

Safety and Security in Tourism. Case Study: Romania

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Abstract

For many countries, tourism is considered as having a great economic importance, with quite a large share in the country's GDP. Hence, the number of foreign tourists is highly important. But worldwide, the threats and dangers are more frequent, and consequently tourists are becoming more aware of the necessity of a safe destination. Foreign tourists are educated in the spirit of touristic safety, and when choosing a particular destination, this aspect is of utmost importance. The image of the country or any touristic destination depends on the quality of the touristic products, which include not only the natural and cultural patrimony or the economic environment, but also the social and political climate, state order and citizens' safety. A country with a good image for safe tourism can use it as a competitive advantage and attract different segments of the international tourism market. The paper presents some of the safety issues in tourism, focusing on the main aspects of tourism safety in Romania, based on the travel and tourism competitiveness index, with special focus on the third pillar – Safety and Security and the results of an on-line survey with managers and employees in tourism activities.

Keywords: *tourism safety, changes in tourism sector, travel and tourism competitiveness index*

Rezumat. Siguranța și securitatea în turism. Studiu de caz: România

Pentru multe state, turismul prezintă o importanță economică deosebită, având o contribuție însemnată la PIB. Ca urmare, numărul turiștilor internaționali este foarte important. În întreaga lume însă, există tot mai multe amenințări și pericole, și prin urmare turiștii sunt din ce în ce mai conștienți de necesitatea unei destinații sigure. Turiștii străini sunt educați în spiritul siguranței turistice, iar atunci când aleg o anumită destinație de vacanță, acest aspect contează foarte mult. Imaginea unei țări sau a oricărei destinații turistice depinde de calitatea produselor turistice, care se referă nu doar la patrimoniul natural și cultural sau la mediul economic, ci și la climatul social și politic, ordinea în stat și siguranța cetățenilor. O țară care este percepută ca fiind o destinație sigură poate folosi această imagine ca un avantaj competitiv și poate să atragă diferite segmente ale pieței turistice internaționale. Lucrarea abordează unele aspecte privind siguranța în turism, punând accent pe principalele aspecte ale siguranței turistice în România. Pentru acest lucru, a fost analizat indicele competitivității călătoriilor și turismului (cu accent special pe cel de al treilea pilier – Siguranța și securitatea) și au fost interpretate rezultatele unui chestionar on-line completat de managerii și angajații din activitățile turistice.

Cuvinte-cheie: *siguranța în turism, schimbări în sectorul turismului, indicele competitivității turistice*

INTRODUCTION

People have always been travelling from one place to another, and the trip has hardly been secure most of the time, no matter the period and the transport means. However, nowadays, the issue of safety and security is ever more important not only for the community at large, but also for the tourists as well, since safety is a basic need in all spheres of human activity, including tourism (WTO, 1997). Although until a decade ago, the stress was laid upon the connection between tourism and crime (Tarlow, 2009), the terrorist attacks from September, 11th, 2001 on the American soil changed the perception of this matter, more tourism scholars analyzing the relationship between tourism, on the one hand, and tourism safety on the other hand (Tarlow, 2002; Laws & Prideaux, 2005; Wilks &

Page, 2003; Mansfeld and Pizam, 2006; Henderson, 2007; Talow, 2009a).

The safety and security in tourism industry has been identified as one of the forces causing changes in the tourism sector in the new millennium (Hall et. al., 2003; Breda and Costa, 2006; Freyer and Schroder, 2007; Edgell et. al., 2008; Tarlow, 2009a). Crime, terrorism, food safety, health issues and natural disasters are the main area of concern (Breda and Costa, 2006).

When dealing with this subject, three concepts are being used. Most frequently, it is safety and security, but some authors combine the two concepts into a single one, i.e. surety (Tarlow, 2007).

'Security issues in tourism [...] primarily refer to the personal safety of tourists and their property, but it includes an ability to become oriented in an alien environment, understand the local system of signs,

indications and social conventions, and finally the security of shopping and consumer services' (Michalko, 2003, p. 162).

