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SEA-COAST TOURISM ACTIVITY IN ROMANIA DURING THE PANDEMICS

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Abstract

The presence of the Covid 19 pandemic on the Romanian territory involved different stages and intensities of manifestation in terms of both space and time. The decrease in tourist travel has affected the proper functioning of the entire HORECA system. In addition, the implementation of the measures meant to limit the spread of the virus has greatly reduced the flow of tourists who accounted for the main forms of tourism.

The tourism restrictions put in place triggers the need for rethinking the sea-coast tourism, which is one of the most popular among Romanian tourists. The main issue in this regard is the need for establishing a physical distance of two meters between people. Since the number of sea-coast located accommodation units is lower than the total number of accommodation units this translates into the fact that not all accommodation units would be able to benefit from the presence of tourists on the beach, along with the reduction of the existing congestion that is present every year in the summer season.

All the documentation studies underpinning this paper show that the Romanian sea-coast tourism is focused on a short, very crowded season, and that the use of the beach areas should be reconsidered, keeping in mind the objective of improving tourist services. The lesson that the pandemic teaches us is that it is possible to generate a high-quality tourism consisting in ensuring an increased comfort, with a smaller number of tourists, by extending the up- season to four months.

Keywords: summer tourism, up-season, the Romanian sea-coast, coronavirus covid 19

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1. Introduction

The persistence of the pandemic for a long period, between 2020 and 2021, has shown that the sea-coast tourism stands at a crossroads – both in economic and spatial terms. All European countries where tourism accounts for approximately 5-12% of the GDP were the most severely affected by this pandemic. In this context, our country is no exception.

With a total length of 245 km, the Romanian sea-coast stretches from the north, from the border with the Republic of Ukraine, to the south, to the border with the Republic of Bulgaria, delimiting the east of the province of Dobrogea from the waters of the Black Sea. The segment beginning in the area of Cape Midia (Năvodari) and up to Vama Veche (the border with Bulgaria) stretches over a distance of 82 km, and is the region mostly frequented by tourists. The beach region covers a length of 120 km on the territory of Constanța County (according to the Integrated Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in Constanța County, 2019-2028, 2019, p. 14).

The Romanian coast offers multiple accommodation solutions. Between 1959 and 1985, the seaside resorts were permanently modernized. Romanian and foreign tourists can choose from more than 250,000 beds in hotels, villas, and boarding houses, located in 12 seaside resorts (figure 1): Năvodari, Mamaia, Eforie Nord, Eforie Sud, Techirghiol, Costinești, Olimp, Neptun, Jupiter, Cap Aurora, Venus, Saturn, Mangalia, and two towns: 2 Mai and Vama Veche. Corbu Beach is the newest beach on the Romanian coast, located a short distance from Mamaia and Năvodari, to the south, and the Danube Delta reservation to the north. The main form of tourism that takes here is spa-maritime tourism, consisting in heliomarine treatments and climatic tourism (Bogan et al., 2021).

In recent years, various restaurants and terraces, clubs and discos have been established along the coast, and arranged on the beach or in the immediate vicinity of the beach. Additionally, they were endowed with areas suitable for performing water sports, tennis courts, football fields and golf courses, theme parks and entertainment centres that are frequently found in resorts (as the Aqua Magic park and the cable railway in Mamaia), along with several cultural sights and cultural attractions (museums, historical monuments of great historical value,

ancient ruins, churches, monasteries, nature reserves that are unique in the country) that are definitely worth visiting. Sustainable tourism is certainly a balance between the tourism industry and the local community meant to protect the destruction of assets on which the coastal tourism is actually dependent (Burke et al., 2001; Dobson, 2003; Garrod & Wilson, 2003).



