REGIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT - WESTERN REGION ISSUES

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Abstract:
Regional development can be considered a means of economic growth and of living standards, in order to reduce existing imbalances.
Evolution and development of tourism is part of the overall development processes of economy and regional development.
Development Region West is one of the eight development regions of Romania, which was established in 1998. One possibility of developing tourism in the region would be niche tourism such as speleo-tourism.

Keywords: regional development, sustainable tourism, speleo-tourism.

To ensure a diversified and sustainable economic growth, the exploitation of the region's potential, the increase of investments, the decrease of unemployment, and the improvement of living standards, the concept of regional development was adopted.
Applying this concept involves the assignation of development regions, which have no legal personality, are not administrative-territorial units, and the adoption of a policy of regional development.

The main objectives of regional development policy aim at:
- the reduction of existing imbalances;
- access to structural and cohesion funds;
- the establishment of a link with government development policies and the stimulation of interregional cooperation.
A set of principles are at the basis of the elaboration and implementation of these policies, namely:
- decentralization of decision making;
- partnership;
- planning;
- co-financing of regional development programs and projects.
The areas of activity for regional development are varied, one of which is tourism.
The concept of sustainable regional development requires economic and social performances, and in the case of tourism these could be:
- increasing the operating and exploitation of tourism resources, without affecting them
- increasing the number of jobs;
- development and conservation of crafts;
- public access to tourism;
- extension of average life-time;
- increasing people's health;
- avoiding environmental degradation;
- reduction in fallow land theft.
Like in any other field of activity, sustainable regional development of tourism relies on some principles, namely:

- the environment is the main element to support tourism, it must remain for future generations;
- by practicing tourism activities the environment, the local communities and the tourists should achieve benefits;
- there is a long-term relationship between the environment and tourism;
- keeping the site characteristics;
- finding a balance between the needs of participants (tourists, their hosts and the destination);
- the principles should be obeyed by all those involved in tourism activities and their accountability.

In preparing a development plan for tourism in an area one must take into account the ecological vulnerability of the receiving environment, the principles of sustainable development. This development plan should be based on a set of essential coordinates. These coordinates are considered to be:

- identification and inventory of tourism potential in a region;
- establishing the intentions to protect resources;
- establishment of monitoring programs in the area to maintain environmental standards;
- conducting studies regarding the demand on the tourist market;
- elaborating studies regarding the impact of tourism on the environment;
- selection of personnel from among the permanent population of the region, as far as possible;
- proposals for promoting new tourist products.

The multitude of tourist resources and their degree of conservation influences tourism development in a region.

Eight regions of development were defined at a country level. Even if there is sufficient potential, tourism is not the best represented economical activity in the West Development Region, which includes the Arad, Caraș-Severin, Hunedoara and Timiș counties.

This region is characterized by the diversity of its natural tourist resources. Studying this type of resources reveals the fact that the natural elements within this region represent an attractive tourist potential, which can be developed in different forms by organizing tourist activities from the simplest to the most complex ones.

The value of the tourist entropic potential of the region is conferred, to a decisive extent, by the existence of several urban and rural establishments that include significant historical, architectural or cultural vestiges.

The development of the sustainable tourism in the region may take several directions, one of them being the niche tourism such as the rural, religious or speleological tourism.

Speleological tourism supposes visiting all types of caves together with a specialized guide.

This type of tourism may take several forms:

- collective;
- ecological;
- specialized;
- for adventure;
- scientific;
- speleological therapy.

Caves are classified, depending on their chronological appearance, in primary (in volcanic rocks and in limestone) which developed at the same time with the rock evolution and secondary, developed in time, after the rock evolution and caused by the movement of the rocks, by erosion or dissolution.

Taking into account their degree of difficulty, there are caves that:

1. may be arranged for tourist purposes;
2. do not need any special equipment for visiting;
3. need special equipment for visiting;
4. may be active;
5. partially or totally flooded.

Depending on their importance caves may be classified in the following categories:

1. A. - caves that display an exceptional value which, through their scientific interest and the uniqueness of their resources, are representatives for the national and international speleological patrimony;
2. B. - caves that have a national importance and they are remarkable due to their size, scarce resources and tourist potential; they are perceived as natural monuments or natural reservations;
3. C. – caves that present local importance and are protected by their geological, hydrological and historical significance or by their sizes; they may be the object of speleological exploits, scientific research,
tourist development or of other means of exploitation;

4. D. – caves that do not meet all the conditions to be included in A, B and C class.

The West Development Region offers the place for activities on behalf of associations and gatherings of speleologists who, besides their current practice, design projects in the view of protecting the caves and the karst environment and familiarize people with these issues. We mention Speowest Arad, Speo-Carâș from Oravița, Explorers from Reșița, Clubul Sporturilor Montane Hunedoara, Speotimis, Speleo eam and Prusik from Timișoara.

