ABSTRACT. Romania is known for its tourist resources. Why, then, Romanian tourism did not become yet the engine of the national economy? This is the starting question of this research. We started with the idea that we have to look for the roots of all problems at the microeconomic level not at the macro one. We have studied a sample of companies involved in tourism field and we applied a questionnaire to their management board. The most important thing to highlight was if the management decisions are strategically orientated or not. The conclusions reveal a sum of problems that Romanian tourism companies are facing. The most important problem is a lack of strategic approach in management process. Further, we made a short sketch of the scenario that might be followed and we revealed the advantages and disadvantages of the possible alternatives for the Romanian tourism companies.

Key words: tourist companies, strategic management orientation, strategic problems.

1. General problems that the tourist companies from Romania are deal with

Romania has a big tourist potential but in spite of this, if we analyze the Romanian tourist industry, we realize that it is dealing with many problems. This study wants to reveal some possible causes of this situation.

Analyzing statistical data and the existing literature, we could find some essential aspects that characterize the Romanian tourist industry in the present period.

A positive aspect is an increase in number of small and medium size private companies in tourist field due to the privatization process, creation of new companies and to reconverted enterprises from other sectors. Unfortunately, phenomena like mergers and acquisitions, which are characteristics of a dynamic sector, are very rare. This is one of the first problems that we have identified.

A second problem regards the human resources. The tourist field seems to be not very attractive for those who have knowledge and education in tourism. A reason for this is the relationship between work volume and salaries, which is unbalanced. Due to this, we assist at some “invert selection” of human resources; those who apply for a job in the tourist field are either without any qualification or with other qualifications but unemployed for the moment. Therefore, the quality of human resources in Romanian tourist companies is bellow the average of other sectors and this has negative consequences for the quality of tourist services.

Low quality of tourist services and the prices that the tourist companies charge, along with Romanians’ low purchasing power has lead to a dramatically decrease of the internal tourist services demand. Despite to the low purchasing power we assist to an increase of the demand for external tourist services and, also, the external offers increase.

In the same time, we could observe a decrease of overnight staying and an increase of offers for weekend tourism. Now days the number of Romanians who are spending the

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holiday at the Black Sea is continuously decreasing because most of them choose other destinations like Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, Greece or others, where the balance price/quality is better that offered by the Romanian tourist companies. The same situation could be observed for the mountain resorts due to the lack of entertainment facilities.

Romanian natural tourist potential remains, in this way, unused and the most important reason for this is the bad management of available financial resources (which multiplied since 2002).

On the other hand, Romanian tourist products are not promoted in spite of the existence of the Fund for Tourism Promotion administrated by Romanian Ministry of Finances from 01.01.2001.

2. The objective of the research

Our purpose was to reveal why we cannot see clear benefits of tourism development in Romanian economy. We have chosen a sort of unconventional way and we did not start the research from analyzing the situation at the macroeconomic level. On the contrary, we have studied the problem at the microeconomic level being interested by the tourist firms.

The management of these companies, especially the strategic management, was interesting for us because we believe that the problems of Romanian tourist industry lye at organization’s management level.

We started with the idea that the purpose of any research is to find those informations that companies need to solve a problem, but the solutions must come from the management teams. In this way, we want to bring to the attention of the decision factors the problems that they had to solve immediately. If we would be able to do this, then our study has reached its purpose.

A problem in our study was the size of the sample that we must use for an accurate scientific research. Due to our limited resources, we did not intend to achieve a study at a macroeconomic level. This was the reason which restrained our research to tourist companies registered in the city of Cluj and our believe that the problems of Romanian tourist companies are the same all over the country, so our conclusions can be easily generalized using statistic tools.

We have intended to include in our study all companies that offers tourist services but from all targeted companies only 18 (72%) accepted to collaborate to our research.

The research method used was the direct interview based on a questioner; this allowed us to collect both formal and informal information in order to observe elements like attitudes, hesitations, embarrassed or optimistic smiles, mentalities. We consider all these elements very useful in the diagnose of the management type applied in the researched companies.

First, we collected data regarding the managers age, managers’ level of education, type of company, ownership, turnover, number of employees and location. From the responses we have received, the following data regarding the companies emerged.

