

TOURISM SERVICES IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

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Abstract

Tourism services play an important role in the context of a sustainable economy, as they can contribute both to the economic prosperity of a destination and to the protection and conservation of natural and cultural resources. A responsible and sustainable approach within the tourism industry is fundamental to ensuring sustainable and equitable tourism in the long term. Sustainable tourism economy refers to the integrated and balanced approach to tourism development, which takes into account three fundamental dimensions: economic, social and ecological. The aim is to ensure that tourism development does not compromise natural and cultural resources, while contributing to improving the quality of life of local communities and generating income and jobs.

The socio-economic changes of the contemporary era have created and dynamically developed tourism. In turn, this sector of the world economy stimulates the development of other branches and economic activities, such as: transport, trade, information technologies, industry, construction. Tourist services represent those activities that aim to satisfy all the needs of tourists, both during the period of travel and in connection with it. Consequently, some of the activities that are part of the tourist service aim to cover common, everyday needs (rest, food), while others present characteristics specific to tourism. By its nature, tourist services must lead to the restoration of work capacity simultaneously with a pleasant and instructive spending of free time, and must also contribute to enriching the tourist's information, knowledge and skills, which imprints the character as an important tool in achieving a new quality of life.

Keywords: sustainable economy, tourism services, quality management, tourism service quality standards.

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MATERIAL AND METHOD

The observations, records and analyzes related to the given article were carried out through various observations, measurements and determinations. The research used the following methods of scientific research: theoretical generalization, scientific abstraction, system analysis, dialectical method of cognition (for researching the theoretical foundations of the financial potential of regions); system-structural analysis (when determining the system of indicators for assessing the financial potential of regions); graphic (to illustrate research results).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Services included in the tourist product:

- services related to passive pursuits, usually manifested in accommodation spaces:

reading, watching radio and TV programs, sleeping, hygiene;

- services related to semi-passive pursuits, such as those offered in restaurants, bars, treatment rooms, etc.;

- services related to semi-active pursuits: watching shows or sports events, visiting museums or exhibitions, walking;

- services related to active pursuits such as: sports, excursions and hiking, hunting or fishing, etc (Stănculescu, G. 2013).

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The characteristics of tourist services are found in the countless structuring concerns and in the variety of intersecting approaches. The services that ensure travel are made up of the services offered by travel agencies and tour operators, transport companies, hotels and other accommodation structures, food and leisure structures.

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Local researchers in the field of tourism Gribincea A., Dragalin I., Barcari Ig., specify that the organization of tourist activities is carried out by different economic agents in tourism. These are legal entities, owners of commercial companies with state, private, foreign, cooperative, mixed capital, family associations and individuals who provide services specific to this activity: hotel, and other similar services (Gribincea, A., Drăgălin, I., Barcari, I., 2016).

Tourism activity, including the provision of tourist services, represents an important component of the national economy.

Sustainable tourism services focus on the development of a destination's natural and cultural resources in a responsible manner. This involves promoting environmentally responsible tourism, protecting fragile ecosystems, conserving biodiversity, and supporting traditional cultural practices.

The complex nature of tourism services has specified the functions of their management at the management team level: forecasting, planning, organizing, functional execution, coordinating, controlling, and concluding.

These functions are vital in the evolution of tourism services management.

- Forecasting – establishes the objectives regarding the performance of the management activity, decisions on tasks, and some of the resources that will be used to achieve the objectives.

- Planning – applies the results of the forecast, collects the internal and external information base of the economic entity, clearly formulates the objectives and action plans at different levels.

- Organizing – establishes the achievement of the objectives in the internal and external information base of the economic entity.

- Functional execution – involves the delimitation and assignment of tasks, their grouping into compartments, the allocation of resources, the construction of the relational framework, the provision and use of feedback.

- Coordination – carries out the appropriate communications for the delegation of responsibilities, the creation of a climate of collaboration and the motivation of the personnel within the economic entity.

- Control – carries out the evaluation of the performances of economic entities in the tourism industry based on formal systems (operational, statistical, accounting.).

In economic entities operating in tourism, tourism services management performs the following functions:

- establishing objectives, which derive from the entity's mission;
- forming an appropriate organizational structure;
- completing the organizational chart with the most competent staff (personnel) possible;
- developing operational and strategic plans to achieve the established objectives;
- coordinating the activity of the employed staff;
- exercising operational control in all directions of tourism services.

In order to fulfill these functions, tourism services management presents a set of processes for influencing and directing the staff within the entity, as well as the establishment of the administrative-organizational framework; adjusting the legislative and regulatory framework to national, European and international requirements; ensuring decision-making transparency; public-private partnership; modernizing the system of training and professional development of staff; developing tourism infrastructure, creating and promoting tourist destinations.

