

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM. CASE STUDY: CONSTANTA METROPOLITAN AREA

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Abstract. Recently, there has been an interest in stimulating the development role of urban centers in Romania, in the context of regional and spatial planning. The accession of Romania to the European Union and the need to absorb EU funds were the main reasons behind the emergence of the legal framework for the development of metropolitan areas as urban growth poles. Constanta, situated on the Black Sea coast, is an important tourist city of the country which has developed as a center of trade between East and West, with good prospects in terms of sustainable tourism development because it's the fourth largest port in Europe, has an international airport, inland waterway, and a functional highway. Tourism is an important economic component, which from the perspective of using the dimension of sustainable development - economic sustainability can become a key factor for a balanced metropolitan development. The purpose of this paper is to show the necessity to develop a strategy for tourism in the Constanta Metropolitan Area, strategy which could contribute to achieving a high level of economic and social development, a high standard of living for all its inhabitants.

Key words: metropolitan area, urban growth pole, strategy, sustainable tourism, Constanta.

1. Introduction

The last decade has been a period of active urban development for cities in Romania. Many of big cities have found innovative ways to create an attractive city with a balanced development for their inhabitants. For large cities, the

solution for a balanced development was to support successful initiatives following the recommendations of the Leipzig Charter, i.e. the increased use of integrated urban development policies with special attention to disadvantaged areas within the city as a whole.

In this context, tourism has been included in urban development policies, becoming a key factor in many regional processes of the large cities. The reasons which explain the presence of tourism in urban strategies are the economic and social development as well as the improvement of public services.

The expansion and the development of tourist resorts on almost the entire seaside on the south coast of Constanta, the existence of urban cores in its suburban area (Năvodari, Medgidia, Basarabi, Ovidiu, Techirghiol and Eforie) and the convergence centers of intermodal transport (the Mihail Kogălniceanu international airport, the Midia Năvodari and Constanta South Agigea ports, and the railway nodes from Palas-Constanta and Valul lui Traian) determined the forming of a quasi-continuous urban axis between Năvodari and Mangalia turning the port into both an industrial and a touristic one. The intense urbanization of the entire adjacent coastline and the need for close local cooperation due to the common unitary functionality of the entire area were the main arguments for the establishment of a metropolitan area of Constanta (Săgeată, 2006).

Situated in South East of Romania, in Dobrogea, on Romanian coastal strip of the Black Sea, Constanta Metropolitan Area has a population of approx. 630 000 inhabitants, being the fifth largest urban agglomeration in the country, after the capital Bucharest and represents the first administrative structure of its kind in Romania, made up of 14 municipalities (Fig. 1): municipality of Constanta, towns: Năvodari, Eforie, Ovidiu, Murfatlar, Techirghiol and communes: Mihail Kogălniceanu, Cumpăna, Valul lui Traian, Lumina, Tuzla, Agigea, Corbu and Poarta

Albă (Integrated Development Plan for Urban Growth Pole Constanta, Constanta Metropolitan Area 2009-2015).



Fig. 1. Constanta Metropolitan Area

Localities affiliated to the Constanta Metropolitan Area are concentrated around the nucleus, namely the municipality of Constanta, the most important tourist city in the country which determines the interdependence processes. With a history of 2,500 years, Constanta has developed as a commercial node between East and West. Most of the industrial and commercial activities of the city are supported by the port of Constanta, the largest port on the Black Sea and the fourth as importance in Europe.

Taking advantage of the positioning on the Black Sea, most communities in the metropolitan area have tourism as their main economic orientation. In the Constanta Metropolitan Area there are five resorts: Năvodari, Mamaia, Eforie Nord, Eforie Sud and Techirghiol, which meet the demands of all age groups and cater for the most elitist tastes, providing expensive sandy beaches, recreational areas, amusement parks, clubs, restaurants and a large capacity of

accommodation in spas, treatment resorts and hotels. Tourism in the Constanta Metropolitan Area is facilitated by the existence of the Mihail Kogălniceanu International Airport, which provides connections to major European cities.

Setting up the Constanta Metropolitan Area meant providing an effective administrative tool to promote joint projects for the integrated development of the area and mitigate disparities in the development between localities, it was conceived as a facilitator to attract investment and structural funds, a platform for collaboration between the territorial administrative components and a development nucleus for public services.

This paper attempts to analyze the growth poles policy in the context of European Union cohesion policy, the need for a strategic approach to tourism using Constanta Metropolitan Area as a case study.

