. 4: The overnight stays in different accommodation units, by nationalities in the 2018-2020 period
 Source: data processed by authors according to NIS, [17]

Regarding the accommodation capacity (no. of bed places) in different accommodation units according to Appendix 2 and Fig. 5, high differences can be observed between 2018, 2019, and 2020, in the latter they decreased by half because of the pandemic.

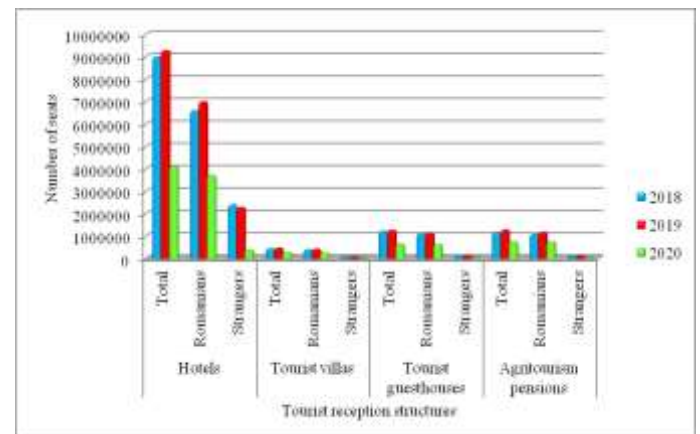


Fig. 5: The accommodation capacity (no. of bed places) in different accommodation structures in Romania during the 2018-2020 period
 Source: data processed by authors according to NIS, [17]

The net occupancy rate of bed places in different accommodation units in 2020 was 22.8% (table 1). The highest value of the net occupancy rate of bed places in different accommodation units in the 2018-2020 period, according to fig. 6 is recorded in apartment hotels (48.2% - 2019), hotels (42.8% - 2019), bungalows (31.4% - 2019), accommodation on the river and sea vessels (29.3% - 2020), tourist villas (27.7% - 2019), hostels (25.2% - 2019),

campsites (24.3% - 2020), tourist guesthouses (22.2% - 2019) and tourist cottages (22.1% - 2020).

Table 1. The net occupancy rate of bed places in the 2018-2020 period (%)

Accommodation units	2018	2019	2020
Total	32.2	33.9	22.8

Source: data processed by authors according to NIS, [17]

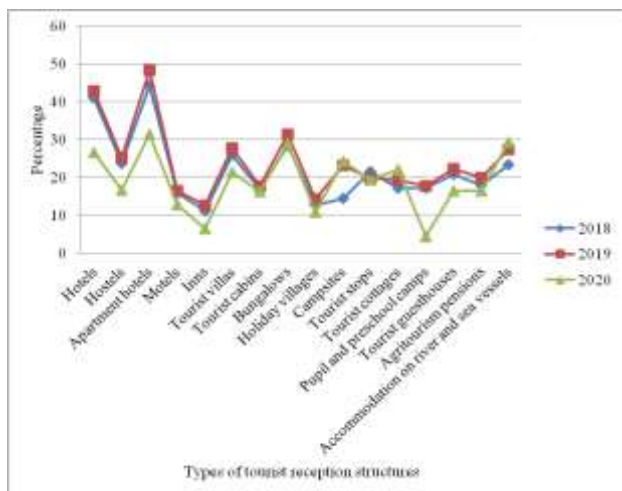


Fig. 6: The net occupancy rate of bed places in different accommodation units in the 2018-2020 period (%)

Source: data processed by authors according to NIS, [17]

Regarding the situation by counties (Fig. 7), the number of tourist arrivals in different accommodation units recorded high values in the following counties in 2020: Constanța, Brașov, Bucharest, Prahova, Bihor, Sibiu, Cluj, Suceava, Mureș and Vâlcea, and tourist overnight stays recorded higher values in Constanța, Brașov, Bucharest, Bihor, Vâlcea, Prahova, Suceava, Mureș, Cluj, Sibiu, Caraș-Severin and Timiș (Fig. 8).