From an economic point of view, the tourist is a consumer of goods and benefits from services; from his expenses and, implicitly, from the financial means resulting from the activity of the economic units of the tourism industry (transport, accommodation, food, entertainment, balneo-medical treatment, etc.). A part goes directly to these units in the form of profit and funds for the payment of salaries of workers employed in the respective units, another part enters the state or local budget in the form of taxes, duties, etc., and the third part is absorbed directly into other branches of the economy for the payment of products and goods delivered and services provided by these sectors for the needs of the tourism industry (Neacșu, N., Baron, P., Snak, 2006).

Recognising the fundamental role of tourism in the economy, the European Commission has adopted the Agenda for a sustainable and competitive European tourism, which states that, in the future, European tourism will focus on the quality of the tourist experience – tourists will realise that destinations that pay greater attention to the environment, their employees and local communities are more likely to show greater care for tourists. By integrating sustainability into their work, tourism stakeholders will safeguard the competitive advantages that make Europe the most attractive tourist destination in the world – they will protect its intrinsic diversity, as well as its variety of landscapes and cultures. By addressing sustainable development concerns in a socially

responsible manner, the tourism industry will also be able to offer innovative products and services of higher quality and value.

The most important aspect in the development of tourism is the regionalization of tourism services. In this regard, the European

Union countries play an essential role, being considered the most sought-after and most preferable destination in the world. Table 1 presents data on international inbound tourism in Europe for the period 2018-2024.

Table 1

European inbound international tourism indicators

Indicators	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total Visits (mil)	716,3	742,4	239,4	301,3	609,5	708,4	747,3
Fixed base growth rates (%)	100,0	103,64	33,42	42,06	85,09	98,90	104,3
Relative annual variation (%)	*	3,64	-67,75	25,85	102,29	16,23	5,49
Variația anuală absolută (mil.vizite)	*	26,1	-503,0	61,9	308,2	98,9	38,9
Fixed base growth rates (%)	100,0	102,04	43,59	57,48	96,50	115,78	127,9
Relative annual variation (%)	*	2,04	-57,25	31,84	67,88	19,97	10,53
Absolute annual change (USD billion)	*	11,35	-334,19	79,47	223,35	110,33	69,80
Expenses/visit (USD)	799	786	1042	1092	906	935	980

(Source: developed and calculated by the author)

Total international visits increased steadily between 2018 and 2019, reaching a peak of 742.4 million visits. In 2020, their number dropped dramatically to 239.4 million (-67.75%), due to travel restrictions imposed during the pandemic. Since 2021, the sector has started to recover, registering significant growth, reaching 609.5 million visits in 2022 and returning to pre-pandemic levels in 2023 (708.4 million). In 2024, the number of visits is expected to reach 747.3 million, exceeding the 2019 level.

The evolution of total tourism expenditure shows a moderate increase from 572.4 to 584.1 billion USD between 2018 and 2019 (+2.04%). In 2020, expenditure fell sharply to 249.5 billion USD (-57.25%). In 2021-2022, there was a gradual recovery to 552.4 billion USD (+67.88% in 2022). In 2023, expenditure continued to increase to 662.7 billion USD (+19.97%), and for 2024 an increase to 732.5 billion USD (+10.53%) is estimated.

Currently, tourism is facing major challenges, which represent opportunities that should not be missed. The tourism industry must adapt to the developments of society, as a factor influencing demand in the tourism sector, to face the constraints imposed by the current structure of the sector, which is in a dynamic fluctuation with a specific character in the economic and social context.

High-quality tourism services, offered in a competitive manner, attract tourists and determine them to choose a particular destination or tour operator. Through satisfying the immediate needs of consumers, they become strategic components in promoting tourism that is fair and efficient from an ecological, economic and social point of view, respectively tourists seek memorable and satisfying experiences, and quality services will

determine them to return in the future and to recommend the destination or tourist business to other potential tourists.

High quality tourism services can also be associated with a strong commitment to social responsibility and culture. Destinations and tourism businesses that promote ethical values, the involvement of local communities and the protection of cultural heritage will attract tourists interested in sustainable and responsible tourism. However, this phenomenon directly contributes to increasing tourist satisfaction, to their loyalty and, implicitly, to strengthening the image of a sustainable destination on the global market, thus the development of quality and competitive tourism services becomes a necessary condition for transforming tourism into a real engine of the sustainable economy.

The quality of tourism services must be understood as a transversal element, which influences all levels of an organization's functioning and which must be integrated into its internal culture. In this perspective, the provision of quality services does not only aim to immediately satisfy the needs and expectations of customers, but also implies assuming a responsibility towards the community, cultural heritage and the natural environment.

An essential conclusion drawn from the theoretical analysis is the existence of a direct and dynamic link between the level of service quality and the competitiveness of tourist destinations. In a global market marked by intense competition and an increase in consumer demands, tourist entities that adopt a strategic orientation towards quality and that respect the principles of sustainable development differentiate themselves through their ability to attract responsible tourists, aware of the impact of their activities on the environment and society.

This differentiation contributes to strengthening the reputation of destinations and stimulating local economic development by attracting a constant and valuable flow of visitors.

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