2. Theory and Methodology

2.1. Development of metropolitan areas as urban growth poles

Accession of Romania to the European Union and the necessity absorption of EU funds according to the recommendations of the Leipzig Charter: „*member states have the opportunity to use European Structural Funds for important programs integrated urban development*”, were the main reasons underlying emergence of the legal framework for the development of metropolitan areas (Burtea, 2013).

The Territorial Development Strategy of Romania 2007-2030, the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013 in accordance with the European Union cohesion policy established the development of existing or emerging

growth poles as a priority objective of the balanced territorial development of the country.

To this purpose, the Government approved Memorandum on the network to support integrated development of growth poles in Romania, a document that supports the development of cities, so that they can achieve the basic urban functions, thus creating conditions for a balanced polycentric development of the country and affirmation of the principle of solidarity, the core principle of European Union cohesion policy.

The establishment of metropolitan areas meet a necessity or an opportunity stemming from the organic evolution of cities. Many strategic issues of urban planning at an European level can only be treated directly at the level of metropolitan areas which would facilitate the development of production, exchange and consumption of goods in the European Union. This is basically represented by the formation of metropolitan areas as growth poles and regions, developing within Europe, which are to be included both in national and transnational strategies (Dincă and Dumitrică, 2010).

The development of metropolitan areas facilitates the integrate spatial planning at the regional level so that it diminishes the disparities between the center and the peripheral area caused by the dispersion or the marginalization generated by the isolation of settlements lacking opportunities. The removal or mitigation of such imbalances would lead to the improvement of the quality of life of the population (Dincă and Dumitrică, 2010).

According to Law no. 351/2001 approving the National Spatial Plan, the

metropolitan area is defined as: "area formed by association based on voluntary partnership between major urban centers (Romania's capital and rank I cities) and urban and rural localities in the immediate area, at distances up to 30 km, from which have developed cooperative relationships at multiple levels". The same law includes in urban centers the Capital city, together with 11 municipalities of rank I: Bacău, Brașov, Brăila and Galați - defined as forming the only urban system in Romania, Cluj Napoca, Constanța, Craiova, Iași, Oradea, Ploiești and Timișoara.

Growth poles represented by seven major urban centers (Brașov, Cluj-Napoca, Constanța, Craiova, Iași, Ploiești and Timișoara) and their areas of influence and urban development poles (Fig. 2) were determined by GD no. 1149/2008, with its subsequent amendments and supplements, which designate the national growth poles that should constitute a priority of investment through community and national funding programmes.

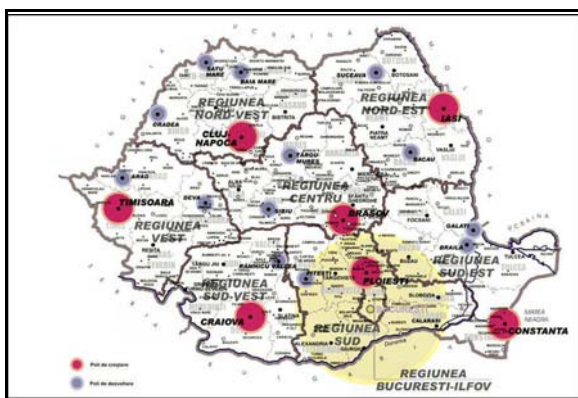


Fig. 2. Growth poles and development poles in Romania, according to GD no. 1149/2008

The growth pole represents a point of economic increase, commonly of an urban area which benefits from the economies of the agglomeration areas, and should interact with the surrounding

areas leading to prosperity, spreading from the core to the periphery.

The metropolitan area represents an environment conducive to the application and development of what the French economist Francois Perroux called "the theory of growth poles". According to the theory of growth poles, the emergence and development of metropolitan areas appears as an unbalanced process, but at the same time integrated in the hierarchy of the space of the development region, in which a specific number of economic units play a crucial role, thus determining them to stand out (Dincă and Dumitrică, 2010).

By creating "growth poles" there is the possibility to attract full capacity of existing development in the area, to facilitate development activities even the appearance of an emerging urban center that has its own activity.

Three major components can be identified in the structure of metropolitan areas: "cultural identity, a social and economic basis necessary to support the development of the area and a form of making power decision" these are just some of the elements necessary for creating public and private "coalitions of development" (Keating, 2008), with territory, management and development strategies.

Metropolitan areas as municipal cooperation structures result from the potential complementarity of the two types of local administrative structures: the ones with an advanced degree of urbanization, regional convergence represented by nuclei of regional and departmental convergence and those represented by communes including their adjacent suburban villages. The city extends beyond its administrative limits,

the rural area evolves from polarized space to integrated space. Intermunicipal cooperation in the periurban area becomes essential for integrated regional development (Săgeată, 2006; Buhociu and Zugravu, 2013).

