

Tourism Nowadays - Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

People always have mentioned the fact that economy is constantly changing, and the economic environment should be as flexible as it can and ready to easily embrace any type of change. This phenomenon of the change is probably more present and more visible than ever, especially in what tourism is concerned. Bearing in mind the context shaped by the emergence of the pandemic, we must admit that all the forecasts, the hypotheses and the growth stimulating strategies that the tourism specialists previously came up with, are slowly turning into something obsolete in the newly expressed reality. The current scientific literature does not hold the cover page anymore in what the evolution of the tourism area is concerned, therefore this sector of tourism stands for its need for support, engagement and the rethinking of the strategies and the instruments that have been developed so far. In this respect, this paper aims at reaffirming the concept of tourism, but also at placing it in the actual context.

Key words: tourism, pandemic, crisis, unemployment, business administration.

J.E.L. classification: M100

1. Introduction

The actual crisis generated by the emergence of the pandemic worldwide has exposed more than ever the sector of services, leading it to an unprecedented fall. In spite of this, this phenomenon has to be perceived as being something temporary, and the current period should be seen as a time for reorganizing and adapting to the newest tendencies. The industry of tourism, which is now in a stagnation state, will reconquer its status of being an activity that generates significant incomes both locally, and worldwide.

It is plain to see that not all touristic activities will survive and overcome this period, because, from the consumer's point of view, this will count as an opportunity to choose precisely those touristic units, which are capable of offering a set of services no matter the context. Thereby, we will come once more back to the Darwinian principle, according to which the survivors will be the ones who can best adapt to their environment.

In order to make a comparison regarding the negative impact of such a significant phenomenon, we could analyze the impact that Ebola had upon tourism in Sierra Leone; in 2013-2014 the arrivals had decreased with 50%, whereas the pre-epidemic peak of the arrivals has never been reached ever since. The general GDP immediately dropped with 1,6% as a consequence of these imbalances.

2. Literature Review

Tourism has always counted as one of the most important industries worldwide and one of the most significant employers in the whole world, by reducing a series of imbalances at a higher scale, ensuring the balanced money currency and leveling away the inequalities among different countries or geographic areas which have had a different development. *Tourism has become a success story of modern times* (Simion, 2013). Except for the economic advantages, tourism has always played a

significant part when it comes to solving some social problems such as the ones concerning the job deployment or the decrease of unemployment. The tourism industry has become the appanage of the developed countries, the ones that devise their economy based on the activities from the third sector. *Tourism is a Triptych activity: economical, social and holistic* (Petrescu, 2010).

In order to have a better understanding of the impact, which the tourism industry has upon global economy, we could analyze the data offered by WTTC. Hence tourism offers a job to 1 out of 10 people worldwide and generates 10,3% of the global GDP. WTTC also came up with a comparison between the tourism growth and the economic increasment generally speaking, thus in 2019 tourism had an increase of 3,5%, whereas the global economic growth counted only 2,5%. Tourism is obviously also a very important employer because it is the ally of the most significant governments when it comes to fighting unemployment. In this context, we should understand that economy cannot be perceived anymore as having nothing to do with tourism, and that economy will not be able to recover without investing in tourism.

3. Tourism - Before and After

Apart from the countless gains that come with tourism, one of the most important aspects refers to the fact that the services, especially tourism, cannot be perceived outside the human resource. The activity per se means human interaction, comfort, leisure, leaving the daily activities and technology behind, thus the human factor becomes extremely important in what the achievement of the touristic service is concerned.

Customer orientation starts from the front-office service, respective from the services provided by the staff placed in direct contact with all the customers of the hotel unit (Oltean, 2013). If until now this was perceived as being a significant advantage, because the labor force was not threatened by industrialization or by the technological progress, which would be unable to replace the need for human interaction, not to mention the job reliability, the predictability of the sector that is in a continuous development, attracting a significant labor force; at the present time the context comes with an unprecedented turnover of all the theories referring to the tertiary sector, especially to the area of tourism.

