

A green and competitiveness model development- Danube bend-eco-friendly destination

Mirela Mazilu, Cipriana Sava, Amalia Niță, Sabina Gheorgheci

Abstract—Green tourism principles, actually, in Romania, have many effects on every single aspect of the hospitality industry. They don't just relate to the environment however important that may be; they also relate from the way business and marketing is done to interactions with society and culture and to economic stability.

Now, the conservation is becoming part of tourist markets, by promoting ecotourism as an element of the so-called green economy, which was proposed as a solution to the on-going crisis at the Rio+20 Summit? Additionally, the complex relationship between tourism and the environment is based on the demand for energy, water, land and materials. The Green tourism and green destinations intensifies the use of natural resources, but how does it contribute to deepening systemic environmental contradictions? Hospitality, travel and ecotourism comprise a multitude of activities which together form one of the world's fastest growing and mutually dependent international sectors. In recent years, tourism has become one of Romanian's most important economic sectors and has significant potential to play a further role in Romania's economic renewal. Hospitality, travel and ecotourism research is fundamental to ensuring that the industry has a positive influence on economies, cultures and societies.

In the remainder of the paper, a theoretical background is presented and the research hypotheses are developed. The sections describing the methodology, empirical results, and discussion follow. The paper ends with a summary of theoretical contribution, managerial implications, limitations and future research. This paper has four major objectives: to develop a model of destination competitiveness that identifies key success factors in determining destination competitiveness, to develop an appropriate set of indicators of destination competitiveness; to highlight the advantages and limitations of the model; and to identify areas for further research.

Keywords—competitiveness, eco-friendly, sustainable market, tourism destination.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of competitiveness is quite broad and can be analyzed from several perspectives: products, companies or

individual economic sectors, on a short term or on a long term, being studied by researchers from various fields – geographers, economics, management, politics and culture, each with its own perspective. OECD [1] defines competitiveness as "the ability of a country or a company to generate proportionately more revenue than competitors on the world market". Customizing the tourism sector, "the tourist competitiveness of a destination is closely related to the ability of a place to optimize its attractiveness for residents and non-residents, to provide quality, innovative and attractive tourist services to consumers and to attract some of domestic and global market, while ensuring that available resources underlying the tourism development are used effectively and sustainable" [2]. The competitiveness of the European tourism is, therefore, closely related to sustainability, because the quality of the tourist destination is strongly influenced by the natural and cultural environment and by the manner in which this is integrated in the local community [3]. In the remainder of the paper, a theoretical background is presented and the research hypotheses are developed. Sections describing the methodology, empirical results, and discussion follow. As the WTTC argues, "Sustainable travel and tourism development relies upon policies which support harmonious relationships among travellers, local communities, the private sector and governments to balance natural, built and cultural environments with economic growth and stability" [4].

The paper ends with a conclusions and summary of theoretical contribution, managerial implications, limitations and possible future research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The review of the specialty literature on 'competitiveness' revealed that, although the different concepts and models of competitiveness appearing in the wider literature are useful in highlighting the various determinants of 'single destination' or 'national destination' competitiveness, the authors do not address the special considerations relevant to determining 'destination' competitiveness.

In this section, we will provide some theoretical grounds on the construction of the framework.

Sabina Gheorgheci is with University of Bucharest, Simion Mehedinți Doctoral School, Bucharest, Romania (sabibi_sabra@yahoo.com:).

Mirela Mazilu is with University of Craiova, Geography Department, Craiova, Romania (corresponding author phone: 0040744582961; e-mail: mirelamazilu2004@yahoo.com).

Cipriana Sava is with UCDC Faculty of Tourism and Commercial Management, Timișoara, Romania (cipriana.sava@gmail.com).

Amalia Niță is with University of Craiova, Geography Department, Craiova, Romania (e-mail: amalia.badita@gmail.com)

This fact has been emphasized by several researchers [5], [6], [7], [8], the sustainable development being a precondition for competitiveness". Competitiveness is just an illusion without sustainability " [6]. Hassan defines competitiveness as "the destination's ability to create and integrate value-added products that sustain its resources while maintaining market position relative to competitors" [7]. Poon [9] has identified 4 basic principles that tourist destinations must comply with in order to be competitive on the international market: the focus on the environment protection, giving tourism a primary economic role, the improvement of the market distribution means and the establishment of a very dynamic private sector. In the remainder of the paper, a theoretical background is presented and the research hypotheses are developed. Sections describing the methodology, empirical results, and discussion follow. The paper ends with a summary of theoretical contribution, managerial implications, limitations and future research

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the major ecological, political and economic changes of the a thorough analysis on the competitiveness of a tourist destination was performed by Ritchie & Crouch , starting with 1993 [6], [10], these researchers elaborating and continuously improving a conceptual model of competitiveness and sustainability for a destination, including five determining factors: the main resources and attractions; the support factors and resources; the destination strategy, planning and development; the destination management; the qualitative and amplifying determining factors.

The resources and the main attractions represent one of the 5 pillars of the sustainable competitive destination model, including primary elements that ensure the attractiveness of the destination, these factors motivating tourists to visit that destination. These resources are grouped into seven categories: landscape and climate, culture and history, market connections, activity mix, special events, spending time and specific tourist infrastructure.

The landscape is closely related to the climate, the relief topography, the presence and size of water, forest surfaces, of arid, urban or rural areas, to the air quality, the diversity of the flora and fauna elements and the presence and the number of wild animals.

Culture and history are even more important elements as we notice a global homogenization of tourist destinations. In this context, a destination that will be able to offer visitors a unique life experience, by proposing something different from the daily routine, will have a competitive .This includes traditions, local cuisine, costumes, elements of history, language, religion, specific architecture, craftsmanship, art institutions, music, various museums, etc.

Market connections can be ethnic (emigrants who visit their families and friends), religious or economic and political, by signing cooperation agreements. The activity mix within a destination is an essential aspect of the attractiveness of a

destination, an element that can be influenced to a very large extent through proper management.

This includes outdoor, adventure, winter or summer, recreational, active rest, educational activities, for families with children or for adults, designed to relax or to be physically demanding.

Closely related to the activity mix, there are the special events and opportunities for leisure activities, which are also a useful tool for management and marketing, including various cultural, artistic and sports events with a regional, national or international nature (mega-events).

