

## Tourism and Cultural Heritage: Sector Priorities of Regional Development Policy within Bucharest-Ilfov Region

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**Abstract:** The sustainable development gets a great importance in the context of Romania integration in the EU and globalization, a context in which the intersection of the economic, social environmental but also cultural and recreational sector is more and more complex. Having in mind this complex context, in this paper, we present a personal point of view regarding the potential for growth in tourism of Bucharest-Ilfov region, due to vast range of tourist offer (cultural, business, recreational). The Bucharest-Ilfov region has a great tourism potential: the attraction capacity of the Bucharest urban centre is enriched by the environmental and cultural value of the areas and sites surrounding the capital city. This combination of urban, business, cultural and environmental resources is a powerful basis for developing the tourism sector in the region. The tourism sector must be a priority of the regional development policy, because of the importance of the tourism contribution to growth and job creation so the infrastructure improvement is therefore a necessity for tourism development. In line with the above, the main goal of this paper is to demonstrate the necessity of increasing the economic importance of the tourism sector within the regional economy.

**Keywords:** regional development; region; tourism infrastructure

**JEL Classification:** O1

### Bucharest-Ilfov Region

Bucharest-Ilfov is the capital region of Romania. It is formed by the capital city Bucharest and the surrounding county Ilfov. Region Bucharest – Ilfov represents the eighth development region of Romania, a special region, as it is the smaller (1821 sq km), but also the most developed from the economical point of view.

This region is placed as an enclave within the South – Muntenia development region, but at the same time in this region is situated also the Capital of the country,

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the biggest Romanian urban agglomeration. The Capital gives to the region a superior economical force, a higher GDP, and a social and professional structure with a higher standard. Foreign investors are interested in the advantages offered by the Capital to a country that represents one of the largest markets in Central and Eastern Europe (almost 20 million citizens).

The region's geographical position has favored the development of a complex communications network, region being crossed by the Bucharest – Pitesti highway, by 8 national roads and by 4 main train lines.

Also this region lies at the joint of important European transport corridors: Corridor 4 (Berlin, Praga, Budapest, Arad, Bucharest, Constanta, Istanbul, Salonique), Corridor 9 (Helsinki, Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Bucharest, Constanta), corridor 7 for navigation (Constanta, Basarabi, Danube, Main, Rhin).

There must be also reminded the Capital's tourist potential, where there can be visited numerous museums, old churches, vestiges from the Old Court, but also Ilfov County's tourist potential (Mogosoiaia, Snagov lake, Cernica Monastery). Bucharest was the first city to introduce gas lighting, it had phone connections before 1900, the railway connection between Bucharest and Giurgiu departing from Filarete Station was the fastest in Europe.

Known as the Little Paris during the interwar period, Bucharest still has a relevant historical and cultural heritage, which has hardly survived to the destructive urban policy of the eighties, when approx. 450 hectares of the built city centre were demolished. The Romanian capital city is still the most important historical and cultural centre of the country and has a high potential for business and cultural tourism. Both cultural and business tourism contribute to growing flows of tourists, as demonstrated by the low seasonal fluctuations. The accommodation capacity in the region has increased. Incoming tourism in the Bucharest-Ilfov region increased mainly due to the increase of foreign tourists attracted by increasing opportunities relating to business and culture. The overall contribution of the tourism sector to job creation and GDP formation is in the rise and its further increase shall be supported by marketing oriented information and promotion.

The niche of "urban tourism" is a very important one and the project of Bucharest Historical Centre shall contribute to increase the economic contribution of the tourism sector to the regional economy.

"However, despite the fact that Bucharest can offer a great variety of "out of seasons" tourism attractions, ranging from cultural targets (such as museums, art exhibitions, historical buildings) to entertainment events (such as theatre shows, music festivals, international fairs, sport events) and recreational places (green areas, swimming pools and lakes), its touristic potential is not fully valorized. The most important factors hampering Bucharest from being again the Eastern

European “Little Paris” are the inappropriate management of its cultural and historical heritage and the low level of specialization of touristic services.