There is a positive aspect that can be spotted in the fact that all accommodation units have a new start, a restart, a starting point, thus cancelling the differences between them caused by the seniority, notoriousness, prestige, the level of investment or size. We will witness a change of vision in that the way of making tourism is concerned, because the larger accommodation units could be perceived as being risky because of the large number of tourists they accept, whereas the smaller units will count as being safer. Nonetheless, there will be certain rules concerning a certain number of tourists accepted, thus leading to genuine imbalances for this type of units which will have to face a lack of coverage of the number of available rooms, by also generating higher fixed costs, which will prove to be harder to cover.

Under these circumstances, my opinion is that the smaller units will draw more of the clients' attention upon them, who will prefer isolated and smaller locations, with a lower touristic potential. Good opportunities will also be possible for apartments or the villas rented as a guesthouse accommodation, and the investments would mainly be in single cabins and not in great hotels. This way, the small entrepreneurs will have their advantages, especially the local entrepreneurs, who do not have the means of putting together touristic cities, but can only deal with small units. This is, therefore, an opportunity for the local economy to become stronger when the usual threats are no longer present.

Tourists will no longer choose hotels that offer various facilities such as swimming pools, spas or other vacationlands that would imply the presence of a large number of people, but will rather go for outdoor activities such as hiking, cycling, exploring nature and other less familiar areas.

Another aspect that will become very important will be the one referring to the sanitary conditions offered by each location; hence, the customers will no longer take into consideration that much the means of entertainment, but rather the aspects concerning the sanitation safety. However, this aspect will have certain connotations at a higher scale, because not only the accommodation unit has to comply with certain standards, but also the area to which it belongs, or even the country where it is located. Therefore, the countries with a good sanitation system will

have a solid advantage compared to the countries that have a different sanitation system. The current pandemic did nothing but to point out a series of negative aspects, weaknesses and shortages of the countries with a significant touristic potential such as Italy or Spain. A poor medical system will surely lead society to stigmatizations, negative tags, and uncertainty. The tourists' anxiety rate and this kind of negative images will lead to the decrease of the number of requests.

In this respect, each and every country whose economy is mainly based on tourism or that wants to reach a certain level of development with the help of touristic activities, will have to bear in mind not only the development of the tourism industry, but also the development of the health system, which will be closely related to the touristic activity. The importance that the health system bears at the moment will have a significant echo in the minds of the potential customers for a long period of time and many of them will have to put many efforts into improving as much as possible the negative image built throughout this period because of the media.

Another aspect refers to merchandising the all-inclusive offers, which inevitably apply the technique of the open bar. It is hard to believe that such offers that usually mean bringing trays with food to a large number of tourists will ever be preferred for the next holidays. Although it is a very profitable option for the hotel-keepers to cover the costs, it will be rejected by the tourists, who are reluctant to having any activities in common. It could also be a customer emancipation, because they will challenge a series of procedures, customs, and service types or will refuse any type of tourism that could endanger their sanitation safety.

Another request of the tourists will definitely refer to the staff who should display efficiency, safety, confidence. Thus tourism and the sector of services will no longer be an outlet for the unprepared labor force, but, on the contrary, it will be a sector where, apart from the professional training, will also take into consideration other conditions concerning the physical appearance, vocabulary and even health condition. The staff will be periodically tested, and the physical appearance will match the idea of safety and professional training. Even though this is a surreal scenario, we will witness a replacement of the staff in the accommodation units with robots. The concept of *Henn Na Hotel* - hotels staffed by robots- in Japan underlines a commitment to introducing state-of-the art technologies in order to maximize excitement, efficiency and comfort for the guests. Amongst other innovations (e.g. voice- and face-recognition), this hotel is mainly staffed by robots. (Papathanassis, 2017). There will be a series of methods of replacing the staff in the accommodation units that will undergo some investigations and this activity will probably gradually lose one of its most important characteristics, i.e. the inseparability of this service from the human resource acting as a service provider. According to World Economic Forum's (2017:05) latest report: Intelligent automation will change the nature of some travel jobs and eradicate others altogether.