DATA AND METHODS

In order to have a comprehensive view of the issue of tourism safety and security in Romania, the analysis followed two main directions. First, we analyse Romania's travel and tourism competitiveness index, with special focus on the third pillar – Safety and Security; secondly, we discuss the results of a Leonardo daVinci transfer of innovation project carried out in four European countries, entitled *Training Safety and Security in Tourism*, where the questionnaire method was used. The method of controlled interview was chosen in order to analyse, map and draw some conclusions about the aspects of safety and security in tourism programs and products offered by tourism operators and agencies. The experts' answers to open questions were compiled and summarised. There were two questionnaires, one filled in by 200 people working in the Romanian hospitality sector, made up of 23 questions; the other one was addressed to specialists in the tourism domain, including managers of SMEs, representatives of regional tourism organizations as well as academic personnel. The two questionnaires were very important for gathering relevant information on the theoretical and practical background in the domain.

One of the major objectives of the research was to have a clear situation regarding the perception and attitudes of the managers and employees in the hospitality sector concerning the influence of safety and security aspects upon their activities. The survey within the project was targeted towards the managers and employees of hotels and other accommodation facilities, tour operators, tourism agencies, charter companies and tourist information centres. The online questionnaire was published on the TSST project web-site. It was short, with clear and simple language, with friendly interface. The questions aimed at highlighting the following aspects: the importance of the safety and security issues in tourism activities as perceived and met by tourism SMEs, the need for improving training programmes and new methods in tourism services, as well as the necessity to offer a more unified European quality tourism product that meets the safety standards.

Sample characteristics

More than half of the respondents to the first questionnaire had a BA diploma and 15 per cent of

them had vocational training (Fig. 1); regarding their sex structure, 52 per cent were females and 48 per cent males.

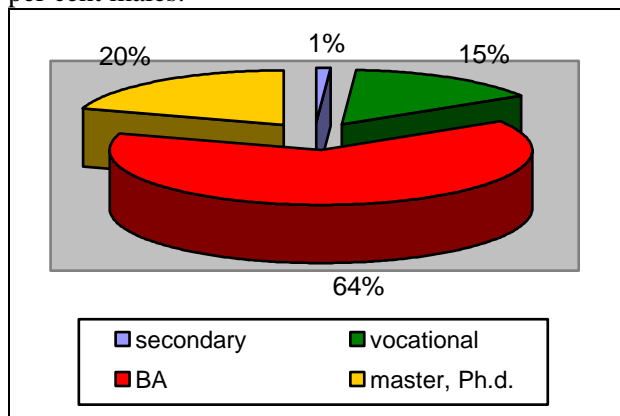


Fig. 1 Education level of the respondents

Most of them (41%) were working in the current tourism company for less than 3 years (this fact is in close connection to the age of the respondents, almost 40 per cent of them declaring to be 21 to 30 years of age), almost a third for 4 to 7 years, and just 10 per cent of the respondents for more than 10 years (Fig. 2).

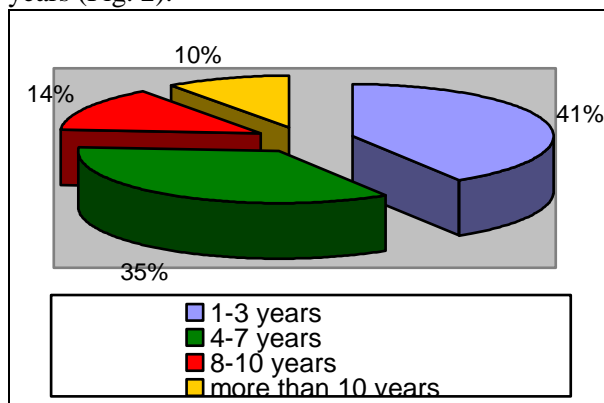


Fig. 2 Respondents' work experience in the field

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In 2009, World Economic Forum published the third edition of the *Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report* which aimed at providing an analysis of the travel and tourism competitiveness of 133 countries worldwide. The rankings are based on the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI), which measures the different regulatory and business-related issues that have been identified as levers for improving travel and tourism competitiveness in countries around the world.