Figure 1. Geographical locations of the resorts in the analysed area
Source: Authors, 2021

In terms of sustaining coast tourism, we must state that Romania was a partner in the PlanCoast INTERREG IIIB CADSES project (2006-2008), introducing a new approach to MSP and strengthening the implementation of ICZM. And, after about 10 years of debate, Bulgaria adopted the Law on the Development of the Black Sea Area (promulgated by SG 47/2007), while Romania adopted the Law on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (Law no. 202/2002) and established the National Committee for Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), under

the coordination of the Ministry of Environment (MARSPLAN-BS, Cross-Border Maritime Spatial Plan for the Black Sea).

A sustainable strategy is necessary to formulate a sustainable coastal tourism management plan for mitigating the process of degradation of coastal community considering the physical environment, local economy and culture, and must include the local industries not related to the coastal tourism (Burke et al., 2001; Dobson, 2003; Garrod and Wilson, 2003; Kline, 2001; Yunis, 2006).

2. Research Methodology

The methodology used brought about – on one hand – a new approach to the economic and tourist capitalization of the sea-coast areas, in the context of the pandemic, and was able to find a solution to avoiding the overcrowding of the beaches in the summer season – on the other hand.

Thus, after outlining a diagnosis of the territory, the analysis is focused on processes and elements that generate environmental imbalances and aims to determine the relationship between two or more close aspects (sea-coast planning, sea-coast tourism, environmental protection, pandemic containment), by drawing conclusions from the relevant data and information that, corroborated, can lead, finally, to a novel applicability.

The current study aims to present the current situation of the Romanian sea-coast zone, in order to identify the associated risks, and, subsequently to highlight the specific issues, as well as what generated them. The methodology for researching the impact of tourism on the studied area was based on: analysing, processing and interpreting relevant statistical data, as well as performing a review of specialized literature dedicated to the area that was studied, along with consulting public documents and doing field research. The interdisciplinary nature of the approached topic called for the use of interdisciplinary methods – ranging from the purely geographical ones to the economic and statistical ones – in order to analyse the processes and phenomena investigated as accurately as possible, but, at the same time, to perform an analysis as substantiated as possible.

The analysis is based on the processing of official data and information that were available on the websites of the Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Tourism, of branch of the Dobrogea Water Basin Administration for the Sea-Coast Area under the "Romanian Waters" National Administration (that is responsible for managing and arranging beaches on the Black Sea coast), of the Ministry of Health, along with statistical data taken from the website of the National Institute of Statistics (<http://www.insse.ro>), for the formulation of some of the final findings. Field observations were also made, in order to correlate the statistical data obtained with the in-site reality, as well as to detect the most minute details of the phenomena analysed.

The objectives of the study are: to outline the main aspects of the problem that is being considered; to diagnose the current situation, by identifying an alternative scenario and analysing it to determine the number of tourists who can benefit from tourist services on the Romanian coast during the pandemic; and to identify new ideas, products or services directed at tourists, and respectively, to improve the existing ones.

3. Managing Beaches in Romania

The Romanian Black Sea coast features alternatively placed sea cliffs and sandy beaches, separated – from place to place – by man-made (landscaped) beaches, sand dunes and sandbanks, rocky shores, small areas of steppe forests, lakes or salt lagoons (see the Integrated Strategy of Sustainable Tourism Development in Constanța County, 2019-2028, 2019, p. 65, for details). The distinctive feature of the Romanian sea-coast consists in a series of physical-geographical and climatic characteristics such as: the orientation towards the east and the southeast, which determines a long exposure to the sun (about 10 hours a day), a gentle slope towards the sea, a relatively high width, high sand quality (in terms of the type of the granulation, the dryness and the purity of the sand), ensuring excellent conditions for heliomarine cures (sunbathing, air / breeze baths, sea baths, sand baths), thus accounting for a high attractiveness compared to other sea-coast countries in Europe (as per

the MasterPlan on Coastal Zone Protection and Rehabilitation, "Romanian Waters" National Administration, p. 52).