Fig. 7: The location of the counties with the most arrivals and overnight stays in 2020

Source: data processed in ArcGIS 10.5 by authors according to NIS, [17]

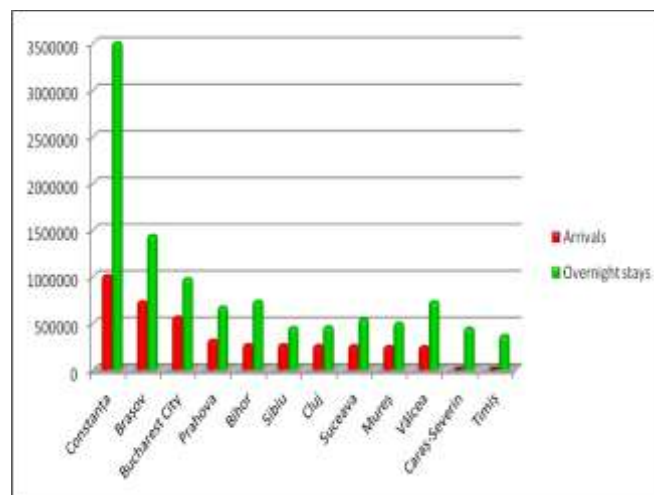


Fig. 8: The tourist arrivals and overnight stays by county in 2020

Source: data processed by authors according to NIS, [17]

Although tourism in Romania is not the main branch of the economy because it is not sufficiently promoted and capitalized, it contributed only 2.7% to the country's GDP (Gross domestic product) in 2019, and due to the pandemic it contributes only 1.7% in 2020 (Fig. 9). To become a basic branch of the Romanian national economy, the people active in this field must ensure the tourists' sanitary safety, social distancing, very good quality of tourist packages and sustainability of services and products, [20]. At the same time, other types of tourism, which require a smaller number of people in the same place, can be developed such as ecotourism (capitalizing the natural assets), rural tourism (tourism in the heart of the village), agrotourism, different tourist thematic routes.

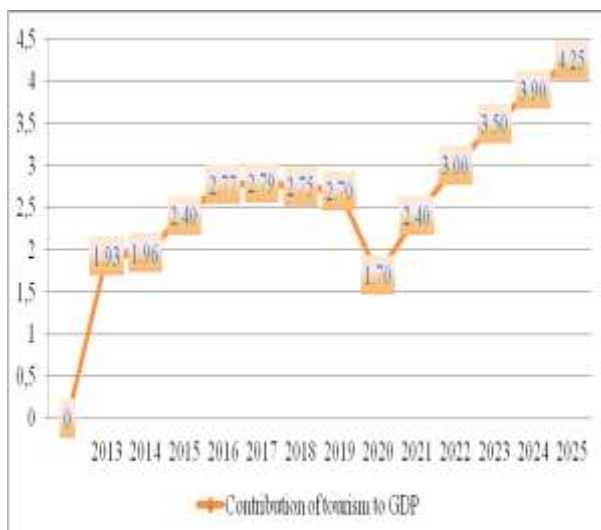


Fig. 9: The contribution of tourism to GDP In Romania (2013-2025)

Source: data processed by authors according to NIS, [21]

3.2 The Negative and Positive Effects on the Resilience of Tourist Arrivals in Romania

In [22] Mishkin defined the term crisis as the case when markets can no longer direct their resources to the most appropriate investment opportunities, at which point "moral hazard" appears.

Most specialists believe that these crises are part of a process with a certain cyclicity, a process that presents, for example, a decrease followed by a certain increase, and the increase, in turn, is followed by a phase of stagnation or decrease, [23, 24].

An economic crisis is perceived as an event that leads or is about to lead to instability, to a situation with a dangerous aspect, which affects an individual, a group of individuals, or an entire community. At the same time, its meaning is exclusively negative, having effects in various fields such as tourism, security, economy, social field, or the business environment, especially being characterized by temporality (it is not easy to anticipate or to specify its duration and its effects or severity that cannot be anticipated).

Therefore, we reproduce some negative and positive effects of the national economic crisis in Romania which affected tourist arrivals:

∞ The registration of a negative increase in international arrivals with a negative influence on the Romanian tourism economy;

∞ The impact of the Romanian economic crisis left its mark especially on developed countries in terms of tourist arrivals, compared to developing countries;

∞ The presence of the economic crisis negatively affected the local communities, thus their incomes from tourism decreased considerably;

∞ The diversification of tourist supply represented the most important benefit for the counties, with positive effects on the number of Romanian and foreign tourists;

∞ The increase in the promotion of holiday packages in the online environment, compared to the period before Covid-19, represented a positive benefit for tourism.

3.3. Strategies and programs for the promotion of sustainable tourism in Romania, especially for tourist destinations

According to Porter in [25], strategy means "being different". The strategy is translated by being in a competitive position, by differentiating an individual or an entity through the eyes of the customer, and placing effectiveness, seriousness, and importance on a mixture of specific activities different from competitors at a given time.

