THE INFLUENCE OF ECONOMIC CRISIS ON THE TOURISM ACTIVITY IN TIMIS COUNTY

INFLUENŢA CRIZEI ECONOMICE ASUPRA ACTIVITĂŢII TURISTICE A JUDEŢULUI TIMIŞ

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Abstract: *The touristic activity of the Timiş County is sustained by a valuable and varied tourism potential, both natural and anthropic which allows the organization of different types of tourism, ensuring a large number of Romanian and foreign tourists. Timiş County has a touristic offer with touristic structures which satisfy the needs of modern tourism, which is competitive with European and international markets. The large number of tourists arriving in Timiş County until 2008 is due to the fact that it has an attractive economic potential, which makes the county important for business tourism and transitory stays, and last but not least for leisure. The decrease of tourism indicators between 2009 and 2010 for the county is explained by the global economic crisis which is rather accentuated in the investigated area.*

Key words: *tourism potential, touristic offer, accommodation capacity, business tourism, economic crisis.*

INTRODUCTION

The term "crisis" comes from the Greek "krisis" which means difference or decision. In broad sense, the term was used to distinguish between right and wrong, between just and unjust. Medical terminology it defined it as a disruption of an activity that normally would have to be continuous. In the fifteenth century, while acknowledging the contribution of traditional medicine, the term has entered the common vocabulary, being used in areas such as politics, economics, social. Today, the crisis is defined as a critical change of main variables, a change which may endanger or even destroy parts of the whole system. Most influences in the use of the term come from the political sphere, and the problem that arises is related to the

development of a system for crisis prevention. The economic crisis is defined as a state of difficulty of the economic activities, a sudden change in economic activity, reflected in the slowdown, stagnation or decline of economic activities. By extension, is a conjectural depressed for economy as a whole, for some sectors, regions, etc.., a disease of the economic organism which marks the severe break of economic balance, especially between production and consumption, supply and demand, direct effects on prices, on the occupancy and the use of production factors.

Tourism, being vulnerable to economic uncertainty has been touched with the other areas of economy by the global economic crisis. During difficulties, people had kept the money for the necessities of life, and are more careful about spending. In 2007-2008 the number of tourist arrivals and overnight stays spent in the hotels had increased. Since 2009 the global economic crisis was more and more felt in our country, so that occupancy rate in the accommodation units has decreased significantly. However, the tourism activity didn't stop the people's need for travel of different reasons, will always be. The trend that is observed is that, despite the barriers generated by the global economic crisis, people continue to travel, but different from previous periods, tourists will reduce their expenses, they change destinations, and will travel closer to in the living area.

THE TIMIŞ COUNTY

The Timiş County is situated in the West part of Romania, in the historical region of Banat; its neighbours are Csongrad County - Hungary, Vojvodina region - Serbia in the South-West, Arad County in the North, Hunedoara County in the East and Caraş-Severin in the South-Eat, it is the largest county of Romania, with an area of 8.697 square km (3,6% of the country's area).

The administrative organization of the territory, on 31st December 2009 includes: 2 large towns: Timişoara and Lugoj, 8 small towns: Sânnicolau-Mare, Jimbolia, Buziaş, Făget, Deta, Ciacova, Recaş and Gătaia, and 313 villages.

The Timiş County has a varied landscape: field in the western and central part, hills in the east part and mountains Poiana Ruscă mountains (Padeş Peak 1.380 m). From a climatic point of view, it has temperate-continental weather with Mediterranean influences; the following rivers

cross the county: Timiş, Bega, Bega Veche, Bârzava, Aranca, Moraviţa and Mureş.

Situated at the intersection of many ethnical groups, languages and cultures, a local spirit has been born, a state of respect and understanding, characteristics that place the Timiş county closer to Europe.

People who come to this region will be surprised by the rich cultural patrimony, especially wooden churches from Pietroasa, Dragomireşti, Poieni, Curtea, Cebza, the monastery of Partoş, and Săraca, but also the numerous historical buildings in Timisoara: Count Mercy's house, Prince Eugeniu de Savoya's house, the Franciscan Monastery, the metallic bridge conceived by the engineer Eiffel or the Baroque Palace.

Due to people's mentality, to competitive human resources, there has always been a certain impulse to create and innovate; from this point of view, Timişoara, the capital of the county, may be called "The town of Premieres"; some of the most important premieres are: the first brewery in Romania (1718), the Bega canal, the first waterway in Romania (1728), the construction of Municipal Hospital, the first in Romania, 24 years before the one in Wien and 34 years before the one in Budapest (1745), the first lit town with electric street lamps in (1760), the library Joseph Klapka, the first library with public loan in the Hapsburg Empire (1815), the first telegraph service in Romania (1854), the first horse-drawn streetcar in Romania (1869), the first waterway on Bega canal, Timişoara being the first town to use this means of transport (1869), (1884), and the list may continue arriving at the year 1989, when Timişoara became the first town liberated from the communist rule.

Although the County is in a plain area, it offers different types of tourism and different possibilities for recreation: the Poiana Ruscă mountains attract tourists to trips, the numerous thermal and mineral springs in Buziaş, Calacea, Timişoara, Biled, Variaş, Bogda, Sâmnicolaul Mare, Jimbolia and others are well-known for their curative properties and offer tourists an oasis for relaxation and fitness. Green tourism and rural tourism is represented by traditional households, monasteries and hunting cabins offering accommodation.

ACCOMMODATION CAPACITY IN TIMIŞ COUNTY BETWEEN 2009 AND 2010

Accommodation capacity of Timiş County is formed of the following accommodation structures: hotels, hostels and motels; camping

sites and inns; villas; school camps; bed- and- breakfasts and guest houses (Table 1).