The aspect of these beaches varies significantly throughout the southern part of the coast, from very narrow beaches – in Mamaia Sud – to very wide ones, with scarce vegetation – in Năvodari, and from rocky shores to fine sandy ones. The phenomenon of coastal erosion has gradually become obvious after the 1960s, its causes being multiple. The most significant can primarily be associated with climate change, complex ports' development, and changes in the flow of the Danube caused by the operation of the hydropower plants on its course, which over time have affected the natural morphological balance of the coastal zone. During the last two decades, we have witnessed a more significant reduction in the beach area, with a direct impact on the tourism sector. The Port of Midia – in particular – influenced the configuration of the beach in Mamaia resort, and partly that of the beach located north of the port of Tomis, while the Port of Constanța had a major influence on the configuration of the cliffs and the erosion phenomena taking place in the area of the southern beaches (MARSPLAN-BS, Cross-Border Maritime Spatial Plan for the Black Sea, p. 90).

The erosion of the beach and cliffs poses a high risk to the human environment, to the commercial and residential properties, to the tourist facilities and to the infrastructure, especially to the network of roads and railways, which are strategic transport links along the coast.

In Romania, there are two categories of beaches: the main form of tourism practiced in the beach region is the spa-maritime one – where the heliomarine treatments take place – and the second is the climatic one, associated with recreation / entertainment activities and sports. Moreover, each beach category has three quality levels, depending on the position of the water line. From 2019, the Administrative Code was approved (by OUG no. 57/2019), allowing for the state goods to be rented ("as the case may be", as specified by the law), by means of Government Decisions.

According to the aforementioned law, "the beach represents the public domain of the Romanian State, administered by the "Romanian Waters" National Administration via its branch – the «Dobrogea – Sea-Coast» Water Basin Administration, and it can be rented only after

organizing a public auction, after complying to the specifications of a tender book that includes a set of minimum mandatory provisions".

A first step in the restoration of the beaches started with the aid of European funds – between 2007 and 2015 (Mamaia Sud, Tomis Nord, Tomis Centru, Tomis Sud and Eforie Nord) – followed by an auction for only (53) beach subsectors – that had no lease contract for the western part (in the direction of the seafront) – in 2019 (MARSPLAN-BS). The newly built beaches can only be rented after complying with cadastral law regulations and after the realization of a series of zonal urban plans for each resort. The biggest action – aiming to restore the beach area – is linked to Mamaia resort, which is also the most sought after by tourists. In general, the preparation of the beaches begins in mid-March and ends in mid-April, when the restoration of the beach consists in supplementing and levelling the sand layer and its sanitation.

But the most important project in the last half century – amounting more than 800 million Euros – is carried out by the Dobrogea-Sea-coast Romanian Waters Autonomous Administration ("Regia Apele Române Dobrogea Litoral"), along the entire Romanian coast, from north to south, in 11 areas, for three years, i.e., until 2023. In 2021, 53 ha of new beach were generated on 6,950 linear m, and about 4.5 million cubic meters of sand were added for sanding.

The arrangement works were done on three different sections in terms of both structure and aspect:

- Section 1 - Corbu, Năvodari, Mamaia, Constanța;
- Section 2 - Agigea, Eforie Nord, Eforie Sud, Tuzla, Costinești;
- Section 3 - Olimp, Neptun, Jupiter, Cap-Aurora, Venus, Saturn, Mangalia, 2 Mai, Vama Veche.

From an economic standpoint, the older beach sectors are being tendered through 440 contracts concluded for periods between five and ten years, corresponding to areas between 361 and 46,787 m², from Corbu to Vama Veche. Most sectors are rented in the Mamaia tourist resort - 131, followed by Năvodari - 87, Eforie - 64, Constanța - 34, Vama Veche - 23, Olimp - 21, Venus - 18, Cordon Venus-Saturn - 13, Saturn - 13, Mangalia - 8, Jupiter - 6, Tuzla - 5, Cap Aurora - 5, 2 Mai resort - 4, Corbu-Năvodari - 3, Costinești - 2, Neptun - 2, Agigea - 1.