The employees in the tourism area will also start feeling some sort of anxiety, and, because most of them are season workers and have no financial support during this period precisely due to the seasonal character of tourism, they will ask for long-term jobs throughout the year. In this case, the smaller businesses will take the advantage, such as family businesses, that, even though they have a small capacity, are available throughout the year, and in this way, the employees have a steadier job. Other bigger businesses will be affected by their seasonal activity and they will not be able to keep a large number of employees throughout the year. Having more and more new employees from time to time will lead to a poorer service quality. Probably the technological era, Homo Technium, which is so criticized by some people, but so cherished by others, it is more real and actual than ever.

The niche tourism will have an exponential growth, aiming at certain social classes. In this way, there are other more modern types of tourism that will develop, which are now in the project phase. Therefore, spatial tourism might become one of the types preferred by the tourists, or even the sustainable tourism, that targets areas, which are less accessible for smaller and smaller groups of people, in order to encourage the idea of sustainability.

This period of social distancing will turn us from the once social beings into solitary human beings, who will find their own hobbies and ways of spending their free time without the presence of a large number of participants. This will be a moment of reshaping the general perception in what the urban agglomerations are concerned, which were once preferred by the tourists, and the

idea of introspection, solitude and social distancing will continue to live among us for a long period of time, even after these times will have passed. It is very likely for us to witness a new type of tourism, i.e. the single type of tourism (solo tourism), which means that, even though people will travel with groups, they will go for the single rooms, except for couples. Hence, we will have a new area of tourism which can point to the accommodation units that offer facilities for single rooms and a variety of other room types designed especially for a single person, with facilities and the comfort that could satisfy a single person, but which also have convenient merchandising conditions for a single person, i.e. lower prices.

Another important area for our country, and not only, that could be exploited considering the actual situation refers to the diaspora tourism. This type of tourism is defined as being "the travel of people in diaspora to their ancestral homelands in search of their roots or to feel connected to their personal heritage" (Huang et al, 2013). This category of tourists, which is specific to Romania, continues to visit its homeland and to lead to a substantial increase of the economy of tourism.

The strategies will be plainly combined in order to help tourism survive, but what it is plain to see is the fact that none of the future strategies will be similar to the ones adopted during the years 2009-2010 after the financial crisis. During that period, the strategies based on the volume had a serious development, such as the city break offers, which will fail to work this time. Suck packages, which mainly refer to weekend tourism, or, the way they used to call it before, a *recession tourism*, would lead to an overcrowding during weekends, and, as mentioned before, the overcrowding will be the prerogative of the failure of any activity.

Another solution they came up with then aimed at the price drop, in order for each social category to afford tourism and, in this way, the hotel-keepers would also have their gain out of the large number of tourists and not thanks to the prices they have. Such a strategy would clearly imply the existence of a crowd, which would definitely not be appropriate in the current situation. It is most likely that the prices will be higher than the previous ones, thus the organizers will make their profit out of the higher prices, and not out of the volume. Most probably there will not be a large variety of services included, a lot of them being against the idea of social distancing or just expensive.

In order to make new predictions, we must take into consideration also the North-South polarity and the disparities between the two regions, but also the way in which they will influence the economy. While the North will overcome this phase easier, by increasing the prices of the touristic services and aiming at a part of the population who has been less affected by the crisis, the South, which is already strongly affected and arising mistrust among the tourists, will have to lower the prices and improve its offers, in order to attract the tourists; to cut it short, it will buy tourists, not only in order to count with some incomes, but rather to overcome the anxiety caused by this situation.

The current situation should not count as a global decrease, but as a possibility of starting anew, of reconsidering certain touristic habits and exploiting new niches or resources.

This is concurrently an extraordinary possibility for the development of the inland tourism. Taking into consideration the fact that many countries which most people would chose as a holiday destination will be reluctant to receiving tourists from other countries for a long period of time, this will be a perfect time for the inland tourism, because countries with a lower touristic potential will be able to still receive tourists. Many tourism professionals have already identified Romania as the country with the highest potential in Europe regarding the development of rural tourism as a major source of income, both for investors, as for the budget of the country; (Tureac et al, 2008).