Conclusions:

- 80% of the managers are bellow 35 years old and 60% of them have studied in tourist or economic filed;
- 89% of the companies are privately owned, 70% of them are of Limited liability type (Ltds) and 51% of them have a turnover between 1 and 10 billions ROL.
- 47% of analyzed companies have between 5 and 6 employees, and most of these (70%) have the activity limited only to city of Cluj area.
Figure 1. The managers age

Figure 2. The level of studies

Figure 3. Company type

Figure 4. Ownership

73
Figure 5. Turnover (billions ROL)

Figure 6. Number of employees

Figure 7. Location
3. Conclusions revealed by the questioners

Through the basic questions from the questionnaire (15 from 22) we wanted to extract some information regarding the situations of the strategic management in Romanian tourist companies.

We have reached to the following conclusions based on the answers to the questionnaire:

Conclusions regarding the opinion of the managers about the necessity, the purpose and the content of strategic management

A gladding ascertained fact is that 95% of managers are fully aware of the importance of a strategic orientated management, while just 5% are not convinced of this situation. However, in their opinion, strategic orientation has different acceptations.

✓ 63% consider that strategic orientation means a better capacity to adapt to their clients demands;
✓ 37% think that strategic orientation means just an efficient development of the company’s activity.

From the 63% of the managers presented above:

✗ 33% of managers consider that strategic orientation means to elaborate, to choose and to implement a corporative strategy, or continuous interest for adopting modern ways for conducting the activity in their companies;
✗ 33% of managers consider that strategic orientation means a unitary vision of the management about the entire activity of the company.

Half of the interviewed managers think that strategic orientation of the management must characterize exclusively the activity of the company management, while the other half consider that the strategic orientation must be found in the activity of all employees.

25% of managers think that the starting point of the management must be the mission of the firm, while 6% consider that the strategic orientation of the management is not quite necessary for the moment.

More than a half of managers (57%) have declared that they know exactly which are the persons from the company involved in elaboration and implementation of corporative strategy, while 43% of them barely know or they do not know at all who those persons are.

44% from the investigated companies have at least a draft of a strategic plan; but 19% of the managers did not know if they have some kind of plan and the others did not answered at this question. 32% of the managers have declared that the company’s activity, to a certain degree, is developed following a management strategy formally elaborated; 58% of them declare that the most of the company’s activities follow a strategic plan, while 10% declare that the activity follows entirely a strategic plan.

Concerning the strategic management implementation modalities, 63% of the managers consider that it is necessary to have some employees prepared for this implementation process; the opinion of 38% of the managers is that they need to employ experts in this field while the others consider that they must appeal to some consulting companies.

Conclusions regarding the managers’ level of information regarding the strategic aspects of their activities

Only 63% of the managers have declared that they know where their company is situated on the tourist market, while this aspect of the activity was not important for the others.

91% of the managers admitted the importance of constructing a good client portfolio; but the role of this portfolio is seen in different manners. For 51% of the managers the client portfolio plays an important role in the increase of sales; for the other 49%, the client portfolio is just a management tool.
In opinion of 94% of the managers, the links between partners have a positive influence on the quality of their own tourist offer. The other 6% denied this.

All of the interviewed managers have declared that they know which their competitors are, but none of them gave to much importance to the study of those. The vast majority of them think that the competition on the tourist market is not so fierce (for the moment) and it not causes insurmountable problems.

All managers admit that a differentiation between their company and their competitors is necessary, but regarding the criteria of differentiation, the opinions are divided. Thus, 54% think that the most important thing is the level of client satisfaction, followed by the quality of offered services (39%), type of the tourist product they offer, the quality of employees (21%), prices (5%), the company’s image on the market (5%), the firm endowments (5%).

The main priorities for the tourist companies, in their manager’s opinion, are the followings: tourist product offer (64%) which has to be original, divert, extensible and flexible; growth of the service quality and affordable prices (18%); the actions connected with the company’s activities such as acquisitions and maintenance (12%).

The main competitive advantages revealed by managers are: their own product offer (a good, original, diverted and flexible one), quality of services, employees professionalism (seriousness, promptitude, empathies), affordable prices, a good quality/price ratio and advertising.

Generally, the managers recognize the importance of the marketing activity, but they put the accent mostly on advertising, fairs participation and promotion of their own tourist packages. Unfortunately, the main elements of the modern marketing such as intern marketing, relational marketing, sincro-marketing, strategic marketing, transactional marketing did not find any place, yet, inside the Romanian tourist companies.