The support factors and resources include the general infrastructure, the accessibility, and the resources that ease the sector development (the human capital, the financial capital, the knowledge in the field), the hospitality, the entrepreneurship and the political will.

The strategy, planning and development of the tourist destination refers to the adoption of a philosophy/values, creating a vision, a proper positioning and a proper branding strategy, development, the performance of proper destination competitiveness analyses, destination monitoring, evaluation and audit.

The tourist destination management is related to organizational structure, marketing, the quality of services and experiences offered, research - information, human resources management, capital, visitor management, resource management, crisis management.

The qualitative and amplifying determining factors include the destination location relative to the main tourist issuing markets and the main competitors, safety/security, cost/value, interdependencies, image and support capacity.

Starting from the model proposed by Ritchie & Crouch (2003) on the competitiveness in tourism and the study of the international literature regarding the main elements of national and company competitiveness, Dweyer and Kim [11] have developed an integrated model of tourist destination competitiveness (Fig. 1).

The tourist resources are divided into three categories: inherited resources (natural and cultural/heritage resources), created resources (tourist-specific infrastructure, special events, available activities, possibilities for leisure activities, shopping) and support factors and resources (general infrastructure, services quality, destination accessibility, hospitality and market connections).

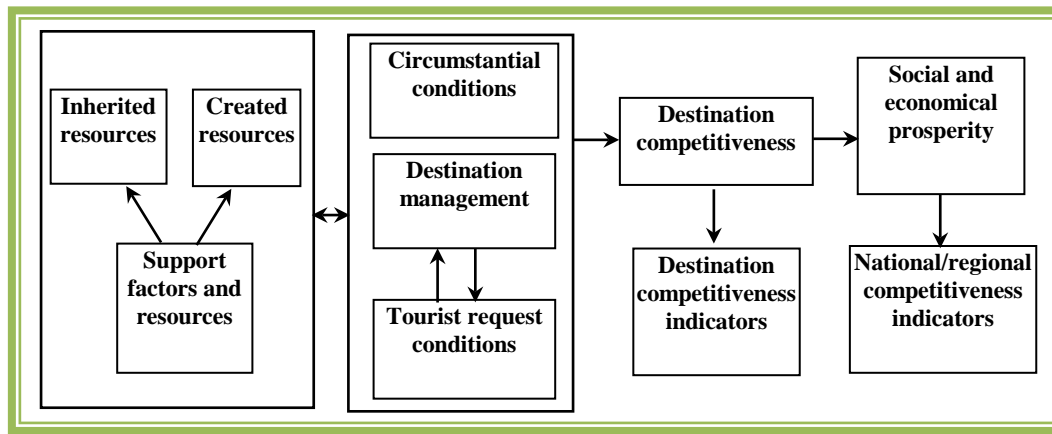


Fig. 1 The integrated model of the tourist destination competitiveness (according to Dwyer & Kim, 2003)

Together, these factors contribute to the attractiveness of a destination, constituting the basis for the destination competitiveness [11].

The circumstantial conditions represent the forces from the environment delimiting or influencing the competitiveness of a tourist destination. These factors are economic, social, demographical, technological, environmental and political.

The management of a destination includes the activities from the public field (the development of national strategies to develop tourism, organizations for destination management, destination planning and development, human resources development, environment management, etc.) and from the private field (tourism associations, the adoption of green strategies, the development of new products, ecological certification programs, etc.).

The request conditions are related to the tourists' preferences, the increase of the destination promotion level, the destination image. The model proposed by Dwyer & Kim [11] allocates an important place to these conditions of the tourist request for the setting of the destination competitiveness, considering that a tourist destination must develop its tourist products to remain competitive and to meet the tourists' preferences, which continuously evolve.

Essentially, from a tourist point of view, competitiveness represents "the ability of a destination to increase the cashing from tourism, to attract more tourists, to offer them satisfactory, memorable and profitable experiences, while the life standard for the local community improves and the natural capital of the destination remains unaltered for the following generations[14].

2.1. Conceptual and framework of competitiveness study

Competitiveness must not be confused with attractiveness, the latter preceding the destination competitiveness; a tourist destination can be very attractive, but certain factors, such as the aerial access, the accommodation offer, may reduce its competitiveness (March, 2004). Competitiveness and attractiveness characterize a destination from different points of view: from the tourist's perspective, it is about attractiveness, while from the destination's perspective; it is

about competitiveness [12]. Although there are numerous studies on the attractiveness of a destination or its competitiveness, [7], [13], [14], the studies that analyse both of these attributes are very little).

The competitiveness of a tourist destination is, on the one hand, a very vast concept, and, on the other hand, an indicator that is quite difficult to quantify. There were several initiatives in this matter in the last decade. Thus, in 2001, World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) [4] published the first Journal on the Competitiveness of Travels at a Global Level, comprising a set of indicators and indexes which show to what extent there is a competitive environment for the development of tourism in a state. This Journal, annually published between 2001 and 2004, had as basis a set of economic and social data that allowed the performance of comparisons between states, these data being grouped in eight categories:

- The competitiveness of prices: the index for price competitiveness in tourism relates the prices from each state, being calculated based on the index of hotel prices and the parity of the purchase power.
- The development of the human capital in tourism – the economic impact of the request, the consumption, the exports, the imports, the economic balance, the number of business travels, the number of arrivals and departures.
- The infrastructure – the level of infrastructure development, considering the features of the road network, the sewerage and drinking water infrastructure.
- The human resource – starting from the life expectancy at birth, the rate of illiteracy, the educational system, the employed population, the structure on genders, abilities and training, this indicator shows the competitiveness of the human resource quality in each state.
- The environment – the awareness of the importance of aspects related to the environment protection by governments, considering the density of the population, the carbon dioxide emissions and the ratification of the international conventions on the environment protection.
- The openness – the mandatory visas, the extent to which a state is open to international tourism, opening the trading

relations and the fees for international trade.

- The technology – the advance recorded by the technical system and the infrastructure, referring to the main telephone land- and mobile lines, the state-of-the-art technology exports.
- The social development – data referring to newspapers, personal computers, TV and the number of committed offences.

