

THE IMPORTANCE OF USING MANAGERIAL STRATEGIES BY THE TOURISTIC FIRMS FROM ALBA COUNTY

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ABSTRACT: In the current economic context, characterized by a dynamic, unstable and uncertain environment, by competition's regional, national and global exacerbation, designing tourism strategies – probably, and obviously possibly, one of the key factors in the Romanian economic social development – is a difficult, but absolutely necessary step, regardless of size, ownership or territorial profile of the companies acting in this field. Big changes are expected to happen in the Romanian tourism during the coming years. In our opinion, they will be more important than those that occurred in the last and a half decade. The opportunities arising in the market will increase by the emergence of new consumers, a new social and economic environment, new products and services, new destinations, new information and distribution channels. Both large and small tour operators can and will take advantage of these benefits and opportunities. Thus, many questions arise: What kind of strategies and what kind of investments or products will be required in the future? What tourist destinations will be the most attractive? If we were to make a bet on the future, what will be the impact of information and communication technologies on tourism? How can we stimulate innovation in tourism? What initiatives and what strategies will need to be emphasized?

KEYWORDS: management strategies, strategic objectives, programs, strategic decisions, managerial skills, growth strategies, organizational change, tourism, hospitality industry

JEL CODES: L8, M1, M2

The research topic's actuality and opportunity

Based on these arguments on the need to study the strategies used by the Romanian tourism companies, the study proposed, may be pragmatically motivated as follows:

First, regarding the today's Romanian tourism trends, it can be noted:

- Greater sensitivity to the environment;
- A depreciation of the preference for mass products and the interest for personalized services;
- An increased interest in safety during the journey;
- An increased use of the Internet and of the new fixed and mobile technologies;
- A trend in recent years, namely the purchase of certain tourism products is characterized by certain anxieties generated by a harsh reality of recent years: for the first time in the history of tourism, tourists have been the target of terrorism;
- Consumer anxiety applies not only to the personal safety, but also to the future, to the aging of certain human values and to the rapid changes they do not understand.

Secondly, if you were to draw a map of the tomorrow products, the following typology could be established for the Romanian tourism:

- Traditional products: tours, mountains and seaside trips, thermal cures;
- Latest products developed at a smaller scale, but prepared for rapid growth: short stays, thalassotherapy, golf, etc.;

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- Niche products such as cultural trips;
- Sectors that will appear and will develop from now on: integrated complexes, amusement parks, leisure, eco-tourism, etc.

Thirdly, strategies' development and implementation in tourism companies in Romania is a complex process that will require options' realism and more thoroughly study of this field's specificities, so alive and continuously expanding. A dynamic and harsh competition makes it change before our eyes. It thus depends on us to "catch" the unprecedented environmental changes and to foresee the future. And how can we do this better than by developing strategies – which are perspective, positioning, plan and model.

In Romania, there are relatively few researches on the development strategies of tourism companies. Based on this finding, it was appropriate to complete this research, for it can shape a better view on the strategies' contribution to the development of the companies operating in the tourism sector, given new opportunities related to Romania's long-term integration into the European Union.

Research objectives

The research' fundamental aim is to broadly and deeply analyse the use of development strategies in Romanian tourism companies, as a direct expression of how they were conceived and achieved at different levels.

The major goals of the investigation undertaken are:

a) Conceptually:

- Short review of the knowledge on the travel company's strategies and their role in the business development;
- Identify the growth strategies that may be used by tourism companies and the steps to be taken in formulating strategies within tourism units;
- Identify the main types of units specific to hospitality industry in Romania.

b) Operationally:

- Analysis of the hospitality industry in Romania;
- Identify the main trends internationally and nationally manifested in tourism;
- Analysis of the characteristics, dynamics and structure of the tourism industry in Romania;
- Analysis of the tourism coordinates in Alba County;
- Identify the main forms of tourism in Alba;
- Analysis of the evolution of the main statistical indicators on tourism activity in Alba county;
- Research on the typology of strategies used by the tourism companies in Alba County.

It should be noted that the specific and in-depth analysis of the typology of the strategies development used by tourism companies took into account the country area represented by Alba County.

In order to achieve these major objectives, a quantitative marketing research was conducted among the tourists of the travel units (accommodation units) in Alba County, in order to know their attitudes, preferences and views on the use of development strategies.

Also, it should be stated that practically all the analyses based on statistical indicators had in mind the developments occurring after 2000. The comparisons undertaken do not report to the 1990s, as during the first part of this period Romanian tourism had another character, inherited from the communist era, and later, during the transition period, the tourism's new character generated by the free market economy had not yet consolidated.