The travel and tourism competitiveness index mainly mirrors the economy's performance, hinting at T&T regulatory framework (the third pillar of which is *Safety and Security*), T&T business environment infrastructure, as well as T&T human, cultural and natural resources.

As stated in the report, *Safety and Security* is a critical factor determining the competitiveness of a country's T&T industry, because "tourists are likely to be deterred from travelling to dangerous countries or regions, making it less attractive to develop the T&T sector in those places". There were analysed the costs of terrorism (threat of terrorism in the country) as well as of common crime and violence (the incidence of common crime and violence in the country, varying from 1 = imposes significant costs on business to 7 = does not impose significant costs on businesses), and the reliability of police services (1 = cannot be relied upon to enforce law and order; 7 = can be relied upon to enforce law and order).

Switzerland, Austria and Germany are the top three countries in the world with the highest index of T&T competitiveness. Compared to them, Romania has scored only 4.0, lying at the middle of the ranking (the 66th position), behind the neighbouring EU countries.

The first indicator for the matter of safety and security was the *threat of terrorism* in the country; this indicator is very important, since terrorism against the tourism industry is not a recent phenomenon, but during the last decades, the linkage between tourism and terrorism became clear (Laws and Prideaux, 2005; Tarlow, 2002; Mansfeld and Pizam, 2006; Tarlow, 2006; Henderson, 2007; Edgell et. al., 2008), with attacks against all aspects of tourism industry, including accommodation facilities, transport means etc. (Tarlow, 2006). Moreover, once an atmosphere of fear was created and a destination is perceived as insecure, the tourism industry is ruined.

Although no terrorist attacks were ever registered in Romania, the country has scored only 5.9 for this indicator, coming on the 57th place in the international hierarchy, well behind Hungary, but much better placed than Bulgaria, the two EU neighbouring countries. Despite the relatively high score (7 means that it does not impose significant costs), this indicator is seen as a competitive disadvantage for Romania.

The *police services* in the country are very important, because they must be relied upon to enforce law and order. However, Romania has a rather low score, being ranked the 74th, just like Thailand, Algeria, Madagascar, Tajikistan or Israel.

The *incidence of common crime and violence* must not be neglected, since visitors are vulnerable both to be victims of crime (travellers are quite often very easy to identify) and to become crime perpetrators (Tarlow, P.E., 2006b, p. 97). Romania has a score very close to the average, just like

Serbia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, being ranked 69th, better than Bulgaria (Table 1).

Table 1 Travel and tourism competitiveness index

Indicator	Rank					
	RO	BG	HU	SE	UKR	MO
Travel and tourism competitiveness index	66	50	38	88	77	93
Safety and security	62	87	41	85	86	52
Business cost of terrorism	57	104	21	90	67	31
Reliability of police services	74	111	46	67	105	112
Business costs of crime and violence	69	99	45	64	61	46
Road traffic accidents	80	52		n/a	101	45

(Data source: *Travel&Tourism Competitiveness Report, 2009*)

Compared to the neighbouring countries, Romania may held a good position, with better score and rankings than all the five countries, but Hungary, in terms of safety and security. However, for the overall travel and tourism competitiveness index, Romania lags behind the European Union countries, far away from Hungary and Bulgaria.

The *results to the online questionnaires*, filled in by tourism actors, including the representatives of accommodation facilities, restaurants, travel agencies, tourism organisations etc., reveal valuable information in support of the need for training safety and security in tourism.

According to WTO, safety and security are vital to ensure quality in tourism and should be one of the utmost importance objectives of tourism destinations (UNWTO, 1997). However, only a quarter of the Romanian respondents to the questionnaire consider that the syntagm 'tourism safety' is comparable to 'the quality of a service or product', and 39% answering rather yes than no to this question. This means that there is an urgent need for changing mentalities, because only by acknowledging the importance of tourism safety by the local actors, i.e. personnel working in tourism companies, Romania can begin to be perceived as a safe destination.