Subsequently, the joint efforts of WTTC and the International Economic Forum (FEI) and other specialty organizations created The Report on the Tourist Competitiveness Index, elaborated between September 2005 and October 2006. The tourist competitiveness index considers the three main categories of variables influencing the competitiveness of this economic sector: the general legal frame for tourism and travels; the business environment for tourism and infrastructure; the human, cultural and natural resources (Fig. 2), each of these including several pillars.

Competitiveness index	<i>General legal frame</i>	rules, norms
		environment legislation
		safety and security
		health and hygiene
		priority of tourism and travel sector
	<i>Business environment and infrastructure</i>	air transport
		infrastructure road transport
		infrastructure tourist specific
		infrastructure TIC infrastructure
		price competitiveness in tourist industry
	<i>Human, cultural and natural resources</i>	human resources
		national tourism perception
		natural and cultural resources

Fig. 2 The 3 pillars of the Tourist Competitiveness Index

Considering that the studies and the indicators calculated by various organizations do not offer a general frame for the measurement of competitiveness that should be useful for governments, OECD performed a study for the identification of a set of indicators that can be applied in a general frame for the evaluation of the competitiveness of a state, defining the competitiveness of a destination as being “*the ability of a place to optimize the attractiveness for residents and non-residents, in order to offer quality, innovative and attractive tourist services (meaning to offer quality according to the amount of money paid) to the consumers and to gain a quota on the internal and global market, ensuring at the same time that the available resources supporting tourism are used efficiently and in a sustainable manner*” [8].

Therefore, key indicators have been elaborated for the analysis of competitiveness, grouped into four main categories: indicators measuring the performance and the tourism impact, indicators monitoring the capacity of a destination to offer quality and competitive tourist services; indicators monitoring the attractiveness of a destination and indicators describing the effects of development policies and the economic opportunities. There are three types of indicators that can be used for measuring competitiveness in tourism: main, additional and future development indicators (Table 1).

There are 11 core indicators, the first four referring to the actual contribution of tourism to the national economy, the following seven measuring the inputs and the potential contribution to the tourism competitiveness.

Table 1 Tourist competitiveness indicators

Main indicators	
Tourism performance and impact	1. GDP from tourism
	2. Cashing from internationally receiving tourism per visitor according to the issuer areas
	3. Number of night stays in all the accommodation structures
	4. The export of tourist services
The ability of a destination to offer quality and competitive tourist services	5. The productivity of the labour in tourist services
	6. The parity of the purchase power and the tourism prices
	7. The policy on the mandatory visas
The attractiveness of a destination	8. The natural resources and the biodiversity
	9. Cultural and creative resources
	10. The visitors' satisfaction level
The policies' effects and the economic opportunities	11. Master Plan for the development of national tourism
Additional indicators	
Tourism performance and impact	Diversifying the market and the main increase markets
The ability of a destination to offer quality and competitive tourist services	The structure of the tourism labour force according to the age, education level and agreement type
	The index of consumption prices for tourism

	The aerial connection and inter-modality
The attractiveness of a destination	The OECD Index for a better life
Indicators to be developed	
The ability of a destination to offer quality and competitive tourist services	The governmental budget allocated for tourism
	The company mortality rate
The policies' effects and the economic opportunities	The use of electronic tourism and of other innovative services
	The structure of tourism supply chains (clusters)

Source: OECD, 2013 [2]

Dweyer & Kim [11] divide the indicators of tourist competitiveness into hard indicators, which can be quantified: the protected areas surface, the number and the expenses performed by the visitors, the market share and the recorded amendments, the tourism contribution to the GDP formation, expenses/visitor, investments in tourism, financial support from the government, the index of the price competitiveness, and soft indicators, as for instance the friendly attitude of the host communities, the services quality, the landscape beauty, the perception on safety and security, etc. At the moment, however, there is no method through which the hard and soft indicators could be integrated to obtain a single index.

In terms of competitiveness of tourist destinations, we can talk about comparative advantages and competitive advantages.

The competitive advantage is a concept originated in economic theories about the competitiveness of organizations, representing, according to authors cited an organization's ability to create superior value for those who buy services and, at the same time, to have a higher profit. The competitive advantages (CA) of a country or region represent the performances of a multitude of activities of private and state enterprises from a country or region, which aim at the peak level of international performances.

The comparative advantages are related to natural and anthropogenic resources available to a destination. Many specialists identified five main categories of comparative advantages, namely: human resources, physical resources, knowledge, capital and infrastructure. We should add another category within the comparative advantages for tourism - the historical and cultural resources, and infrastructure will include not only general infrastructure but also specific tourist infrastructure [5].

If the comparative advantages are related to the resources of

Tabel 2 The computational model for the competitiveness of the Danube Bend destination

a destination, the competitive advantages are related to the ability of a destination to efficiently use these resources over time. A destination that has a vision for tourism development, embraced by all the decision makers, which understands very well its weaknesses and its strengths, that develops an appropriate marketing strategy and manages to successfully implement it, is a much more competitive destination, the competitive advantages being related to where and how a destination chooses to deploy its comparative advantages [5].

The competitive advantages, unlike the comparative ones, can be (re)produced and improved by local, regional and national actors. To fully understand the competitiveness of tourist destinations, we should carefully analyze both types of advantages.

Crouch & Ritchie [5] believe that the primary elements of the attractiveness of a tourist destination (landscape, culture, history, market characteristics, activities and events) are essential to the comparative advantages of a destination, being one of the main factors that motivate tourists to visit that destination. Mihalic claims that destination attractiveness and its competitiveness can be increased by proper management of environmental quality of a destination' [12] She add "that destination competitiveness can be enhanced through such initiatives as codes of conduct, self-developed environmental practice, certified or award-based best practice and accreditation schemes and in many cases environmental objectives and practice must be incorporated into the current attitudes, management strategies and methods in order for destinations to stay competitive maintaining a high level of overall environmental quality is important for the competitiveness of most types of tourism destinations and thus a primary concern for destination managers" [12]

2.2. Theory/calculation

The analysis in this article presents an interdisciplinary approach, including contributions of economists, geographers, managers and marketing professionals. According to the International Economic Forum (2016), the travel and tourism sector competitiveness based on key indicators place Romania on a lower level compared to the neighbouring countries, the EU countries, which demonstrates the poor competitive performance of Romania.