In order to achieve this research objective, which is to assess the attitudes and opinions of the representatives of tourism establishments in Alba on the importance of developing strategies, we have formulated a set of derived objectives which can be summarized as follows:

- Objective 1: Determine the importance given to the use of strategies for the company increase;
- Objective 2: Determine the frequency with which the tourism units in Alba County develop strategies;
- Objective 3: Determine the level and degree of involvement of managerial and non-managerial staff in strategy foundation, design, implementation and evaluation;
- Objective 4: Identify the strategic alternatives and the action directions used by the tourism units.

Research methodology

In order to further understand the phenomena and the processes specific to the tourism companies' development strategies, marketing researches were asserted, mainly focused on studying the typology of the development strategies used by the tourism companies in Alba County.

The marketing research undertaken in this work touched quantitative aspects. Quantitative research was conducted among the tourism companies of Alba County. This marketing research aims to provide essential information necessary to support the development strategies.

Theme: Attitudes and opinions of the representatives of tourism establishments in Alba County on the importance of development strategies.

The research conducted falls into the category of quantitative marketing research, as its aim is to describe, to systematically analyse and to quantify multiple variables related, on the one hand, to the characteristics of the company's development strategies, and on the other hand, to the attitudes and opinions of the tourism establishments representatives' on the use of strategies.

This research was based on the survey method which involved a complex questionnaire (37 questions) and a simple random sampling among the tourism establishments of Alba County.

In this research, the sampling unit is the travel unit (the accommodation unit), and the observation unit producing raw data is the representative of the tourism unit or, in this case, of the accommodation unit. The research results will be extended to the entire population studied, namely to all accommodation units in Alba County.

Theoretically, the sampling required for the sample is the list of the tourism units of Alba County in 2015. Their total number was 185 units.

Next, the procedure for establishing the sample base and the sample was as follows:

- We opted for the survey method, namely for the self-administered survey method to the extent that the questionnaires were filled in by representatives of the accommodation units. They received them by e-mail and their responses were automatically recorded on the database created by google.docs. All questionnaires were obtained by auto-completion; the questionnaire was developed and administered by using docs.google;
- The primary data were acquired between 25.11.2014 – 25.04.2015, namely during 5 months.

The questionnaire included 37 questions and was written in Romanian. The questions were structured in three sections. The first section contained seven questions on the sample structure, in which I tried to identify the main characteristics of the responding tourism units. The second section included 26 questions and sought to identify the specific coordinates of the use of management strategies by the tourism establishments of Alba County. The third section contains four questions that identified the respondent's status within the travel unit.

Research's conclusions

The management strategies field is constantly looking for new paradigms, but until now it simply could not agree on one. Why? This question was argued saying that the area is an interdisciplinary one, a field of practice, whose perspectives will change and whose scientific approaches will be immeasurable. It is hard to believe that a single paradigm will ever dominate the field. However, I believe that in the future there will be studies going beyond the traditional approaches.

Conclusions regarding the main coordinates of tourism in Alba County can be summarized as follows:

- Alba is a complex combination of natural beauty (unique landscapes, harmonious landforms, karsts, natural areas), of cultural and historical areas with the rural population's creations (art and popular tradition, ethnography and folklore, cultural and artistic events, etc.).
- The county's anthropic frame enjoys the reputation of the Apuseni Mountains through the cultural space "Țara Moșilor", and also the many architectural buildings such as fortresses, wooden churches, fortified churches, some of these attractions being unique;
- Tourism, as part of Alba County's economy has an important role in exploiting the local tourism resources and improving the life of residents, in socio-economic development of urban and especially rural localities, and of the community general. By developing local tourism, regional or zonal agencies, tourism creates jobs, both directly (in tourism structures) and indirectly (in the adjacent economic sectors – agriculture, crafts, trade, financial-banking services, transportation, etc.), and reduces the young people's exodus from the county's rural areas;
- The variety and complexity of the tourism potential of Alba County facilitates the practice of a wide range of tourism forms, among which the most important are: mountain tourism, rural tourism and agro-tourism, cultural and historical tourism, urban tourism, business tourism, events tourism, youth tourism, ecumenical/religious tourism, ecotourism, hunting and fishing and so on;
- There are serious limitations in the exploitation of the existing potential;
- The indices of net use of the operating tourism accommodation capacity reached the maximum in 2005 and the minimum in 2009. Its levels, however, are very low, which indicates the existence of a large gap between supply and solvable demand;
- The tourists' attraction to the county's destinations is low;
- Among the typology of strategies that can be adopted at some point by an organization, growth strategies are of great topical due to the worldwide incidence of some factors that have a significant impact on their development and performance, such as lower resource availability in the environment, increased competition due to globalization, unprecedented pace of technical progress;
- Unlike any other strategies that can be adopted by organizations, growth strategies have a unique specificity, deriving mainly from the fact that they focus on the organization's performance development;

In order to further understand the phenomena and processes specific to tourism firms' increase strategies, a marketing research is needed, mainly focused on the typology of development strategies used by tourism companies in Alba County.