The questionnaires' results. Two thirds of the questioned persons agreed that there are different ideas regarding the general safety and protection of tourists put into practice in the company (35% answered *yes* and 32% *rather yes than no*), among the factors that would motivate companies to develop guidelines for the general safety and protection of the tourists during the trip, the most important being the increasing interest of the tourists in their personal safety during the trip (almost a third of the respondents), the importance of safety as part of the trip destination marketing

(32%) and competitive conditions of tourism companies (Fig. 3).

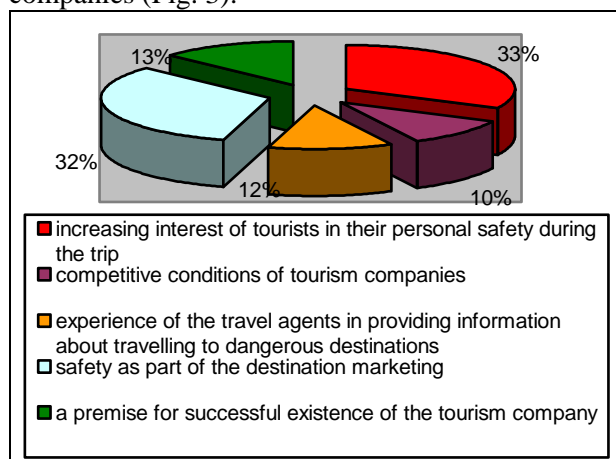


Fig. 3 Which factors would motivate your company to develop safety guidelines for the general safety and protection of tourists?

For the Romanian tourism companies, the following research themes related to tourism safety are topical: the importance of safety for tourists when choosing a particular destination or activity (28%), the most important factors that influence the choice of a service or product (21%), the necessity of an action system against risk to cope with catastrophes (17%).

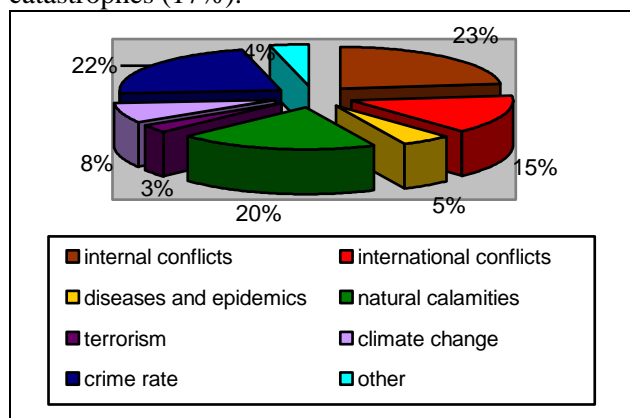


Fig. 4 Which forms of danger might put your business at risk?

Almost one fifth of the respondents consider that internal conflicts, natural calamities and the crime rate are the most significant forms of danger that might put their business at risk (Fig. 4). Most often, tourism crisis cannot be avoided since they are generated by external factors. But still, the extent of the crisis may be controlled if knowing the appropriate crisis management strategies (Mansfeld, 2003, p. 274).

In Romania, almost two thirds of the respondents consider that the personnel of the tourism company have the necessary skills for reacting if an emergency situation appears at the destination of the

trip (49.5% answered *rather yes than no* and 26.7% answered *yes*). This situation is a bit curious, since only a third of the respondents say that education seminars regarding tourism safety are organized for the company personnel once a year or more than once a year, 37% admitting that this type of seminars are being held less than once a year and 28% that no such seminars are being organized (Fig. 5). This may indicate the fact that both managers and personnel may overestimate their capacity to react in a crisis situation.