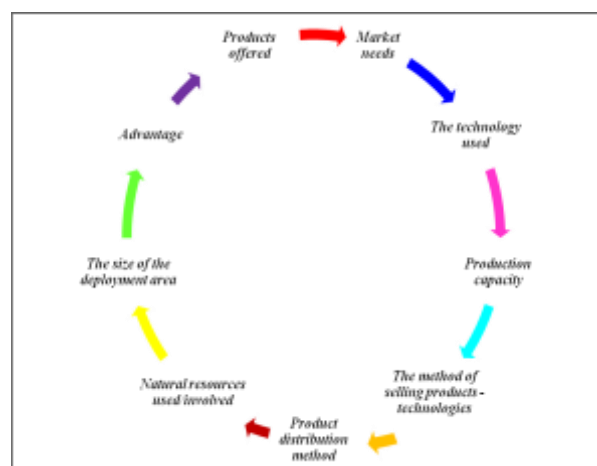


Fig. 10: The characteristics of a strategy

Source: data processing and adaptation after [26]

In [26], Tregoe & Zimmerman categorize strategy according to a set of characteristics (Fig. 10).

Knorr adds to this set of strategy components, a focus on services, the end consumer, market segments, and targeted geographic areas to apply the strategy, [27].

A strategy, to be well founded, must be guided by a model that reflects the principles of governance, culture, systems, and processes of a state. At the base of the components of a strategy stand correct and thorough planning and design, thoroughly created and documented actions, which can benefit from adequate support to promote and implement it.

Thus, Fig. 11 graphically illustrates that the strategy needs to be based on these principles.

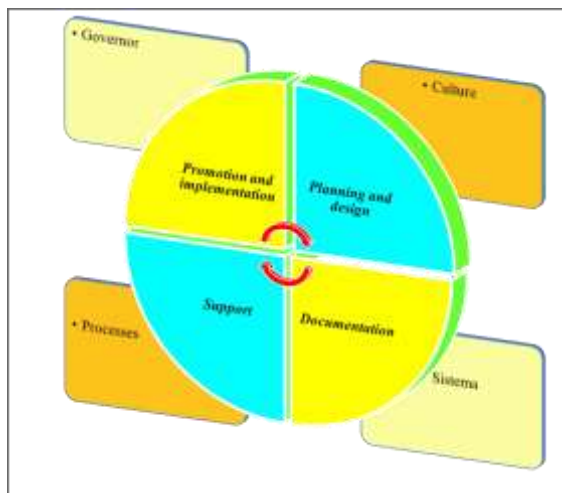


Fig. 11: The fundamental principles on which a strategy is based

Source: adaptation after [28]

Analysing tourism in specialized literature through its complexity and forms, one can notice that it includes a wide set of services directly subordinated to the tourism sector, or other areas of a state's economy such as transport, agriculture, food, human resources, etc. For this reason, both the advantages and the limits of the other branches of the economy influence directly or indirectly the situation of Romanian tourism.

To counteract the effects that influence tourism, including the effects of the resilience of the tourism economic crisis, Romania drafted, elaborated, and initiated a series of strategic acts that combined efforts of both the tourism industry and the partner economic sectors, the desire being that of developing Romanian tourism as much as possible. Thus, among the most important documents, the following can be highlighted:

- * The Master Plan for the Development of National Tourism 2007-2026, [29]
- * The strategy for creating and promoting the national tourism brand, [30]
- * Master Plan for the development of spa tourism, [31]
- * The national strategy for the development of ecotourism, [32].

The strategic directions expressed in the Master Plan are reproduced in the following areas that complement the efforts to develop sustainable tourism:

- * research and statistics;
- * policies to be implemented, orientation and adaptation of tourism legislation;

- * development of human resources;
- * planning and developing tourism infrastructure in the country;
- * adaptation and modernization of information services;
- * promoting tourist destinations in general and authentic ones in particular;
- * environment – proactive conservation actions;
- * investment policy and decision-making management.

The strategy to promote the national tourist brand came as a result of the fact that Romania, as a tourist destination, was not promoted in an efficient and integrated way on an international level by national, regional, and local authorities (NTA – National Tourism Authority, 2015).

The project included five stages, [33]:

- 1) analysis of the tourist image and potential;
- 2) analysis of competitors and competitive advantages;
- 3) strategy and positioning;
- 4) creating the design and the slogan;
- 5) brand strategy and communication.

This brand strategy aimed at the exploration and development of unique experiences, at less known and visited places.

The official launch of Romania's tourism brand took place on July 29, 2010, during the Shanghai Exhibition. The brand was catalogued by communication, branding, and tourism specialists as "common", "ambiguous", and "limiting", far from reaching its goal, [34].

The Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism (M.D.R.T. in 2011) considered the logo (Fig. 12) to be, from a visual point of view, "fresh, inspired by one of the strongest symbols of the Romanian people" and in line with the world trends of "reorientation towards nature, discovery, conservation", [34].



Fig. 12: The logo of the tourism brand of Romania
Source: [35]

Thus, it is necessary to describe the brand elements (Table 2).

Table 2. The logo and slogan of the tourism brand of Romania

No. Crt.	Name	Characterization
1.	Isotype: Leaf	It represents the basic principle of nature, it can occasionally be associated with the mountainous areas, and the blue line represents the importance of water and the Danube river.
2.	Logo: Romania	Written in characters imitating handwriting, having simple, friendly and optimistic personalities. The lines are curved to recall the Carpathians and the shapes of natural landscapes.
3.	Colours: Green	A range of green, natural colours represents the natural richness of forests, countryside and mountains. In the middle, the circumflex diacritic mark is characteristic of the Romanian language. It has a bow shape with warm colours to create contrast and vibrancy.
4.	Slogan: Explore the Carpathian Garden	The tagline is placed at the bottom of the image, written in a more common, green font, and slanted to the right. The Carpathians Garden promotes the country's strongest tourist asset according to market research. The theme of the explorer indicates the targeted type of traveler.

Source: adaptation after M.D.R.T., „România – explorați Grădina Carpaților. Valori de referință și identitate vizuală”, [34, 36]

The attributes and benefits of the tourism brand are shown in table 3.

Table 3. Brand attributes and benefits

No. Crt.	Attributes	Benefits
1.	Tangible attributes	The Carpathian Mountains, intact nature and wild landscapes, Latin-Byzantine history and culture, the Danube Delta and a large part of the Danube River, traditions kept alive, UNESCO world heritage sites.
2.	Intangible attributes	Authenticity/originality, mystery/spirituality, purity, hospitality, and honesty.
3.	Emotional benefits	Positive surprises, connecting with nature, respect for people/self-esteem, health and relaxation, contact with people, feeling brave/adventurous.
4.	Rational benefits	Discovery/exploration, the simple and good life, experiencing living culture, contact with unspoiled nature, escape and slowing down safety.

Source: adaptation after [34]

The master plan for the development of spa tourism carried out an analysis of the current situation of the sector. Together with the involved stakeholders, it identified ways to improve spa tourism, as well as the sources of funding necessary for it (Master Plan for the Development of Spa Tourism, Phase 2, 2009), [37].

Spa tourism is considered to be "a form of tourism that requires a specialized infrastructure and equipment, a qualified staff, and the mandatory presence of elements of spa potential (mineral or thermal waters, salt pans, aerosols, etc.)", [38].

The Ministry of Health undertook a series of actions aimed at helping future measures on spa tourism and tested the therapeutic capacity of the natural factors within the spa resorts, but also promoted the obtained results. Localities with natural curative factors have received the status of the balneo-climatic resort, among them famous cities such as Băile Felix, Băile Herculane, Techirghiol, the town of Covasna, the commune of Amara, Sovata, Ocna Sibiului, Băile Govora, Băile Olănești and the area of Călimănești-Căciulata.

The first generally accepted definition, and the one that continues to be a valid definition, was given

by the International Ecotourism Society (IES) in 1991: "ecotourism is responsible travel in natural areas that preserves the environment and supports the well-being of the local community", [39].

"Any trip to isolated natural areas to enrich the understanding and appreciation of the ecological and cultural heritage, without causing their damage, falls under the term ecotourism", [40].

The strategy delimits the concepts regarding the term ecotourism and the fact that it is related to cultural tourism and rural tourism, being a link between the Master Plan for the Development of National Tourism, the National Strategy for Sustainable Development, and the strategies of local tourism development, especially those aimed at protected areas.

The general objective was to create the framework for the development of ecotourism at the national level, focusing mainly on protected areas, the aim being to maximize revenues from ecotourism activities and to provide value to a competitive tourism product, both internally, as well as externally.

Starting from the social and economic benefits and the general objective, the specific objectives aim at the regulation of the institutional framework, the improvement of the tourist infrastructure and the planning of the territory, the increase in the level of education and awareness of the importance of ecotourism, the importance of the development of human resources engaged in ecotourism, the local development and business, care and respect for the environment by preserving and protecting it and, last but not least, a very good marketing and promotion strategy for this type of tourism. The ecotourism development strategy from 2009, [41], was updated between September and December 2015, with vision, objectives, context, and applicability for the following period, 2016 – 2020 (National Ecotourism Development Strategy, 2015), [32].

The development of tourism in Romania must be an objective and a means of economic and social development in the context of the national policy of development and integration into European structures, [42].