On the other hand, the Ilfov County, though not so well known as the capital city, does have a high tourism potential, thanks to the combination of monasteries, historical buildings, forests, lakes and a still untouched rural environment, that characterizes its non urbanized landscape. Issues for developing tourism in Ilfov are: a still low level of accessibility (difficult access to Snagov Island); the inappropriate management of natural resources (wild deforestation, no water treatment plants in the region, no waste collection in the rural areas) and, same as for Bucharest, the low level of specialization of touristic services.”<sup>1</sup>

Infrastructure improvement is therefore a necessity, well beyond the requirements of tourism development.

### **Tourism Sector SWOT Analysis for Bucharest-Ilfov Region<sup>2</sup>**

#### **“Strengths:**

- Good accessibility by flight in comparison with other European capital cities.
- Growing trend of incoming tourism in Romania, within international increasing trends for urban tourism.
- Large number of quality hotels in Bucharest (five-four stars, but also good three stars).
- A large supply of tourist attractions in Bucharest and Ilfov (monuments, events-including business events, quality hotels, restaurants, banks etc.). Romexpo is the largest exhibition centre of Romania.
- Sustained foreign direct investment in the last years in the hotel & restaurant sector, a trend that is expected to continue for some years ahead.
- The capital is the most important cultural centre of the country (universities, theatres, monuments, museums etc.).
- Concentration of travel agencies in Bucharest.
- Bucharest close to Danube (Giurgiu at less than 50 km distance from downtown), country-side and mountains

#### **Weaknesses:**

- Low accessibility by road/railway in comparison with other European capital cities.

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<sup>1</sup> Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Plan, Regional Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013.

<sup>2</sup> Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Plan Regional Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013.

- Low weight of tourism in the total of the employed population
- Limited tourism promotion.
- Limited tourism information (green phone lines, info centres, history panels outside monuments etc.).

#### **Opportunities**

- Job creation;
- e-booking growing trends;
- potential to promote Buchares-Ilfov through the web;

#### **Threats**

- Neglecting regional cultural patrimony.
- Centralized promotion of Romania neglecting Bucharest as a tourist destination.
- Low prices and attractiveness of tourism destinations outside Romania, at car travel distance ( Greece, Turkey).
- Low degree of cooperation between regular line air travel operators and travel agencies.

In line with the above, the main goal for a tourism strategy is to increase the economic importance of the tourism sector within the regional economy, by fostering large job creation and higher GDP and value added formation. This goal is articulated into the following main objectives:

- Increase the contribution of the tourism sector to job creation and the formation of regional GDP.
- Promote Bucharest-Ilfov as a new brand, thus also raising the image of Bucharest as European capital.

The achievement of the above objectives requires a coordinate set of actions that, on the one side, help developing a competitive tourist offer in order to stimulate new quality demand of touristic services, that is attracting more visitors to Bucharest-Ilfov; on the other side, improve soft and hard infrastructure in order to improve the supply of tourism products.

- “Promote equal opportunities and gender policies, enhancing women’s competencies in tourism services.
- Promote the information society through the use of e-communication methods and technologies in order to promote the region’s tourist packages (not only e-booking, but also virtual museums), thus increasing the rate of hotels occupancy.

- Make operational public-private regional partnerships, with a mandate to focus on new touristic products and promote regional tourism.
- Establishing and promoting quality standards for the touristic products and services, including via studies and research on tourist satisfaction.

Organize appropriate promotion of the most appropriate touristic sites and events, including audiovisuals, publications, leaflets, maps of the city and its surroundings, publications, sponsorship of events, marketing actions, etc.

- Promote the sustainable development of tourism, by protecting natural resources, reuse and renew of the historical architectural heritage both in urban and rural areas.
- Establishment and/or reconstruction of buildings such as visitor centres, exhibition sites, multi-functional halls, sites for training, conferences and business consulting services, tourist information points, community centers, infrastructure increasing tourist comfort.