The main strengths of a tourist company are, in its manager opinion: the product offer (33%), prices (27%), commercial position (40%), the existing endowments (25%), relationship with clients (26%), image (13%), advertising and publicity (14%), employees professionalism (18%) and last but not least a very clear objectives setting (14%). On the other hand, the main weaknesses of a tourist company may be:

- insufficient advertising and publicity (51%);
- the lack of ticketing activity (25%);
- a very small number of employees (26%);
- the lack of own tourist packages and of a destination specialization (21%);
- the managers overloading (19%);
- a bad commercial position (outside the commercial zone 27%);
- inappropriate spaces (7%);
- high prices (8%);
- a lack of medium term forecasting (11%).

These are the results obtained from the sample.

If we try to generalize all these results, at a significance level of 5%, we obtain the following:

- Between 73,5% and 99,91% of the tourist company managers are fully aware about the importance of strategic management;
- Less then 68,8% of the tourist companies developed a strategic plan;
- Less then 84% of the managers know their company position on the market;
- Between 68% and 99% of the managers admit the importance of the client portfolio;
- Between 72,1% and 99,8% of the managers admit that the links between partners has a positive influence for the company’s activity.
As we can see from the statistics many tourist company managers know and admit the importance of... so, were are the problems?

4. Final conclusions

Analyzing the conclusions generated by the study, we were able to formulate the following problems with which Romanian tourist companies are confronted:

- Persons without a proper training in the tourist field are in charge with the management of many of these companies. Even if we admit that the business feeling and the intuition are indispensable, the lack of knowledge in the field is a serious problem.
- Romanian tourist companies “live from a day to another” because the managers are not aware, yet, of the necessity of strategic management. For most of them the sense of the concept and/or its purposes are not very clear.
- Most of the tourist companies did not elaborate a formal strategy, being orientated mostly to solving the operative and tactical problems. This situation led (past of lead) to a neglect of the strategically problems.
- The companies did not pay sufficient importance to the internal and external strategically diagnosis, under evaluate the strategy of their competitors, being unable to identify their own strengths. Therefore, they become impersonal and cannot keep their clients.
- The number of persons involved in elaborating, implementing a corporative strategy is very small, and it is not involved in the coordination of the actions required by strategically plans.
- Managers are not used to be interviewed. Some of them are afraid of it and try to avoid, with diplomacy, but categorically such situations. Questions seem to be inconvenient and they do not want to reveal some “secrets”. They are not convinced that this kind of study has positive effects on their activity.
- Most of the managers do not have a proper training in tourist field. They often mix management with marketing or with publicity and they do not know how to evaluate their position on the market. They do not give the necessary importance to the study of competitors or of their clients and they do not have an accurate database for learning from their or others mistakes. They are not preoccupied with the internal and relational marketing.

These conclusions confirm the idea we started with: namely that the inadequate situation of Romanian tourism has its roots at the microeconomic level. These are the factors to blame for the actual situation; that Romanian tourism is far away from being the engine of the national economy.

We can conclude that the problem number one of the Romanian tourism is the necessity of a radical change in the management process of the tourist companies.

The questions are: how to realize this change? From where to start?

In our opinion, this change must begin with human’s way of thinking, but this is a difficult process to initiate because it implies a changing process at a personal level for those who are involved. On the other hand, this process represents a challenge for the managerial teams, which must assure the needed development on different stages required by the implementation of a strategic plan.

We discuss here about the creation of an organizational culture favorable to change due to the fact that any change generate, in most cases, employees’ resistance or opposition. The identification of the resistance factors and transforming them in change triggering factors assure that this process will be successful.
A permanent and intense communications between the persons involved will be required and the starting moment must be choose with great care. The transition must be supervised and coordinated otherwise, it will be end with a big failure.

The change must be made according to a plan established in advance based on a complex analysis of the business environment and on a correct evaluation of the internal capacity of the organization to face these changes. The change must start with the managers, and go from top to bottom.

The answers to the questioners revealed that there are three different ways to implement the strategic management, each one with its advantages and disadvantages but all of them very expensive from the costs point of view.

One of these modalities can be the training of some employees in field of management. This can be made through postgraduate courses. This way has the advantage that the people involved know the activity of the company and are involved in it but there is a risk that after the graduation they can quit the company.

A second modality consists in hiring of some specialists, already formed. New salary expenses will follow this for the company. The risk that we presented above can be avoided but it highlights another problem; the period of accommodation is necessary.

Finally, the use of specialized consulting companies means that the tourist firm has supplementary costs. On the other hand, if the employees do not trust the consultants it is possible to refuse to give any information to these. In this case, without information, the solution will not by efficient.

As a final conclusion, the implementation of strategic management in Romanian tourist companies is a necessity and should become a number one priority but at the same time is a complex and difficult process that has to be conducted with responsibility.

REFERENCES