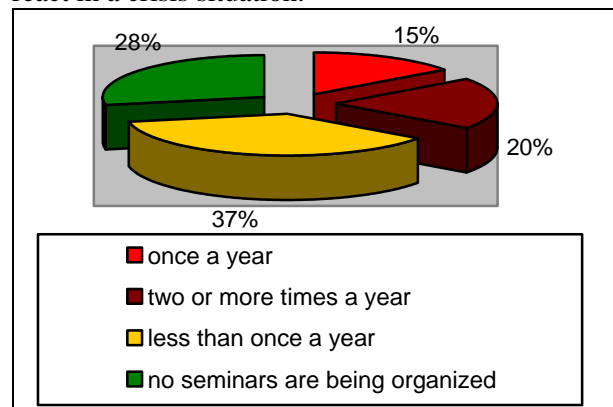


Fig. 5 How often are education seminars being organized for your personnel regarding tourism safety?

The **tourism experts' opinion** is also highly important and reveals valuable information. All the interviewed persons agree that tourism safety is important for all the factors involved in tourism activities (first of all for the clients, but for the tour-operators and agents as well), because the main objective is to ensure the client's safety and finally his satisfaction. The aspects of tourism safety must be taken into account, since once a client buys a touristic product or package, the company that offered it is fully responsible for all the aspects of the tourist safety.

Sales agents must have detailed knowledge about the touristic services offered, about the legislation, as well as communication skills in order to be able to give the client not only proper information, but also the feeling of comfort and safety the client must have when the agent answers his questions.

All the groups of tourists can and may be consulted (national and international tourists, the young and the old, having different jobs etc.) with respect to aspects of safety and security in tourism, since there should be made no difference between tourists regarding the safety of the trip. Although there are more challenging groups, like the old or the young people, no discrimination should be made. The first condition for a tourist to be satisfied by whatever package of service is that he

should arrive safe and sound to the trip destination and then take advantage of the services offered in that particular destination, in the same climate of comfort and safety. Any inconvenience or discomfort as a result of the trip to the chosen destination will certainly influence, in a negative way, the way tourists perceive the next products and services.

Defining new priorities of tourism safety is an important criterion for tourist destination marketing, which is not yet emphasized in Romania. The size of tourist flows and income from touristic activities require a constant reevaluation of the standards for the products the companies are offering and the quality of services, since the final beneficiary – the tourist, is always judging and classifying things.

Worldwide, the threats and dangers are more frequent and consequently, tourists are becoming more aware of the necessity of a safety destination. The standards of the EU imply some demands that should be met by any touristic activity. In order to meet these demands, at least at a reasonable level, there must be drawn an action plan that should take into consideration the Romanian realities, which are clearly influenced by the existing economic conditions. Foreign tourists are educated in the spirit of touristic safety, and when choosing a particular destination, this aspect is of utmost importance. The image of the country or any touristic destination depends on the quality of the touristic products, which include not only the natural patrimony or the economic environment, but also the social and political climate, state order and citizens' safety.

According to the Romanian government and national agencies, tourism is a priority domain of Romania's economy. The quality of the touristic products must be a strategic component and a key factor for the promotion of the country on the international market, in the present economic context, when there is a rapid and continuous diversification of touristic destinations and products. Most important, the tourists' demands for safety and security are ever higher. These realities require more efforts for the tourist's protection, by guarantying both the quality and the security of the touristic destinations and packages.

The government has acknowledged this matter and there are various laws for the protection of tourists. Within the Ministry of Tourism, there is the General Direction for Control and Tourists' Safety. One of the objectives of the National Center for Touristic Teaching is also to ensure the safety of the tourists as consumers of services and goods.

Possibilities for training specialists in the tourism sector and for the development of a skilled workforce

In Romania, Tourism as main specialization is taught in 30 universities (19 of them state-owned universities and 11 as private universities), spread throughout the country. Most often, the Faculties of Economics have a specialization named *The economy of commerce, tourism and services* or *Management of commercial companies and tourism*. It is also worth mentioning *Business management in the hotel industry* (Cluj-Napoca Business School), The University College for marketing in tourism and hotel activities (Arad), as well as *The Training Center for Tourism* held by Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.