Develop tourism infrastructure at tourism sites, such as parking lots (where appropriate), rest areas for visitors, including hygiene facilities (restrooms), tourist information devices and boards in the vicinity of the attractions, facilities for easier access of disabled.”<sup>1</sup>

The regional development policy is a policy of solidarity, meaning a policy for people, its purpose being to create working places, to increase the competitiveness level, and to support the countries from the less developed regions. One of the instruments for implementation of this policy is Regional Operational Programme, which has as the main objective the balanced development of all the regions of the country, by making best use of the regional and local development potential, focusing on the urban growth poles, improving regional and local transport infrastructure, as well as social infrastructure, supporting the development of regional and local business environment, also by sustainable development and tourism promotion, with a view to transforming these regions, especially those which are less developed, into areas more attractive for investments, tourism and housing.

The Regional Operational Programme 2007-2013 is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The Regio global objective consists in supporting and promoting the economic and social sustainable local development of the Romanian Regions, according to their specific needs, by improving business environment and infrastructural conditions as basis for growth, in order to make the Romanian Regions, especially the ones lagging behind, more attractive places to

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<sup>1</sup> Bucharest-Ilfov Regional Development Plan, Regional Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013.

invest in and work. Regio will contribute to support and promote of sustainable economic and social development of the tourism potential of the region.

The Priority Axis 5 Regio regards **The Sustainable development and promotion of tourism** aims mainly to sustainably value and promote the cultural patrimony and the natural resources with tourism potential, as well as to improve the quality of the accommodation and leisure tourism infrastructure with the view to increase the attractiveness of the regions, the development of local economies and the creation of new jobs.

The key area of intervention 5.1 is **“Sustainable restoration and valuing of the cultural heritage, as well as establishing/modernizing the related infrastructures”**.

**The objectives** of this area<sup>1</sup> are:

- Increasing the importance of tourism and culture as factors stimulating economic growth within the regions, observing, at the same time, the principles of sustainable development and environmental protection;
- Extending the tourism season;
- Increasing the number of tourists by valuing the local and regional cultural tourism potential on the national and international tourism market.

The categories of eligible beneficiaries are:

- Local and central public administration authorities;
- Religious institutions organized as legal entities of public utility;
- Non-governmental organizations.

The eligible informative activities within the project are:

- Restoration, protection and preservation of heritage buildings, of their interior paintings, frescoes, exterior murals;
- Restoration/creation of access routes (pedestrian and roads) to the rehabilitated sites within their area of protection;
- New works and equipment meant to ensure inside and outside lighting, safety lighting as well as decorative lighting;
- Restoration and remodeling of facades;

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<sup>1</sup> The Applicant's Guide 5.1. Key area of intervention ” Sustainable restoration and valuing of the cultural heritage, as well as establishing/modernizing the related infrastructures.

- Landscape setting up facilities for highlighting the restored heritage tourism attraction;
- Interior equipping (installations and equipment ensuring air-conditioning, fire safety, burglary prevention conditions);
- Modernization of utilities related to the heritage site (electricity, water supply, sewerage);
- Equipment for the presentation and protection of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage;
- Establishing protection areas by delimiting and surrounding the heritage site (there where the case may be);
- Construction of utility annexes (parking sites, restrooms, advertisements and signs);
- Establishing/marking tourism routes/cultural itineraries to the rehabilitated tourism sites;
- Building / rehabilitating / setting up the access path to the rehabilitated tourism sites.

Approximate financial allocation for this area of intervention of the Bucharest-Ilfov region is of 20.85 million Euros.

There are 6 projects in implementation in Bucharest for sustainable restoration and valuing of the cultural heritage: 4 are the projects of Citu Hall of Bucharest Municipality (Triumphal arch, Mina Minovici Museum, Astronomical Observatory and Cesianu House), the restoration of Sofia Church and restoration of the Patriarchal Palace. More details about these projects can be consulted on the website dedicated to Regio [www.regioadrbi.ro](http://www.regioadrbi.ro) section Projects.