In Corbu-Năvodari (3 sectors) there are the largest rented beach areas: between 21,562 m² and 46,787 m²; in Neptun there are two sectors, with areas of 13,551 and 14,233 m²; the areas that are rented in Costinești resort (2 sectors) cover 5,285 m² and 37,651 m². In the resort of Mamaia (131 sectors), the smallest area is of 480 m², while the largest one covers 22,099 m². Tuzla (5 sectors) has large beaches from 2,945 m² to 6,162 m²; Vama Veche (23 sectors) has beach areas covering surfaces from 565 m² to 3,715 m², and the beach sector in Agigea covers 1,617 m².

Both the old and the new beaches run the risk of extreme storms –causing the sediments that makes up the beach to be washed away. Consequently, storm waves occurring in the Black Sea area can lead to an increase in water level by up to 1.3 m above the average level (MasterPlan on Coastal Zone Protection and Rehabilitation, National Administration - Romanian Waters, p. 25). The highest erosion rates are recorded in the segment in Mangalia, south of the VI-J-23 sea dam, with rates of over 4 m/year.

In the Limanu and Vama Veche sub-sectors, the evolution trends of the shoreline evince erosion levels between 0 and 2 m / year, respectively between 0 and 1.2 m / year. The current erosion trend is expected to continue at the same rate as today.

There is also an acceleration of the phenomenon of cliff collapsing in Eforie, caused by the marine erosion that takes place when the sea water reaches the base of the cliffs, but also by violent storms and large temperature differences between summer and winter.

Other causes for the instability of the cliffs are the landslides caused by the rainwater infiltration, the lack of drainage, the leaks from water pipes and from the sewerage systems, or the excessive loads occurring in construction and urban networks, the sand extraction for civil constructions (from the cliffs in Eforie Nord and Eforie Sud, the cliffs surrounding Lake Techirghiol, the cliffs in the northern part of Constanța, the cliffs in Limanu commune, the landslides taking place in 2 Mai (cf. MasterPlan on Protection and Rehabilitation of the Coastal Area, National Administration - Romanian Waters, p. 43). The coast area that makes the focus of the Master Plan extends to the sea from the shoreline and is generally limited by the 15 m isobath, while inland, the (dry) area analysed in detail by the Master Plan is approximately

400 m wide, from the shoreline in the Northern unit, and by 200 m in the Southern unit.

Over the next three years, another 11 beach areas will be expanded by more than 200 hectares. These include the following: the dams of Edighiol / Periboina, the beaches of Mamaia, Tomis-Cazino, Agigea, Eforie – during the first stage, and the beaches of: Costinești, Olimp, Jupiter-Neptun, the swamps of Mangalia-Venus-Aurora, Mangalia-Saturn – in the second one. According to the Ministry of the Environment, the total investment related with the "Protection and rehabilitation of coastal areas - Phase II" project amounts EUR 841,118,736, and the investment falls under the priority of "Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management". By protecting the land adjacent to the shore, the project aims at protecting the local socio-economic infrastructure and at reducing the negative impacts on the local population caused by the erosion over the next 50 years (https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/ro/projects/romania/protecting-romanias-coastline-from-erosion).

By means of the Government Decision no. 357/2018 with its subsequent completions and amendments, along with the measures for sanding the specified areas, a list of strategic investment projects – that are to be prepared and assigned in the form of public-private partnerships – was approved by the National Strategy and Forecast Commission. This list includes the building of a system of luxury resorts located in the Black Sea area and denominated "the New Costinești". According to the respective legislative provision, the capitalization of approximately 2.5 km of beach – located on the Black Sea coast, in the area of Costinesti-23 August that are not currently exploited – is considered, by creating new accommodation areas that respect Western standards, making this area capable of standing up to their Bulgarian, Greek, and Turkish counterpart.