Thus, metropolitan areas constituted in Romania were created as "intercommunal partnership structures polarized by an urban core" (Săgeată, 2006).

Setting up the Intercommunity Development Association "Constanta Metropolitan Area" with a public utility status, which undertakes and puts into practice all competences and duties, rights and obligations relating to the limited scope of a public service that were transferred, in the interest and on behalf of local associated authorities, aims to: "*sustainable development of administrative territorial units that make up the association and all their surrounding areas, through joint implementation of development projects of regional or local interest and the provision of common public services*".

2.2. Developing a strategy for sustainable tourism

Tourism, if it has sector policies and strategies, can become an important component of the economy, a growth factor with huge potential that can cause significant changes in the territorial area, contributing to the sustainable growth of a region.

Through "growth" we understand a complex process that involves the entire economic system, determined by the results of economic activity and is the sole factor that ensures long-term economic success of each state.

The concept of sustainable development belongs to the new theory of economic

development, itself a relatively new branch of the general economic theory, that emerged and was particularised in the '50s -'60 (Dincă and Dumitrică, 2010).

The best known definition of sustainable development is one formulated in 1987 by the Brundtland Report: "*sustainable development is development that aims to satisfy needs of the present without compromising the possibility of future generations to meet their own needs*".

Economic sustainability entails the need to elaborate economic policies unaltered by the insignificant economic variations that may occur in the long-term economic strategies (Jenks and Jones, 2010; Dincă and Dumitrică, 2010).

Since 1991 the concept of sustainable tourism has been defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, World Federation for the Protection of Nature, the European Federation of National Parks and Natural, as "*all forms of tourism development, management and marketing of tourism that respects the natural integrity, social and economic environment, ensure the exploitation of natural and cultural resources for future generations*".

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) the sustainable tourism concept believes that "*the rules and practice of sustainable tourism development principles are applicable to all forms of tourism, in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various specialized sectors of tourism*". Thus, sustainable tourism takes all forms and activities in the tourism industry, including conventional mass tourism, cultural tourism, mountain tourism, coastal tourism, health tourism, business tourism, rural tourism, etc.

In reference works there is a definition that sustainable tourism represents "*that type of tourism development activities which focus on the present resource harnessing so as to hold its ability to reproduce thereof in the future*" (Stănciulescu *et al.*, 1998).

Sustainable tourism enable the development of recreational and tourism activities in a country, region or tourist destination, taking into account basic principles of sustainable development, which shows respect for the environment, for people, for local culture and economy of the tourist reception region (Law, 1992; Jugănar, 2007).

In this sense, the principles of sustainable tourism development refer to the following aspects (Stănciulescu, 2004):

- specific policy decisions and implementation of sustainable tourism development should be initiated with their own local community and enjoy broad participation, partnerships and cooperative actions between social groups involved;
- policies must be integrated and based on the recognition of the interdependence tourism policies with those specific to other related areas (transport, labor etc.);
- implementation of these policies should be made taking into account the existing constraints in practical work, which involves the choice of short-term goals, periodically reevaluated;
- the consequences on the natural and human environment must be taken into account, when problems arise regarding their effects, and such risks must be avoided.

Based on these considerations, developing a strategy is a complex

concept with a long-term planning which refers to the final targets, along with allocated resources to achieve assumed mission.

World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines the most effective approaches for the development of sustainable tourism strategies and policies. Taking into account the concept of sustainable development and the special position of tourism, WTO has made twelve objectives for the sustainable tourism agenda. These are the following:

- 1) *Economic Viability*: To ensure the viability and competitiveness of tourism destinations and enterprises, so that they are able to continue to prosper and deliver benefits in the long term.
- 2) *Local Prosperity*: To maximize the contribution of tourism to the economic prosperity of the host destination, including the proportion of visitor spending that is retained locally.
- 3) *Employment Quality*: To strengthen the number and quality of local jobs created and supported by tourism, including the level of pay, conditions of service and availability to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability or in other ways.
- 4) *Social Equity*: To seek a widespread and fair distribution of economic and social benefits from tourism throughout the recipient community, including improving opportunities, income and services available to the poor.
- 5) *Visitor Fulfillment*: To provide a safe, satisfying and fulfilling experience for visitors, available to all without discrimination by gender, race, disability or in other ways.
- 6) *Local Control*: To engage and empower local communities in

planning and decision making about the management and future development of tourism in their area, in consultation with other stakeholders.