Table 1

Level, percentage and dynamics of accommodation units in Timiş County (2009-2010)

	West region (accommodation places)		Timiş County (accommodation places)		Percentage in total region (%)		Dynamics in 2010 compared with 2009 (%)	
Year	2009	2010	2009	2010	2009	2010	West Region	Timiş County
Total	23041	23257	6550	6857	28.43	29.48	100.94	104.69
Hotel	13187	13401	4338	4603	32.90	34.35	101.62	106.11
Hostel	140	120	78	58	55.71	48.33	85.71	74.36
Hostel	209	209	40	40	19.14	19.14	100.00	100.00
Hotel Suite	342	422	63	63	18.42	14.93	123.39	100.00
Motel	633	572	60	30	9.48	5.24	90.36	50.00
Inns	56	56	40	40	71.43	71.43	100.00	100.00
Villas	1933	1733	513	445	26.54	25.68	89.65	86.74
Camping	420	492	260	260	61.90	52.85	117.14	100.00
School camps	1005	838	269	269	26.77	32.10	83.38	100.00
Bed and breakfasts	2769	3136	806	912	29.11	29.08	113.25	113.15
Guest houses	1178	1473	83	137	7.05	9.30	125.04	165.06

Source: Territorial Statistics 2010. Statistic Annuary2000-2010.Use of accommodation structures in 2010, INSSE 2011.

As far as the number of places is concerned, hotels occupy the first place (4603 places in 2010), with a percentage in the region of 29.48%; followed by bed and breakfasts (912 in 2010) with a percentage of 29.08% and a dynamics in 2010 compared to 2009 of +13,15%. On the whole there are in 2010, 6857 accommodation places, with a percentage of 29.48% in the region, with a dynamics index of104.69% - so, there is a rise of +4.69% in the total dynamics of accommodation places in the Timiş County. However, in terms of dynamics, the places offered in guest houses, which in

2010 have a +65.06% compared with 2009 (137 places in 2010, compared with 83 in 2009). The same can be said about urban bed and breakfast with a rise of 13.15%, with 106 places more than in 2009.

Analyzing the comparative dynamics of accommodation, depending on types of units, in 2010 compared with 2009 for Timiş County, we have the following structures under the development level of the region: hostels (74.36% from 85.71%), motels less by -50% compared with 2009, and villas (86.74% from 89.65% per region). The rest remained steady or had a dynamical rise even above the regional level – rural guest houses well above the regional average. On the whole, the level of accommodation rose by 4.69% (+307 places).

The main cause of the decrease is represented by the withdrawal from tourist circuit of large accommodation units, by changing their destination or return to former owners. Although new accommodation units have been built lately, they are smaller, and thus easier to maintain and with less investment – their capacity does not cover the loss of larger units.

Another cause is poor investment in tourism, which can be observed in the whole region (although there has been an increase) which is due to the general economic situation in our country.

ANALYSIS OF TOURIST CIRCULATION BETWEEN 2006 AND 2010

Statistical measurements of tourist circulation have the purpose to determine its dimensions and to offer useful information for further development in the service industry.

Table 2

Evolution of arrivals in the Timiş County and as a total in Romania (2006-2010)

Year	Arrivals (thousand-persons)	
	Total Romania	Timiş County
2006	6216	246,68
2007	6972	283,41
2008	7125	281,80
2009	6141	225,61
2010	6037	217,08

Source: Territorial Statistics 2010. Statistic Year Book 2000-2010. INSSE 2011.

As it can be seen from the table, the number of tourists in Romania during 2006-2010 (in classified accommodation units) has dropped from 6216 thousand persons to 6037 thousand persons in 2010, and for Timis County the number of arrivals has decreased from 246,68 thousand persons in the first year analysed to 217,08 thousand persons in 2010. The drop in the number of tourists is due to a fall in buying power. Romanian tourism had an ascendant evolution up to the end of the year 2008, a fact proved by the large presence of foreign tourists in our country, followed by a decrease due to the recession (but also due to domestic reasons).

The large number of tourists arriving in Timiş County is due to the fact that it has an attractive economic potential, so the county has a certain value for business tourism and transit tourism, and last but not least for leisure. During 2007-2008, there was a very good period as far as the number of tourists arriving.

The tendencies of touristic circulation during recent years can be outlined by studying the number of overnight stays.

Table 3

Evolution of overnight stays in accommodation units in Timiş County compared with Romania (2006-2010)

Year	vernight stays (thousand-days)	
	Total Romania	Timiş County
2006	18992	608,27
2007	20593	638,45
2008	20726	655,60
2009	17325	521,23
2010	15930	508,01

Source: Territorial Statistics 2010. Statistic Year Book 2000-2010. INSSE 2011.

From the above table we can see that the number of overnight stays in Romania has dropped from 18992 thousand days, in 2006, to 15930 thousand days in 2010. During 2007-2008 there was a rise in overnight stays in Timis County. Starting with 2008, there is a total decline both in the county and in Romania, with an impossibility to reach the same level of overnight stays from the previous period.

The evolution of analyzed indicators registers both increases and decreases during the analyzed period in 2009 being on a decrease, in the county and in the country. Each indicator is influenced by certain events during actual activities such as natural calamities or poor investment in the county, and the recession which has left a significant mark on tourism.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis conducted in this paper had as a purpose highlighting the tourism potential of Timiş County and a short review of the main indicators connected to tourism activity in the area and in the Timiş County. This area is one of most attractive locations for investment in Europe. Poor investment in tourism, which is obvious in the whole region (despite some increases) is due to the general economic situation in Romania.

The potential of this branch is immense but it is not capitalized. Durable development in this field should prepare Romanian tourism to get integrated in the global circuit, to overcome difficulties usually faced in the field, to put strategies into practice in order to bring tourism in our country among the first activities to register economic progress with national importance.

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