The intense urbanization of the entire coast adjacent to the Black Sea, as well as the need for close local cooperation, as a consequence of the common unitary function of the whole area, has led to the establishment – in 2007 – of the "Constanța Metropolitan Area" Intercommunity Development Association. The Integrated Urban Development Strategy for the Constanța Metropolitan Area (2017-2023)

provides the development of a project called "the Black Sea Esplanade" dedicated to arranging the area of the Constanța-Mamaia-Năvodari beach section, along with facilitating the tourists' access to it, by creating a promenade space intended for pedestrians and bicycles only.

4. The Share of Sea-Coast tourism in the National Tourist Offer

Thanks to a great deal of natural factors that make these areas suitable for thalassotherapy and balneotherapy and capable of offering multiple cures and treatments – based on sea and lake salt water, hot springs and sapropelic mud – for a wide range of conditions. The special tourist potential of the region has led to the development of multiple tourist activities focused on different types of tourism: health tourism, relaxation and recreation tourism, cultural tourism, business tourism, extreme sports-based tourism – to name just a few.

The largest coast area is located in Constanța County, which is the main tourist destination at national level, accounting for 13.4% of the tourist accommodation structures, and for 27.2% of the beds in Romania. Also, regarding the tourist traffic, 10.2% of the number of tourists, and 17.5% of the number of overnight stays in accommodation structures in Romania are registered in Constanța County (tables 1 and 2).

In these circumstances, once can see that tourism is a fairly important factor in the economy of Constanța County. According to the statistical data, the gross added value obtained by the branch of trade units, hotels, and restaurants accounts for 22.5% of the total gross added value of the whole Constanța County (according to the National Institute of Statistics).

The municipality of Mangalia and all the tourists resorts included in its administrative territory, are, lately, in great demand among investors. Tens of millions of Euros have been paid for the rehabilitation of some of the existing hotels, or for the construction of new ones. Therefore, we witness an increased attractiveness for longer stays here – both in case of family or all-inclusive forms of tourism – in the southern part of the Romanian sea-coast.

Most large and medium-sized hotels were built between 1965 and 1985 – of them, many were modernized, but others need to be demolished.

After 1990, other accommodation units (boarding houses, villas, cottages, camping areas) were built – which – although more numerous, feature lower accommodation capacities. These are found concentrated in areas that used to be less developed, such as Costinești, Năvodari, Saturn, 2 Mai and Vama Veche.

Table 1. The evolution of the tourist accommodation capacity on the sea-coast between 2017 and 2021

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total units in Romania	7,905	8,453	8,402	8,610	9,146
Total units located on the sea-coast	776	766	848	772	772
%	10.62	9.06	10.09	8.96	8.44
Total beds in Romania	343,270	353,835	356,562	358,119	364,507
Total beds in units located on the sea-coast	80,688	80,665	85,081	85,200	84,794
%	23.50	22.79	23.85	23.79	23.26
Days of accommodation in Ro	87,655,762	89,075,891	88,789,656	64,040,595	77,947,656
Days of accommodation in the sea-coast area	9,852,659	9,845,187	10,075,072	6,798,034	87,587,691
%	11.9	11.1	11.8	10.6	11.2

Source: The National Institute of Statistics, Bucharest, 2022.

What defines this kind of tourist product is the presence of large accommodation units, with numerous beds (especially hotels), whose largest number of beds belonging to the comfort categories of 2 and 3 stars. However, 4–5-star hotels that have been established recently also feature negative aspects such as the congestion generated by car traffic, too much noise, lack of leisure units, the inexistence of green areas and of theme parks, and so on.