As a summary of the analysis findings, we mention that tourism firms of Alba County largely use strategies as a management tool in their activity, giving them the importance they deserve, and acknowledging their usefulness for providing increased performance and for obtaining competitive advantage. In strategies' foundation, design, implementation and evaluation by tourism companies, top managers' involvement and importance has been emphasized. However, middle

management's involvement has not been neglected, seconded by the crucial participation of the non-managerial staff.

The interest in the development of growth strategies is evident in the context of identifying key growth objectives pursued by tourism companies, of which the most frequently indicated by respondents were increasing number of tourists and increase profits.

Regarding the action directions followed by travel companies, the most frequently mentioned were: attracting new customers or tourists as favourite direction followed in order to increase service demand, improving the quality of services as favourite direction to increase the share market, selling over the phone, using the media and the Internet together with launching a new tourism product, as directions used on market development and modernization as the main solution to increase sales.

Using direct distribution channels, through direct negotiation with clients, rather than using indirect distribution channels, through travel agencies or associations, is the distribution strategy used by the vast majority of tourism establishments. Motivation is most likely given by the difficulty of establishing a mutually-beneficial cooperation for both parties, in the case of tourism products intermediation through travel agents, or the travel agencies' lack of interest in offering Romanian travel products, preferring to sell abroad products. Directly related to the above, the main way to promote or to attract tourists was indicated as being the Internet. It is a fair motivation if we think about the rapid evolution of modern media and about the consumers' preferences on their use to the detriment of classical communication means.

Another relevant issue related to cooperation with associations, was that most travel units are not part of any specialized organization and are not included in any local or regional tourism circuit.

Regarding the staff, the main types of strategies used aim at providing motivating salary packages, training or specialization courses, awards, bonuses, performance recognition. Although the importance attributed to professional skills development through courses and trainings is significant, regarding the employees' level of education, approximately 50% of respondents indicated that half or more than half of employees have specialized studies, consistent with the position occupied, while the remaining 50% indicated that none or less than half of the employees have specialized education. This is sounding the alarm about human resources quality in the tourism sector and indicates the tourism facilities' need to seriously consider the strategies for the human resources development and improvement.

Tourism units stressed once again that the lack of qualified personnel in the area greatly influences their activity. In addition to staff's lack of specialized trainings, a number of other obstacles encountered in developing strategies, referred to the lack of funds, lack of staff involvement, to the fact that personnel misunderstands the goals or that sometimes results are too long expected.

Conclusions

The goal of my research was to bring to the fore not only the theoretical aspects related to the management strategy and how companies can develop, implement and use it, but also aspects of strategy's implementation in practice, as it is seen by firms, in this case by firms operating in the tourism industry. Although the strategy implementation process influences the activity of many members of the organization, the strategy research has only recently begun to be considered important in the activity of practitioners working in this area. Managers have thus become a group of actors whose role in developing the strategy is not fully known. Although the specialized literature contains many references to the theoretical significance of this role, the practice-related

activities are still poorly explored. Literature does not yet provide sufficient information on daily activities, tools and working methods needed to implement the strategy.

Thus, one of my concerns was to conduct a research among tourism firms in Romania and the general objective of the study was to generate new knowledge about their success or failure in implementing such strategies. The study was conducted among organizations that develop such strategies, which have been thus motivated to participate in such a study.

Questions around which the study was structured are:

How does the strategy development work in practice within tourism companies in Romania?

What are the differences between how management strategies are developed in practice compared to their theoretical approach and how could they be brought to the same common denominator?

The interview's quantitative aspects were based on a semi-structured interview among a representative sample of companies operating in the tourism sector, and additional data were obtained from documenting on how organizations develop the management strategy.

For the Romanian tourism companies' managers, the study sought to find some tools and concepts that will help them better understand the process of strategy development. It is intended for the study results to allow tourism units develop their own strategies by creating new practical applications to support their old ones.

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