- 7) *Community Wellbeing*: To maintain and strengthen the quality of life in local communities, including social structures and access to resources, amenities and life support systems, avoiding any form of social degradation or exploitation.
- 8) *Cultural Richness*: To respect and enhance the historic heritage, authentic culture, traditions and distinctiveness of host communities.
- 9) *Physical Integrity*: To maintain and enhance the quality of landscapes, both urban and rural, and avoid the physical and visual degradation of the environment.
- 10) *Biological Diversity*: To support the conservation of natural areas, habitats and wildlife, and minimize damage to them.
- 11) *Resource Efficiency*: To minimize the use of scarce and non-renewable resources in the development and operation of tourism facilities and services.
- 12) *Environmental Purity*: To minimize the pollution of air, water and land and the generation of waste by tourism enterprises and visitors.

Adopting a sustainable tourism strategy is the responsibility of the public sector through policy that should develop a strong economic dimension. However, given the formulation of objectives, it can be concluded that for implementation of policies and plans it is necessary to involve both its responsibility and that of the private sector, of the local communities which are part of the sustainable development of the region

(Bramwell and Lane, 2010 Devine and Devine, 2011).

3. Results and Discussions

Case study: the contribution of tourism to the development of Constanta Metropolitan Area

The method used in this study was to analyze the existing official documents as a basis for developing a sustainable tourism strategy that can enable a complex development, into an integrated conception of Constanta Metropolitan Area.

The complexity of the problems in metropolitan areas should take into account the specific territory (Krueger and Buckingham, 2012), and the Black Sea coastline is one of the oldest and most important traditional tourist region, which provides various forms and types of tourist areas. The urban centre of Constanta, located on the Black Sea coast, in the south-east of Romania, in the historical region Dobrogea, is the oldest attested city in Romania. Constanta is an area with favourable prospects in terms of economic growth and territorial development because it is the fourth largest port in Europe, has the potential for food and agriculture, and renewable energy, it is an important travel destination, it has an international airport, inland waterway, a functional highway.

A great economic development potential of the tourism sector of Constanta Metropolitan Area is the port that offers optimal conditions for berthing of cruise ships, river and passengers ships. Here foreign tourists have the opportunity to benefit from summer tourism, balneary tourism, leisure and recreation and water sports tourism, business tourism, cruise and itinerary tourism, as well as a

multitude of sights combining historical vestiges with contemporary architecture.

Transforming Constanta Metropolitan Area in a quality tourist destination, based on its natural and cultural patrimony, to correspond to the European Union standards for the provision of products and services, represents one of the biggest challenges this area faces in order to achieve sustainable development of the tourism sector at a superior rate to other tourist destinations in Europe (Popescu, 2008; Popescu and Corbos, 2010).

Adopting a strategy in this area will have positive effects on the economic growth of the "Constanta National Pole Growth" in the context of balanced polycentric development of the country, as well as in line with the strategy of the territorial development of Europe (Patrichi, 2011).

In analyzing the newest trends in Europe of urban development it is recommended that strategic plans for priority are based on identifying the factors that influence metropolitan development and provide opportunities for future development.

Growth poles of large urban centers should be engines of regional development for themselves and their areas of influence which could provide citizens with a high standard of living at the lowest possible cost. Therefore, it is necessary for the development policy of the growth pole to be integrated into the national economy and contribute to its development by creating jobs.

Lately, tourism activity has become a strategic factor for the economic recovery of regions and countries, even during the economic crisis and fiscal problems in Europe that threatens to undermine the

achievements during the period of growth.

There is a major concern across Europe about reducing the gaps between the levels of economic development of different regions. In the Europe 2020 strategy "*An European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*", launched on March 3, 2010 by the European Commission, three mutually reinforced priorities for economic growth are proposed:

- smart growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation;
- sustainable growth: promoting a more efficient economy in terms of greener and more competitive resource use;
- inclusive growth: promoting an economy with a high rate of employment, ensuring social and territorial cohesion.

Cohesion or regional policy of the European Union provides a framework for financing a wide range of projects and investments, in order to encourage growth in the Member States and their regions.

In the absence of a tourism sector strategy, we analyzed the "*Integrated Development Plan of the Growth Pole*" Stage 2009-2015, which is based on a portfolio of programs and projects for funding from the Regional Operational Programme, Priority 1 - "Supporting the sustainable development of cities - growth poles", the main strategic objectives:

- 1) *The increase of its economic and social role by adopting a polycentric approach in order to stimulate a more balanced development of Constanta and its area of influence.* Programs of this objective aim at reducing the development discrepancies between the municipality of Constanta and the

other localities that fall within its area of influence, and focuses on socio-economic attractiveness of the public domain in the area of influence of the Constanta growth pole through: rehabilitation and increase of tourism attractiveness of the peninsular zone of Constanta; rehabilitation and modernization of the streets and roads between metropolitan localities area; rehabilitation, upgrade and construction of urban public spaces in all the areas of social, economic and touristic interest; rehabilitation, modernization planning and construction of green areas and improvement of public services.