Table 2. The evolution of tourist traffic in coastal tourism (2017-2021)

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total arrivals in Romania	12,143,346	12,905,131	13,374,943	6,398,642	9,276,719
Total Romanian tourists' arrivals	938,266	10,108,509	10,691,195	5,944,775	8,436,145
Total foreign tourists' arrivals	2,760,080	2,796,622	2,683,748	453,867	840,574
Total arrivals in the coastal area	1,235,542	1,111,389	1,153,682	905,266	1,142,271
% of total in Ro	10.17	8.63	8.62	14.14	12.31
Romanian tourists' arrivals	1,016,287	1,076,044	1,119,401	899,104	115,593
Foreign tourists' arrivals	33,683	35,345	34,281	6,162	26,678
Total overnight stays in Ro	27,092,523	28,644,742	30,086,091	14,579,140	20,653,053
% of the total, in Romania	15.93	15.89	15.48	22.41	20.39
Romanian tourists' overnight stays	21,801,487	2,331,538	24,795,253	13,581,775	18,824,936
Foreign tourists' overnight stays	5,291,036	5,329,604	5,290,838	997,365	1,828,117
Total overnight stays in the coastal area	4,316,379	4,553,407	4,657,955	3,267,464	42,118,916
Romanian tourists' overnight stays	4,183,458	443,022	4,534,514	3,246,820	4,134,964
Foreign tourists' overnight stays	132,921	120,385	123,441	20,644	83,952
Occupancy in Romania	32.6	32.4	34.2	22.9	28.5
Occupancy in the coastal area	51.7	50.4	51.0	42.2	46.2
Average length of stay in Romania	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.3	2.2
Average length of stay in the coastal area	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.6	3.6

Source: The National Institute of Statistics, Bucharest, 2022

In terms of food services, the ratio between the total number of seats at a table and the total number of classified beds is of 1.5, which

allows an optimal degree of coverage of the demand for this kind of services. However, there is no data on the number of tourists who had meals permanently or temporarily during their stay at the seaside.

This aspect also shows the intensity of the tourist traffic on the Romanian Black Sea coast, in the context in which this form of tourism is closely linked to the evolution of the weather and the quality of services offered to tourists. Table 2 includes the relevant values related to the tourist traffic specific to this type of tourism.

Regarding the evolution of coastal tourism, there is a slow but steady increase, as evinced by the share of tourist traffic (the arrivals and overnight stays in tourist accommodation structures), between 2017 and 2021 (as shown in Table 2). The decrease in the number of tourists is more obvious in 2021.

The tourist traffic shows a fluctuating number of tourists, with the largest share belonging to Romanian tourists, and a number foreign tourists dropping from one year to the next. To remedy this, spa and wellness centres, along with conference rooms, have been established, in order to extend the duration of the tourist season. However, it cannot be said that the Romanian Black Sea coast is a highly popular European destination.

Consequently, integrated long-term development plans are needed for each seaside resort, while large-scale interventions need to be made in order to turn some resorts into thalassotherapy centres, and to polarize an increasing number of foreign tourists. In the near future, a new seaside resort that should feature a higher overall comfort – called "Europe" – is planned to be created; the goal of this action is to boost competition between seaside resorts.

The vast majority of Romanian tourists chose to plan their journeys to the seaside on their own and only 24% of them turned to travel agencies for planning their stay (Integrated Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development in Constanța County, 2019-2028, 2019, p. 199), while most foreign tourists chose the services of travel agencies.

Over the last ten years, the seaside destination has no longer been perceived as a holiday destination but rather as a weekend destination. In hot summer days, it is a sought-after destination for tourists in Bucharest and in the counties bordering the capital city.

The creation of holiday vouchers offered to state servants and other state employees did not lead to a major increase in tourist indicators related to the coast area. Granted based on Law no. 165/2018, these are instruments available for paying for tourist services. In 2019, the revenues generated by the holiday vouchers accounted for approximately 20% of the total revenues registered by the companies in the tourism sector.

The length of the average tourist stay in the coastal area is quite short and it shows no signs of increasing. At the same time, the occupancy rate is quite low (in order to be profitable, an accommodation unit must have an occupancy rate of over 60%), and in the off-season, it is below the break-even point of the accommodation and catering units. In addition, there is a low interest of tour operators to extend the tourist season through various forms of entertainment (including custom activities) adapted to the preferences of the tourists.