The tourism competitiveness in the Oltenia region has been rather less analysed and the results of the studies that have been conducted at national level have been underused for plotting a coherent program to increase the competitiveness of tourism regions.

Băloi (2014a) performed an assessment of the potential for tourism development in Oltenia, quantifying the factors of competitiveness (Table no. 2). The index aiming at the natural resources exploitation is quite low, which implies considerable opportunities for entrepreneurs and local authorities as well, like the index on anthropogenic resources capitalization.

Criterion	Coeff	Sub-criteria	Coeff	Rank	Use	Score
1. Natural resources	0.2	Landscape	0.4	3	0.66	0.264
		Flora and fauna	0.1	2	0.33	0.033
		Balneary resources	0.3	2	0.33	0.099
		Other (hydrography, relief)	0.2	2	0.33	0.066
		<i>Total</i>				0.462
Total					0.092	
2. Anthropogenic resources	0.2	Cultural resources	0.35	3	0.66	0.231
		Historical resources	0.1	3	0.66	0.066
		Leisure	0.35	1	0	0.000
		Awareness, image, branding	0.1	2	0.33	0.033
		<i>Total</i>				0.330
Total					0.066	
3. Economic factors	0.15	Supporting the local economy and communities	0.3	4	1	0.300
		Rates and Prices	0.35	3	0.66	0.231
		Integration into the services chain	0.35	2	0.33	0.116
		<i>Total</i>				0.647
Total					0.097	
4. Government effectiveness	0.1	Investment policy	0.3	2	0.33	0.099
		Fiscal measures to stimulate entrepreneurship	0.3	2	0.33	0.099
		Institutional framework	0.2	2	0.33	0.066
		<i>Total</i>				0.264
Total					0.026	
5. Effectiveness of tourism businesses	0.1	Added value	0.4	4	1	0.400
		Tourism capacity and productivity	0.4	2	0.33	0.132
		Financial results	0.2	3	0.66	0.132
		<i>Total</i>				0.664
Total					0.066	
6. Management	0.05	Involving managers	0.6	2	0.33	0.198
		Promoted attitudes, values, practices	0.4	2	0.33	0.132
		<i>Total</i>				0.330

Total		0.017				
7. Infra	0.2	Uses	0.3	3	0.6 6	0.198
structure		ITC and education	0.2	1	0	0.000
		Accessibility	0.25	2	0.3 3	0.083
		Tourist capacity and facilities	0.25	3	0.6 6	0.165
		Total	0.446			
Total		0.089				
OVERALL SCORE		0.454				

The governance, the management practices and, last but not least, the infrastructure represents weak points in terms of tourism development. Therefore, its overall score is also low - only 0.46, indicating a weak exploitation and revaluation of the tourist potential.

A micro-region, to express its international reliability, competitiveness and visibility as a tourist destination, must emphasize its defining elements, but also the activities from the recreational, curative or cultural sphere in which it is specialized.

The South-West Oltenia region benefits from important tourism resources, but, despite this, the importance of tourism to the local economy is relatively small, its contribution to the regional GDP is only 1%. Tourism can be an essential vector in the development of many areas and the increase of the labour force employment in a region where alternatives are still few.

2.3. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

The study and research itself for the Danube Bend destination have been developed based on two hypotheses:

- the opportunities in tourism based on natural and human heritage can have a considerable contribution in obtaining a regional competitive advantage
- tourism can become a vector of development for the entire regional economy.

The information sources used in shaping the tourism potential diagram are represented by:

- the material available online (e.g. tourism master plans, legislation, regional initiatives etc.);
- statistics (Eurostat reports, sector analyses conducted by consultancy companies, statistical series of the Institute of Statistics);
- expert opinions regarding the field research methodology and trends, opinions collected through specific interviews, attending meetings and round tables, participation in tourism research projects.

The reason to develop a tourism potential diagram has been:

- to allow the criteria differentiation based on the most important sources of impact
- to achieve the quantification of activities and the tourist potential based on the criteria and features

- all the criteria for quantifying tourism potential are treated unilaterally in diagnosis

To achieve the tourist potential diagram of the Danube Bend area, the following theory and calculations have been taken:

1. criteria selection for quantifying the potential: in our study, we used seven quantification criteria chosen based on recommendations and indicators used by institutions with experience in the study of competitiveness of various industries, regions and countries [15]. The 7 quantification criteria chosen are: 1. Natural resources, 2. Anthropogenic resources; 3. Economic factors, 4. Government effectiveness, 5. Tourism business effectiveness, 6. Management, 7. Infrastructure. Each criteria group of the 7 groups will comprise a number of sub-criteria.

2. using a scale with 4 ranks for measuring the potential of each sub-criterion: 1: Unsatisfactory, 2: Satisfactory, 3: Good, 4: Very Good

3. determining the utility degree corresponding to each rank of the scale used. The Neumann - Morgenstren model has revealed the following uses:

- for Rank 1: Unsatisfactory = 0.00 use
- for Rank 2: Fair = 0.33 use
- for Rank 3: Good = 0.66 use
- for Rank 4: Very good 1.00 = use

4. granting a rank out of the 4 possible (1: Unsatisfactory, 2: Satisfactory, 3: Good, 4: Very Good) to each sub-criterion of the 7 quantification criteria groups of the tourism potential. The classification of each quantification criterion and sub-criterion of the tourism potential within quantification scale has been drawn up by the author based on the personal experience in tourism, the questionnaire, the interviews, the expert opinions;

5. granting the importance coefficients for each quantification criterion and sub-criterion of the tourism potential. This process was done after consulting experts from the tourism sector and based on the personal experience in tourism.