Certain behavioral tendencies of the tourists should be speculated, such as: the wish to discover the local culture, the wish to get to know the customs, the traditions, tasting the local cuisine, becoming familiar with the local cultural events, the folk costumes, the activities or games that are specific to that area, all of this is a new way of learning, growing, getting to know and being amazed at new things, of acquiring new abilities. Tourists can be involved into a series of activities specific to a local area, among which the local cuisine could also count.

It becomes clear that the Romanian educational system should also be changed, in order to train the future labor force in the tourism area. Taking into account the fact that Romania had, according to the World Tourism Organization, 3 times less tourists than Bulgaria in 2018 and 6 times less than Hungary, we must become aware of the fact that there are many factors leading to such a

disparity compared to our neighbors; and, apart from other deficiencies, the one related to education could bear a relevant significance.

This kind of approach could bring back to life the inland tourism, especially the rural tourism and the agritourism, which have been less exploited so far. However, this situation must be handled with care, the organizers should care more about making the tourist want to come back and not about the quick recovery of their losses. They should not take advantage of the current situation, but rather see it as an opportunity to prove that there are also other countries, which can handle tourism, and that inland tourism is a viable possibility. After this downfall, we could witness a recovery of the tourism industry and even a significant increase of the GDP obtained from touristic activities. My opinion is that this break should have a considerable contribution to the growth of the local economy, to rediscovering the national touristic potential and even to suppressing the power that the great hotel chains have had so far.

Another threat against the industry of hospitality concerns the temporary incapability of organizing events with a large number of participants, events such as conferences, symposiums, congresses, job fairs, fairs and exhibitions. Even in this case there is a problem which will also cause some inconveniences to the great chains of accommodation or service units, because this type of events required first of all space, urban areas, central areas, a good positioning which facilitates the transportation with different means of transport in common, but also the existence of various leisure possibilities. Not to mention the prestige and the notoriousness of the organizing units which are specific to the great hotel chains. Once we will consider them as being advantages, these facilities will be perceived as being negative aspects for the great hotel chains, which will make their revival even harder. Fastuous events will now be held online, and step-by-step technology will also conquer this area of the tourism. "Beyond mainstream tele-conferencing and video-communications, 3D-holograms and telepresence devices promise to eliminate geographical distance enabling travellers to be virtually present in any location at any time. Telepresence devices, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles combine tele-conferencing and mobility-technology to create personal *avatars*, allowing travellers and interactively visit attractions while being physically at another location" (Rutkin, 2015).

4. Conclusions

As a conclusion, we should consider the current context as being the catalyst for a new beginning, for rethinking the society nowadays and its organization, but also a rethinking of what the industry of hospitality means.

We will thus witness a leveling of the disparities between the great hotel chains and the local accommodation units, which can also count as a positive aspect for the local economy. As previously mentioned, the advantages of the great accommodation units, such as a high accommodation capacity, notoriousness, being placed in the middle of crowded areas, will be rather perceived as disadvantages. There is also a way for the smaller local companies to easily develop by attracting a constant customer flow. Another favorable aspect refers to allowing new entrepreneurs to get to know the market; because the market is in search of new solutions, the new entrepreneurs will no longer feel intimidated by the greater companies, which generally had the tendency of taking over the whole market and establishing the prices based on the advantages that the mass tourism provided them with.

We have noticed that a new national strategy will actually be a series of directions for which responsibility has already been taken. The rethinking of tourism does not aim only at the development of the accommodation units, it should rather be a reconciliation of the government's efforts, the educational system, the health system, the infrastructure, the level of digitalization and, to a higher extent, a change of mentality.

The strategies will focus on the idea of distancing, a reduced volume, digitalization, the exploitation of some niches which favor the outdoor activities, a health system related to a well-organized sanitation system, the discharge of mass tourism, the intense promotion of smaller accommodation units that are not that notorious, being more open-minded, but also the exploitation of certain types of tourism which are less known on Romanian territory (rural tourism, the diaspora

tourism).

In other words, it has been proven that the success recipes based only on the current reality or on a static evaluation by bearing in mind the situation from the past years have no solid base. That is why the organizations should count on flexible organizational structures, on abilities that are related to the ones specific to this area such as imagination, creativity, and they should shape a type of management focused especially on prediction, thus granting a certain importance to the management of the organizational change.

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