- 2) *Development of transport infrastructure and increasing accessibility both inside and outside of localities.* Programs have been proposed which aim to improve the quality of passenger and freight transport and related modernization through: rehabilitation, upgrade and construction of urban public infrastructure (including passages) within and between localities of Constanta Metropolitan Area; fluidization and decongestion of traffic in Constanta Metropolitan Area.
- 3) *Increase the contribution of tourism to the Constanta National Pole Growth through tourism potential and cultural recovery.* There are many historical and cultural sights, whose economic potential is not exploited properly. The local administrative structures of the growth pole have set as their goals the conservation, restoration and sustainable exploitation of the cultural heritage, as well as the development of touristic potential through investment in tourism infrastructure, whether it is about cultural dimension or the sports and leisure on this economic field.

- 4) *Increasing competitiveness in order to stimulate local businesses* by improving access for the private sector and economic activities which generate high added value. Being aware of the importance of investment and increased access to resources and equipment, it is suggested to achieve a modern center of business consulting, especially in tourism, thereby attracting private capital in actions aimed at the satisfaction of certain needs of the local community and the creation of new jobs.

Through the Regional Operational Programme 2007-2013 urban infrastructure and social infrastructure projects are funded in areas declared growth poles. Investments proposed for funding by public administration authorities constituted on *Intercommunity Development Association "Constanta Metropolitan Area"* aim to restore the historical center of Constanta, to modernize public infrastructure in Mamaia, to widen the route Mamaia-Năvodari and Năvodari-Lumina, build the Tomis Riviera. They also target small projects (rehabilitation and/or upgrading of streets, boulevards, squares, parks, sidewalks, walkways, promenade areas of tourist resorts, rehabilitation of green areas, rehabilitation and modernization of public lighting) but with an impact on the cultural heritage, the urban and social infrastructure of the localities.

From the analysis of programs and projects accomplishing the vision of development of the metropolitan area, regarding European funds and private investors from the perspective of sustainable tourism, the following conclusions can be highlighted:

- Policy in this sector aims to increase socio-economic attractiveness of the

tourism sector of Constanta Metropolitan Area as an urban growth pole;

- There is concern for the development of local infrastructure including public services and transportation;
- Harnessing the natural and cultural resources and using them as tourist potential;
- Creating opportunities for local economic development and job growth through tourism potential of the resort.

Starting from the vision of developing the "Constanta National Pole Growth" which has as its main objective *"to make the Constanta Metropolitan Area a competitive multifunctional center of Romania, the country's most important tourist and main economic polarization in the Black Sea region"*, as well as from the analysis performed, in our opinion the tourism development strategy should focus on expanding the area of transport infrastructure, the development of tourist structures, the modernization of infrastructure and diversification of the accommodation, the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage, the development of promotional marketing strategies, diversifying tourism products, improving services and proper promotion.

In this context, a complex development in an integrated concept with socio-economic efficiency is possible while applying a systematic approach to problems. That is why in the elaboration of the tourism sector strategy (Mazilu, 2011), one should take into account the specific aspects of the tourist area, with a decisive role in its development:

- resource exploitation and development of the area in a systematic manner, in which all

components are integrated in development projects;

- establishment of functional connections between subsystems of the same area through cooperation and partnership in order to achieve investment to ensure economic growth and social development;
- preservation and improvement of the conditions and quality of environment by creating infrastructure and endowments in accordance with the rules and regulations of environmental protection;
- achievement of a balance in the development of tourist facilities and the capacity of the natural and human environment, not to cause degradation and rapid depletion of tourism resources;
- careful exploitation of resorts, towns and tourist spots, to avoid congestion and prevent placement of other industrial, agricultural and transport investments which may jeopardize tourism, threatening the very function of these centers of touristic interest.

4. Conclusions

Territorial cohesion is a very important topic for current and future development of the "Constanta National Pole Growth" from the perspective of efficient use of European funds for Romania.

Sustainable tourism development based on large projects that facilitate economic growth is a viable solution as well as premises for achieving a high level of economic and social development.

Constanta is a city that can become a European metropolis because it has a growing touristic area that can generate a rapidly growing economy and a high standard of living for all its inhabitants. Therefore, developing a strategy for the

tourism sector is the ability to achieve objectives in a coherent framework that reflects the growth potential of its metropolitan area, targeting localities that have tourism as the main economic orientation.

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