- The criteria 1, 2 and 7 (1. Natural resources, 2. Anthropogenic resources and 7. Infrastructure) have each been awarded a 20% importance coefficient because they are the basic resources in tourism;
- Criterion 3. Economic factors have been awarded a 15%

importance coefficient because it is considered as being the factors having a great impact on tourism;

- Criteria 4 and 5 (4. Government effectiveness, 5. Tourism business effectiveness) have each been awarded a 10% importance coefficient since Romania is considered to have a changing regulatory environment that does not support tourism development, as well as because of the tourism's contribution to the GDP;

- Criterion 6. Management has been awarded a 5% importance coefficient since the contribution of this criterion to the exploitation of the tourism potential can be improved;

6. calculating the score of each sub-criterion, using the formula:

$$\text{score} = \text{coefficient} \times \text{use}$$

7. calculating the total scores for the sub-criteria of each criteria group in the seven main groups;

8. determining the score of each main criterion of the seven main groups, using the formula:

$$\text{score} = \text{coefficient} \times \text{use}$$

Where use = scores total of the sub-criteria for the respective main criterion

9. determining the overall score of the area potential subject to research, using the formula:

Overall score = criterion 1 score + criterion 2 score + criterion 3 score + criterion 4 score + criterion 5 score + criterion 6 score + criterion 7 score

10. Classifying the result (the overall score) of the potential of the area within a scale quantifying the tourism potential, as follows:

- values between 0% and 25%: denote a critical situation of the tourism potential

- values between 25% and 45%: denote a problematic situation of the tourism potential (both success and failure of economic activities in tourism are possible)

- values between 45% and 70%: denote a good situation of the tourism potential and industry (there are the prerequisites for a good development of tourism businesses)

- values between 70% and 100%: denote a very good situation, the regional tourism being viable in a highly competitive environment.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This model allows for destination competitiveness to be assessed over time in respect of particular types of tourists (by education, sex, nationality, or motivation), or by comparison to a particular competitor market destination or competitor set of

destinations. In this way the trends in destination competitiveness can be linked to various private and public-sector initiatives or other variables.

Thus, the quantification of criteria used in assessing the potential for tourism development of the Danube Bend has the results: value of 0.454, which shows a modest enhancement of the (natural and anthropogenic) tourism potential of the Danube Bend, being useful to managers and those who would draw up sustainable development strategies for this unique tourist micro-region, also revealing the points where they have to "force", even to boost their manifestation and considerable contribution in shaping a tourist destination of excellence.

Any tourist destination, as any organism, develops based on its tourism potential - physical side - Hardware) and, to become competitive and to resist over time, necessarily implies a logical part (Software) according to a model that should be adjusted during each evolutionary stage of the tourist destination (fig.3).

To become competitive on an uncertain tourism market, the destination, as a service provider, must "shake hands" to collaborate in a fair manner with all the tourism stakeholders, especially because they have many common points of interest in order to ensure tourist satisfaction (Table 3).

We cannot resist social technology and trends of tourism services in the grey area of the sharing economy-**the collaborative economy** is a *socio-economic system built on the concept of sharing physical and human resources. It comprises the common creation, production, distribution, trade and consumption of goods and services by individuals and organizations* [16].

In tourism, the usual forms of collaborative economy that comply, in fact, with the global travelling and consumption trends are more common in the Western world (peer-to-peer accommodation or P2P travel experiences, car sharing or commute-sharing), being new forms of tourism where partners are equally privileged participants, but who evade payment of taxes to the state budget for all required travel services (accommodation, meals, transport, experiences, etc.).

The percentage of those who travel on their own and in areas and locations which are not subject to taxation is now nearly 25%.

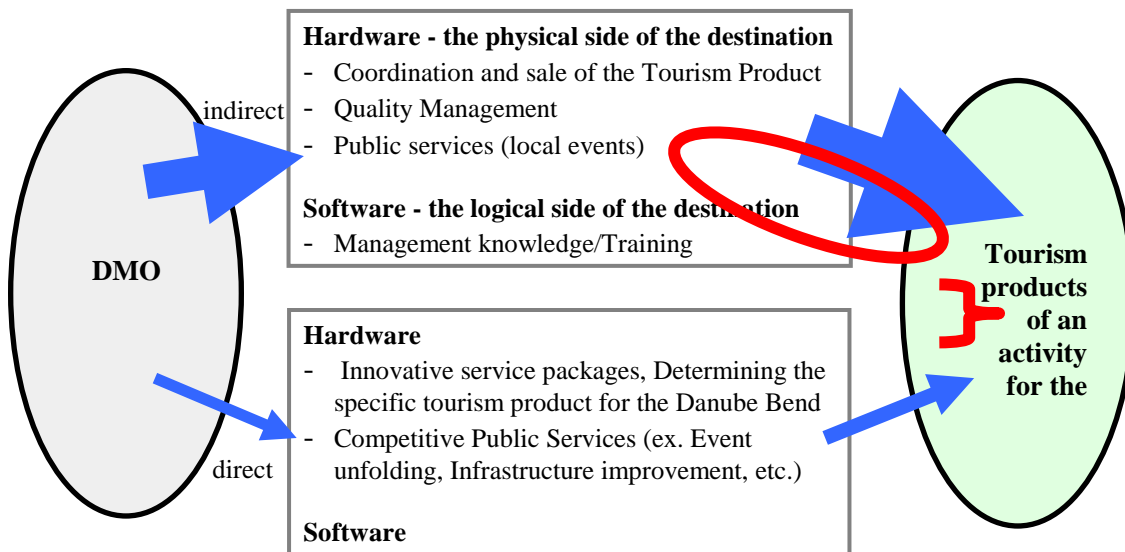


Fig. 3 The virtual model of organizing a competitive tourist destination

Table 3 Competitiveness - balance between the needs and desires of tourism stakeholders

THE DESTINATION - SERVICE PROVIDER	TOUROPERATOR	TRAVEL AGENCY	TOURIST
High volume sales	High volume sales	High volume sales	Knowledge of the tourism product
Preserving the tourists' loyalty	High profit	High profit	Continuous diversification of the tourism product
Reduced distribution costs	Reduced economic risk	Positive image	Quality tourism services
Choosing the most competitive distribution channel	Tourism products that motivate agencies	Innovative tourism products	Highly qualified human resources in tourism

Moreover, it is estimated to reach almost 50% in 2025. But this trend leads to a new category of competition and competitors! [17].

The tendency to "copy" all that is considered fashionable in the West, in any field, implicitly tourism, small, but alarming forms of collaborative economy, especially in accommodation, have also developed in our country.

Time will tell if it is illegal or legal, but unfortunately the grey economy, which is not taxed, alarmingly "develops" in Romania as well and the individual tourists are enjoying its benefits, while the tourism officials are not, losing consumers.