Another key intervention area for tourism is 5.2”**Creating, developing and modernizing the specific infrastructures for the sustainable capitalization of natural resources with touristic potential**”.

**The objectives**<sup>1</sup> of 5.2 key area of intervention are:

- Capitalizing natural resources for tourism;
- Diversifying the touristic services;

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<sup>1</sup> The Applicant’s Guide 5.2 key intervention area ”Creating, developing and modernizing the specific infrastructures for the sustainable capitalization of natural resources with touristic potential”.

- Improving the quality of accommodation services;
- Creating / expanding the leisure tourism structures in order to increase the number of tourists and the length of stay.

The categories of eligible beneficiaries are:

For the public tourism infrastructure (that does not fall under state aid)

- Authorities of the local public administration;
- Partnerships between the authorities of the local public administration;
- Intercommunity Development Agencies.

For the public/private tourism infrastructure (that falls under state aid)

- Authorities of the local public administration;
- Partnerships between the authorities of the local public administration;
- Intercommunity Development Agencies;
- SMEs in the field of tourism and/or related activities;
- Partnerships between the authorities of the local public administration and the NGOs in the field tourism and/or related activities.

The indicative eligible activities within the project can be:

For public tourism infrastructure (that does not fall under state aid)

- Setting up natural touristic objectives with touristic potential;
- Capitalizing the potential of the mountain tourism;
- Developing the balneal tourism.

For the public-private tourism infrastructure (that falls under state aid)

- Developing balneal tourism;
- Creating, rehabilitating and expanding the recreational infrastructure, related utilities included.

The financial allocation for this area of intervention in the Bucharest-Ilfov region is of 20.47 million Euros.

For 5.2 key area of intervention there are 4 projects in implementation in Bucharest, the beneficiaries are 3 small and medium enterprises from Bucharest and City Hall of Bucharest Municipality and the projects are regarding the



extension of accommodation capacity of a hotel and the creation of two entertainment parks. More details about these projects can be consulted on the website dedicated to Regio [www.regioadrbi.ro](http://www.regioadrbi.ro) section Projects.

The Municipality of Bucharest, together with Sectoral Administrations, has identified a number of area-based projects, the largest one being the —Bucharest historic centre renaissance project, or the Green Bucharest project, consisting in the establishment of new green areas within the urban area, as well as a Green Belt around the city are intended to target the protection and improvement of the Bucharest urban environment.

The finalization of these projects represents a great challenge from the point of view of the urban and regional governance, as it requires involvement and consensus of the population, as well as cooperation and communication between all public institutions with inherent responsibilities.

### **Final Remarks**

Investing not only in regional innovation and internationalization, education and employment, but also in tourism, culture and regional marketing, is needed to improve the structure and performance of the economic activity in the region.

The great tourism potential of the Bucharest-Ilfov region based on the combination of urban, business, cultural and environmental resources represents a powerful basis for the social and economical development of the region.

However, a coherent integrated strategy is necessary in order to recover the present gaps of the tourism sector in order that the EU objective foster tourism's competitiveness and sustainability, to be in compliance with national objective, the promotion of Romanian tourism potential and with regional objectives: increasing the economic importance of the tourism sector within the regional economy, by fostering large job creation and higher GDP and value added formation and promoting Bucharest-Ilfov as a new brand, raising in this way the image of Bucharest as European capital.

Building regional identity and image, laying at the basis of local proud and community cohesion, are one of the elements of territorial attractiveness. The role of the administration is to preserve the cultural heritage and at the same time, to build on it with a vision towards modernity and the future.

A good regional tourism strategy must build on Bucharest historic role, of image, symbolic and geopolitical value, promoting it as a renovated European capital, located at the edge of the continent, as Eastern Europe gate, traditionally open to multicultural influences.

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## **Websites**

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