In 2013, ten destinations were proposed by AER at the National Ecotourism Conference (2016), the first three destinations that aspired to this status were evaluated, two of which met the conditions and were officially recognized by NTA (National Tourism Association): Mara – Cosău – Creasta Cocosului (Maramureș county) and Zărnești – Piatra Craiului (Brașov county) (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13: The first ecotourism destinations officially recognized by NTA

Source: data processed in ArcGIS 10.5 by authors, [43]

Currently, the Romanian Ecotourism Association, in partnership with the National Tourism Authority, through the project "National network of ecotourism destinations - sustainable development tool", financed by SEE grants 2009 - 2014, within the NGO Fund in Romania, offers technical support for 10 micro-regions that want to become an ecotourism destination, [44].

The 10 areas included in this project are (Fig. 14), [44]:

1. Tușnad and surroundings
2. Mara – Cosău – Creasta Cocosului
3. The hills of Transylvania
4. Țara Dornelor
5. Țara Hațeg
6. Craiului Forest
7. The Danube Delta
8. Land of the Aurochs
9. Zărnești – Piatra Craiului
10. Mărginimea Sibiului.



Fig. 14: The ten destinations proposed by AER as ecotourism destinations

Source: data processed in ArcGIS 10.5 by authors, [43]

4 Conclusion

From our point of view, the economic crises that have affected the tourism sector represent situations characterized by a certain degree of instability and volatility at the local, regional and national levels. Thus, we can speak of uncertainty at the level of the markets (if we refer to a global crisis such as the one currently generated by coronavirus), and this includes the capital markets, the oil market, but also the labour market or the foreign exchange market.

The HORECA sector, which plays a fundamental role in the Romanian tourism economy, also had a very strong decrease, and as a negative effect of globalization, the Covid-19 pandemic determined that the March 2020 - March 2022 period to be one of the most difficult periods for the tourism sector.

In conclusion, we can say that the complex configuration of the territory and the history of the Romanian people offer a tourist potential of great variety and tourist value, recognized nationally and internationally.

Therefore, the natural framework of Romania, with its physical-geographical elements (landforms, geology, climate, river delta, hydrography, flora and fauna species) represent important resources, which trigger different tourist activities; the natural environment is a basic component of the tourist supply, which determines or influences the directions and structure of the tourism activity throughout the country.

From an economic point of view, tourism can be seen as a specific demand for goods and services, thus stimulating the development of other sectors of activity (agriculture, industry, transport, etc.). Detailing the previous aspects, it can be said that tourism contributes to the following:

- Increase in the gross domestic product;
- Creating new jobs in almost all branches of the national economy with which tourism is directly or indirectly related;
- Increasing the revenues of the state budget through the possibility of taxing some prosperous economic activities following the development of tourism;
- The volume of sales resulting from economic transactions;
- Trade development.

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Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)

Mirela Mazilu and Amalia Niță were responsible for planning the research activity and execution, realized the concept and organized the methodology of the study.

Ionuț-Adrian Drăguleasa was responsible for data processing using ArcGIS software in developing the maps, data analysis and literature review.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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Appendix 1

The overnight stays of tourists by nationality in different accommodation units (number of tourists)

Accommodation units	Tourists	2018	2019	2020
Hotels	Total	20935932	21785080	9963078
	Romanians	16429429	17321844	9092974
	Foreigners	4506503	4463236	870104
Tourist villas	Total	970413	1039641	593440
	Romanians	882625	958361	578194
	Foreigners	87788	81280	15246
Tourist guesthouses	Total	2229463	2324217	1201697
	Romanians	1995894	2087156	1162688
	Foreigners	233569	237061	39009
Agrotourism guesthouses	Total	2255286	2518605	1515305
	Romanians	2068888	2318252	1494216
	Foreigners	186398	200353	21089

Source: data processed by authors according to NIS, [17]

Appendix 2

The arrivals of tourists by nationality in different accommodation units (number of people)

Accommodation units	Tourists	2018	2019	2020
Hotels	Total	9004486	9274954	4116681
	Romanians	6606653	6994909	3718991
	Foreigners	2397833	2280045	397690
Tourist villas	Total	440497	463600	267338
	Romanians	398301	424127	260002
	Foreigners	42196	39473	7336
Tourist guesthouses	Total	1234295	1254476	654397
	Romanians	1114622	1133674	636920
	Foreigners	119673	120802	17477
Agrotourism guesthouses	Total	1173455	1272878	755436
	Romanians	1083662	1171790	745535
	Foreigners	89793	101088	9901

Source: data processed by authors according to NIS, [17]