To adjust such a process and not lose ground to the competition, tourist destinations will need to adjust their strategies to attract tourists who are constantly connected and informed.

The competitiveness of a destination depends on:

- a high competition,
- a policy of price reductions,

new performing technologies, to ensure through rigorous marketing a competitive sustainable development to meet the tourists' motivations and expectations, according to a cycle of inter-conditionings that must be complied with, to become a competitive tourism (fig.4).

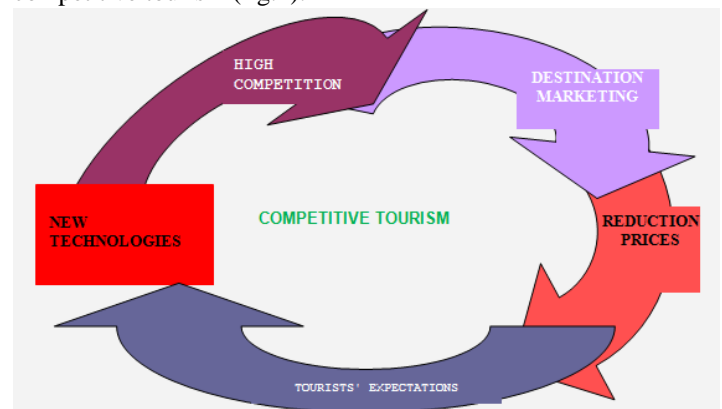


Fig. 4 Competitiveness cycle of a tourist destination - Compulsory stages (source: authors' adaptation after [18])

The overall theme of the Top 100 Awards is "Destinations of future generations". Award candidates are destinations that cherish and celebrate their... for future generations of citizens and travellers. A new Destination Sustainability Support System is based from: Authenticity, Biodiversity, Cultural values, Destination's local community and entrepreneurs, and environment [19].

Important for the Green destinations is "the results of the competition will be announced during Global Green Destinations Day, 7-8 September 2016 in Ljubljana (Slovenia), a city that kept its historic core attractive and well preserved, and was elected by the European Union as European Green Capital 2016. The Green Destinations Standard is a tool to measure, monitor and improve the sustainability profile of destinations and regions and to report

the new green destinations” [19]. The standard is a flexible system (Fig.5) able to use many different criteria and indicators, including all 41 Global Sustainable Tourism

Council – Destination (GSTC-D) criteria and the European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS).

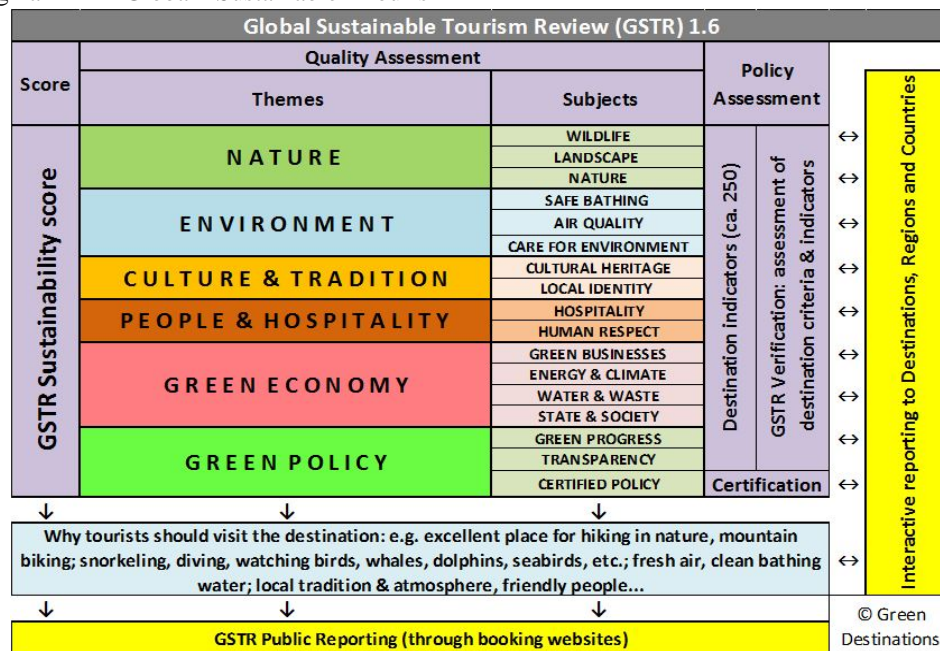


Fig. 5 GSTR Public Reporting –Global Sustainability Tourism Review

This Standard is enabling to assess and monitor over time: status (quality), trends and policy, by providing sustainability profile on six different themes: Nature; Environment; Culture & Tradition; People & Hospitality; Green Economy; and Green Policy. Each criterion is assessed with several indicators on a 1-5 scale. Via a scoring system, a final Green Destinations Rating between 0 and 10 is defined. A destination can be given points for increasing levels of active involvement in a sustainability assessment, as follows:

1. **BasiQ Assessment of Destination Quality indicators** from neutral sources (Internet, databases, Google Earth): up to 7 points (max 7/10). This assessment can result into a BasiQ Award.

2. **GSTR Assessment Verification:** a 3rd-party verification of a Self-Assessment by the destination: this provides up to 2 points extra (max score 9/10). This Verification provides an overview of strengths and weaknesses, a number of brief recommendations, and an indication of the likely Quality Coast or Quality Destination Award level (BasiQ, Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum).

3. **Certification in line with GSTR and GSTC:** will add the final points (max 10/10) [19] (fig.5, 6).

Sustainable Tourism represents one of the development opportunities of the South-West Oltenia Region, and Danube Bend Region, this thing being achieved only through the

preservation and the protection of natural and anthropogenic tourist objectives so that benefits should be possible in both directions.

The relation between tourism and the environment has a special importance, the protection and the preservation of the environment representing the main condition to carry out and develop tourism activities.

This connection is a complex one and manifests in **two directions:**

the natural environment through its components representing the basic resources of tourism, and, on the other hand,

the tourist activity has both a positive and negative influence on the ecologic environment, changing its components.

Because the sustainable tourism represents a purpose, we have to understand that any type of development including the tourism development triggers certain changes in the area.