The existence of such caves and associations in the region offers a range of possibilities for the tourist speleological development.

In the Arad county there are caves and swallow holes (103 identified groups) placed in its mountainous region. Three of the caves of this county are protected areas: Valea Morii belonging to the Moneasa village, Duțu and Sinesie, belonging to Săvârșin village.

The Caras-Severin county has a mountainous landscape where there are numerous attractive caves (approximately 1500 caves and swallow holes). Within the category of natural and protected areas there are included the Comarnic cave and the Popovăț cave in the Carașova village, Buhui, belonging to Anina town, Bârzoiu on the territory of the villages Cornereva and Mehadia.

With an important mountainous area, the Hunedoara county possesses caves and swallow holes. Some of them have already been declared protected areas such as the Coral Cave and the Zeicului Cave near the village Câmpul lui Neag, the cave assembly Ponorici – Cioclovina near the Boșorod village, Șura Mare which belongs to the Pui village, Tecuri near Baru Mare village, Cizmei and Podul natural from Grohot situated on the territory of Bulzești de Sus village, Dealul and Cetatea Bolii from the Bânia village.

In the Timiș county the number of these natural attractions is more limited because of the predominant plane landscape. We may only mention the caves from Românești, Albastră, Cioaca Birtului situated in the Poiana Ruscă mountains but which are not considered natural protected areas.

Even if there is a significant number of caves on the territory of the analysed region, none of them is organised or exploited from a tourist point of view and at international standards.

However, besides the members of the above mentioned associations which explore this phenomena, there are also some tourists eager to discover the beautiful underground landscapes and reach the less accessible caves.

We can identify a popular cave for tourist in each county of this region.

The Comarnic cave, within the management of the National Park Semenic, is unelectrified and unequipped for practising sustainable tourism. Due to the forest exploitation, the access to the cave is possible only by means of off-road vehicles and the guide is available only for the summer period. According to the data offered by its keeper, the number of tourists between 2005 and 2009 was very low (picture 1)

![Picture 1 The evolution of number of tourists who visited the Comarnic cave, the Caras-Severin county.](image-url)
According to these data we may say that few tourists come and see the beauty of this place because reaching this place is difficult and there is no signalling.

The Românești cave, situated near the monastery with the same name in the Timiș county, may be easily reached, but does not present any special characteristics. Annually (beginning from 1984), a symphonic concert takes place in October due to the extraordinary acoustics of this place. This event gathers more than 3000 tourists every year. During the rest of the year those who want to visit it (pilgrims at the Românești monastery, tourists who come to the Liman’s Valley) have a marked track.

The most visited cave in Hunedoara county is considered to be Cetatea Bolli which has two access ways and is situated at only 6,5 km from the town of Petroșani.

A part of the tourists arrived at the Moneasa spa resort. Try to visit the cave from Bâi, situated in the centre of this resort which, however, offers a modest view.

A first step towards the surpassing of the current phase of exploitation of these natural resources is the planning of a tourist strategy for the development of the speleological tourism.

The main motivation to accomplish this task would be the increase of the number of caves in the region.

Some objectives of this strategy may be:
- the diversification of the regional tourist offer;
- the attraction of a higher number of tourists of different ages and social categories;
- an appropriate and sustainable exploitation of the caves;
- the compliance to international standards of caves’ development;
- the organisation of courses for the specialization of tourist guides for these caves;
- the planning of some impact studies on environmental issues;
- the consolidation of the infrastructure development regarding accommodation and public food services;
- the planning of some tourist activities;
- some activities aiming the promotion of these caves: leaflet publishing, brochures;
- the publishing of materials for the tourists’ information and education;
- the attraction of tourism agencies for the sale of tourist programmes

The responsibility of the tourist speleological development is attributed to the speleological associations, guardians or cave administrators, to City Halls and Prefect’s Offices of the designated area. Moreover, the volunteers and the inhabitants also play an important part in the strategy setting up.

The planning and the setting up of such a strategy would have the following effects:
- the diversification of the tourist offer;
- the increase of the number of visitors;
- the development of the general infrastructure and of the specific tourist infrastructure in these areas;
- the economic growth;
- raising awareness about the protected areas among the local population and tourists;
- drawing attention upon the importance of these caves and upon the other tourist objectives from the appointed areas.

The development of speleological tourism may contribute to the environment protection and to the development of the West Development Region.

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