Apart from the Universities, there are 14 vocational and high schools which offer study programmes for tourism, the most frequent qualifications being tourism agent or technician in tourism.

There is also an institutionalized system for the programmes of 'adults' continuous professional training', held by the National Center for Touristic Teaching, under the responsibility of the National Authority for Tourism. One of the leading institutions contracted by the Center for training courses is Tourism, Hotel & Restaurant Consulting Group (according to their presentation, there were approximately 20,000 trained people in 10 years). It is worth mentioning the private initiative of the Royal Institute of Hotel Management that created a post graduate diploma program in collaboration with École Hôtelière de Lausanne in Switzerland.

With respect to the average number of graduates of colleges and universities in tourism area per year, there are no correct data at national level. Some rough estimates indicate approximately 1600 graduates on Bachelor Level, 200 on Master and around 700 in high schools and vocational centers.

Although the number of graduates may seem high, it is estimated that less than 20 per cent of the graduates from universities or vocational schools with touristic programmes end up working in the sector of hospitality and tourism in Romania.

Recently, the need for qualified personnel has increased on the one hand due to the high number of hotels and other accommodation establishments recently built, all of them requiring trained staff and to migration, on the other hand (more and more persons with some experience in this sector choose to work abroad, because they can earn more).

However, the formal education for hospitality services is not well developed, because the training courses are only partially included in the curricula

for vocational schools and universities. What is more, the training curricula for the hospitality sector do not include the practical knowledge and skills needed for this kind of activities. As shown in the Master Plan for Tourism, ‘there is no acknowledgment for the need of training and there is no educational culture’.

What is more, the issue of safety and security in tourism is quite vaguely dealt with in the curricula of the universities and vocational schools. Most often, there is no subject directly addressing this matter, but rather some optional courses regarding the quality of products and the protection of consumers, having as a special topic the protection of service consumers – the protection of tourists. Most important, the existing training curricula for the hospitality sector are improper most of the time and the teaching staff lacks the qualifications and practical experience. Most of the training courses for tourism do not aim for practical skills. ‘Getting the diploma is more important than the skills acquired’, due to the work legislation approved in 2006, stipulating that whoever intends to apply for a function in the sector of hospitality and tourism must hold a proper diploma or certificate.

There is almost no separate and specialized formal training and education in the hospitality sector. The training institutions are not accustomed to the training depending on the demands, taking into consideration the needs of the market. Generally, the hired staff in travel and tourism activities does not have the practical skills and knowledge for carrying out activities at international standards. The issue of safety and security in tourism in Romania is generally disregarded. Consequently, it is very important to have a good training for the safety and security in tourism.

CONCLUSIONS

Crises can have a significant impact on tourist inbound and outbound flows. Although Romania does not receive a high number of international tourists (around 1.5 million, which accounts for less than 0.5% of the total number of international tourists in Europe, while the proportion of nights spent in Romania by non-residents in the European Union is only 1.4%), the lack of a proper safety system may impinge on the future development of the country as a main tourist destination. We must take into consideration that tourist destinations are now viewed as systems, made up of accommodation, attractions and transport (Chiang L.C., 2000). This means that safety in tourism must be ensured at multiple levels at the same time: on

the one hand, at national level, by the police which must enforce the law and by other public bodies ensuring public safety, and on the other hand, at the local level: the managers of hotels and other premises must be well aware of the importance of having the proper equipment for guaranteeing their guests the security, the proper procedures to react or prevent some accidents or crises, and not least, a well trained personnel, having the skills and knowledge to react in a crisis situation.

In order to have personnel that is trained well enough and motivated, there is an urgent need for updated curricula and courses, as well as better informed and experienced training staff. The results and experiences of other countries in this domain may well be used, taking into consideration some specific aspects of the country. Romania is an emerging country from the international tourist destinations point of view and it can only assert its place among the main destinations in the continent if it is perceived as a safe destination, among other things.

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