A Green Destination's journey towards sustainability				
Step	Assessment type	Result	Sustainability Score (GSTR)	Annual fee
1	Self-Assessment	Awareness	25-50%	Free
2a	Quality Assessment	BasiQ Award	35-70%	€200 - 300
2b	Interactive Assessment & Verification	Verified score, BasiQ Award	45-90%	€500 - 960
3	Certification, e.g. QualityCoast Award	Bronze Award	60-70%	depending on certification programme and destination size
		Silver Award	65-80%	
		Gold Award	75-90%	
		Platinum Award	90-100%	
4	Benchmarking & Monitoring	Annual Benchmark Reports	---	included in any GD membership type

Fig. 6 A Green destination towards sustainability

However, these changes must be maintained within acceptable limits, so that the sustainability purpose should be reached.

The sustainable tourism may be better achieved through a careful planning, through the corresponding development and

the management of the tourist sector based on principles Fig.7 [20].

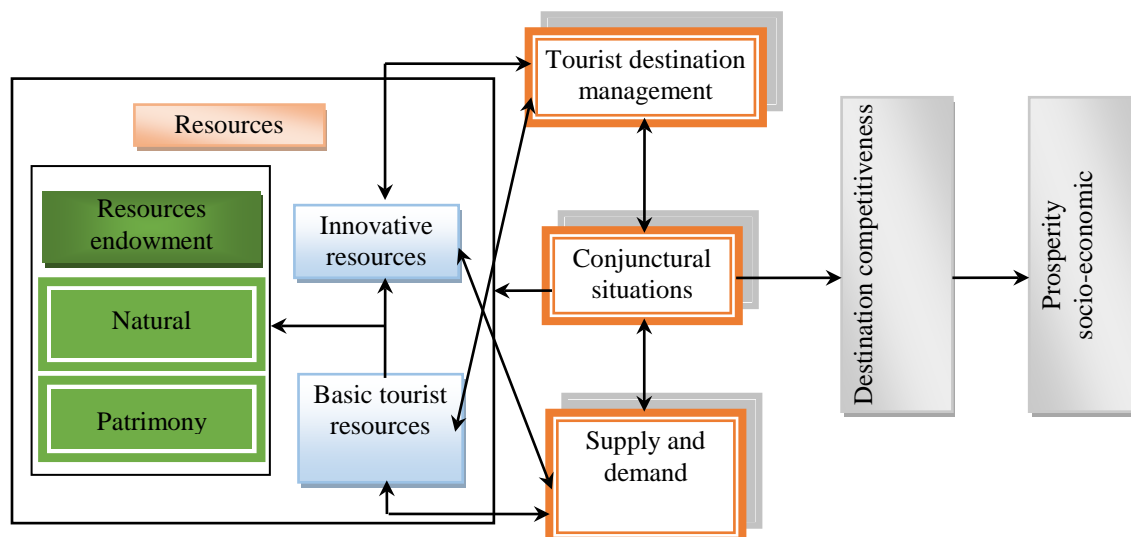


Fig. 7 The tourist competitiveness model (adapted from Dwyer & Kim, 2003, p. 378 [11])

IV. CONCLUSIONS

United Nations declares 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development [21]. The UN General Assembly has approved the adoption of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. "The declaration by the UN of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development is a unique opportunity to advance the contribution of the tourism sector

to the three pillars of sustainability - economic, social and environmental, while raising awareness of the true dimensions of a sector which is often undervalued" UNWTO Secretary General, TalebRifai." [22].

Sustainability has three independent aspects for tourism as well as for other industries: economic, social-cultural and environmental.

The sustainable development implies permanence, meaning that the sustainable tourism represents the optimal usage of resources (including the biological diversity), the minimisation of the negative economic, social-cultural and ecologic impact, and the maximisation of benefits on the local communities, the national economy and the preservation of nature. As a natural consequence, sustainability refers also to the necessary managerial structures in order to fulfil these purposes-because “Competitiveness” and “sustainability” are the two key terms in the modern view. Sustainable tourism is not only a school about others, but determines how we will live with the others, what attitude we will have. Our world, the one created with the tourism producers, is a global one, a single ethnicity: the human race presented in its specificity, element by element for diversity. With past, present and hopes. Any mistake can lead to irrecoverable trauma. The sustainable tourism represents a distinct field of activity, a very important component of the economic and social life for a larger number of countries of the world. From an economic point of view, tourism constitutes as a main source of revival of the national economies of those countries which dispose of important tourist resources and exploit them properly. Its action is manifesting on a multitude of levels, from the stimulation of the economic development to the perfection of the social structure, from the superior revaluation of the resources to the improvement of the life conditions and last, but not least, as an important generator of work places. The unfolding of tourism means a specific request of goods and services, request that engages an increase in their production sphere.

Concerns about the sustainable development, in each country, but also worldwide are caused by a complex of issues: poverty, amidst the wealth, environmental degradation, loss of confidence in the institutions, uncontrolled expansion of urbanization, lack of job secure employment, marginalization of youth, removing traditional values, unemployment and other financial or geopolitical and economic crises, etc.

Hence, it follows that sustainable development is defined by a natural dimension - meaning that this exists only as long as man-made environment is compatible with the natural environment; an economic dimension, based on competitiveness, a social and human dimension - all the exits from man-made environment must respond directly to the needs and interests of present and future generations that coexist and succeed, a national, regional and global - for the purposes of compatibility criteria optimization, both nationally and regionally or globally.

Thus, the concept of sustainable development and the strategy for achieving it raise the question of the human being and, in general, of the human community, from the perspectives of time and space.

The benefits of promoting sustainable tourism in terms of protecting the environment arise from the following aspects:

- Sustainable tourism promotes cost-effective use of land with low agricultural yield;

- Sustainable tourism promotes understanding of the effects of the tourism activities on the natural, cultural and human environment;

- Sustainable tourism guides the development of facilities and recreational facilities that bring benefits to the local population and therefore contributes with funds to the conservation of archaeological sites, of buildings and archaeological monuments;

- Sustainable tourism complies and ensures the environmental requirements, proving how important the natural and cultural and historical resources for the economic growth and the social welfare of local communities, respecting the interrelation of the three spheres of sustainability (Fig. 9).

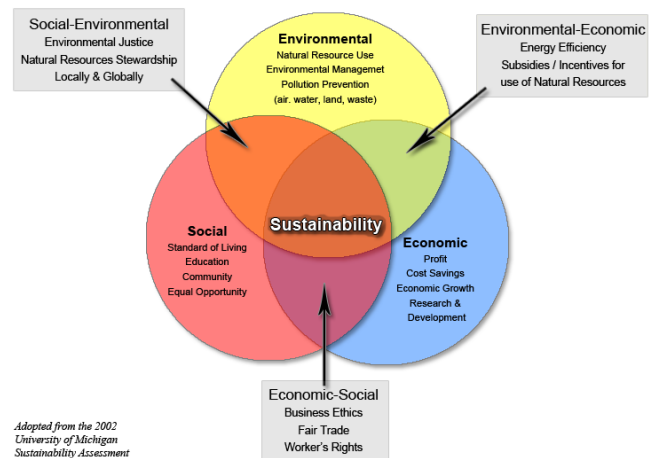


Fig. 8 The Three Spheres of sustainability

On a competitive global [23] and more and more developed market nowadays, there is a great need for a powerful national branding of tourism management which could optimize the resources, could concentrate within a nucleus the interests - the public and private sector, the national, local and regional sector - and capture the tourists' attention. This will need a certain type of interest for a coordinated approach on marketing and distribution through the internet in order to optimize the vision on Romania. The recommendation of the World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC) is that the Romanian Government follows the policy of an open market of telecommunications, which will generate low costs and services of better quality for tourist and tourism companies. Its main task is to commercialize the region or the country as a tourist destination and to improve the image globally [24].

This on the mass of people called tourists. In this context, sustainable tourism and friendly tourist destinations win more ground, imposing on the world tourism market, creating tops, there remaining only our respect for them, the opportunity to create them where the environment requires us to, and to proliferate them. In present the tourism destinations are the rightful owners of the global tourism industry. And when global tourism transforms into powerful, dynamic, local green visitor economies – that's when the massive rewards will be

manifest for all. A model of Romanian tourist destination competitiveness was developed that sought to capture the main or different elements of competitiveness highlighted in the general literature, while addressing the special issues involved in defining and exploring the notion of destination competitiveness as emphasized by tourism specialists. The model developed in this article maybe can form the basis for further conceptual and empirical research. Perhaps the major thrust of the required research area is to explore the role of demand side factors in comparing the competitiveness of different Romanian green destinations.

- [23] http://mir.uzreport.uz/news_e_137425.html
- [24] <http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2015-12-07/united-nations-declares-2017-international-year-sustainable-tourism-develop>
- [25] M.E. Mazilu and R. Marinescu, "The Competitiveness of the Romanian Tourism-a ghost or sustainable reality?", *Annals of Faculty of Economics*, Oradea, vol.4, Issue 1, ISSN:1582-5450, 2009, pp. 367-372.
- [26] M.E. Mazilu, "The Analysis for the Romanian tourism today", *Review Tourism Today*, College of Tourism and Hotel Management, number 8, 2008, pp. 167-181.

REFERENCES

- [1] OECD, *The World Competitiveness Report*, 1994.
- [2] OECD *The World Competitiveness Report*, 2015
- [3] ec.europa.eu/enterprise/sectors/tourism/sustainable-tourism.
- [4] WTTC, *Competitiveness Monitor*. London: World Travel and Tourism Council, 2001, p. 3.
- [5] G.I. Crouch and J.R.B. Ritchie, "Tourism, Competitiveness, and Societal Prosperity", *Journal of Business Research*, 44, 1999, pp. 137-152.
- [6] J.R. B. Ritchie and G.I. Crouch, "The competitive destination: A sustainability perspective", *Tourism Management*, 21 (1), 2000, pp. 1-7.
- [7] S.S. Hassan, "Determinants of Market Competitiveness in an Environmentally Sustainable Tourism Industry", *Journal of Travel Research*, vol. 38, no.3, 2000, pp. 239-245.
- [8] A. Dupeyras and N. McCollum, "Indicators for Measuring Competitiveness in Tourism: A Guidance Document", *OECD Tourism Papers*, OECD Publishing, 2013/02.
- [9] A. Poon, *Tourism, Technology, and Competitive Strategy*, Wallingford: CAB International, 1993.
- [10] J.R. Ritchie and G.I. Crouch, "Competitiveness in international tourism: A framework for understanding and analysis", *Proceedings of the 43rd Congress of Association Internationale d'Experts Scientifique de Tourisme*, San Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina, 17-23 October 1993.
- [11] L. Dwyer and C. Kim. 2003. Destination competitiveness: Determinants and indicators. *Current Issue in Tourism*, 6 (5), 2003, pp.369-414. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13683500308667962>.
- [12] Mihalic Tanya, Sustainable-responsible tourism discourse – Towards "responsustainable" tourism, (2016) *J. Clean.Prod.* Volume 111, Part B, 16 461-470, Special Volume: Sustainable Tourism: Progress, Challenges and Opportunities, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.12.062>
- [13] Mo, C., Handy, D. and Havitz, M. (1993) Testing an international tourist role typology. *Annals of Tourism Research* 20 (2), 319-35.
- [14] D. Buhalis, "Marketing the competitive destination in the future", *Tourism Management*, 21 (1), 2000, pp. 97-116.
- [15] L. Dwyer, P. Forsyth and P. Rao, "Destination price competitiveness: Exchange rate changes vs inflation rates", *Journal of Travel Research*, 40 (February), 2002, pp 340-348.
- [16] L. Dwyer and C. Kim, "Destination competitiveness: Determinants and indicators", *Current Issue in Tourism*, 6 (5), 2003, pp. 369-414. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13683500308667962>.
- [17] World Economic Forum, *The Global Competitiveness Report 2001-2002*.
- [18] <http://www.thepeoplewhoshare.com/blog/what-is-the-sharing-economy/>.
- [19] <http://evisionturism.ro/turism-p2p-afaceri-necontrolate-sau-noi-intermediari>
- [20] PricewaterhouseCoopers research, 2004
- [21] <http://greendestinations.info/gstr/>
- [22] M.E. Mazilu, "Key elements of a Model for Sustainable Tourism", *International Journal of Energy and Environment*, Issue 2, Volume 4, 2010, pp.45-54.