The absence of data collected on a regular basis and of consistent tourist information and leisure alternatives outside the coastal area and outside the tourist season have caused a focusing of the tourist demand. In these conditions, – at the coastal level – actions aimed to attract tourists are taken out of inertia, without being underpinned by a clear and unitary vision (in 1999-2000, 2008, 2009, and 2019, several tourists strategies were elaborated at the level of Constanța county, but – out of the proposed actions, only two or three were actually put in place) – causing many Romanian tourists to be more interested in the tourist resorts in Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, and Croatia.

Over the last two decades, we have witnessed a phenomenon of overcrowding of beaches, associated with a lot of discomfort to tourists during the peak season (in July-August), and especially during weekends, when the beach's carrying capacity is often exceeded. In 2020, there were only three beaches labelled with a Blue Flag on the Romanian coast: "Marina Regia Beach" and "Phenicia Beach" (both in Năvodari), and "Vega Vintage Beach" (in Mamaia).

5. The Analysis of the Relationship between the Accommodation Trends and Romanian Seaside in the Context of the Coronavirus Pandemic

The global spread of Covid-19 disease has led to major influences on many economic sectors. The field of tourism has been severely affected by the ban on the free movement of tourists and the closure of borders. To counterbalance these effects, The European Commission has set up a web platform called "Re-open EU", which provides real-time information on legal provisions applicable at country borders and the availability of transport and tourism services in the Member States. In addition, it provides data on travel restrictions, public health and safety measures, such as maintaining a proper physical distance or wearing a mask, along with other useful information, tourist offers in each country, and in the EU. Using quarterly / yearly data from one or more nations, studies can examine the long- and short-term effects of the pandemic on tourist arrivals (Karabulut et al., 2020).

Thus, through responsible and informed decisions, Europeans could plan their summer vacations and their longer-term journeys considering – at the same time – the persistent risks associated with coronavirus. On the 8th of March 2022, Romania abrogated the alert state that had been put in place because of Covid-19. All mandatory measures that had been in place – including wearing a mask indoors – became mere recommendations. Last but not least, because the conclusion of the epidemic cannot be anticipated, it causes long-term uncertainty (Collins-Kreiner and Ram, 2021).

In Romania, during the pandemic period, the government adopted the amendments to Annex 3 of Decision 394/2020, so as to allow the access of persons to the beach in places where no chaise longues are installed. Thus, people who want to stay on the sea shore without using a chaise longue have to follow the same rules as those located in the arranged areas. Because beach users tend to concentrate in areas with a wide range of facilities such as drink or snack stalls, kiosks, showers, etc., their closure or separation is recommended (Zielinski and Botero, 2020).

The manifestation of the pandemic state had a positive effect too in that it contributed to an increase in the quality of services associated with coastal tourism. This can be translated into a more rational exploitation of the beaches, the reduction of overcrowding, a higher rate of garbage collection, actions of sand sanitation and an improvement in beach facilities, along with the reduction of noise pollution. Additionally, beach users are more likely to arrive earlier in the morning or later in the evening to avoid congestion and to minimise human contact (Botero et al., 2020).

Considering the entire coastal tourism developing between Midia Cape (Capul Midia) and Vama Veche, the length of the coast covers approximately 74 km, with an average width of 100 m. There are beach areas that reach 200 m, but others that are less than 50 m wide. However, most values of the beach areas in the seaside resorts are between 50 and 80 m wide.

For the calculations to be as accurate as possible, the average value of 100 m wide beach was chosen. Therefore, the beach area available on the entire Romanian coast is of 7,400,000 m². During the months of June-August, the seasonality phenomenon is obvious, as about 85-90% of tourists came to the coast between 2019 and 2021, the rest, in May and September, and very few – for New Year's Eve.

Taking into account the new extensions, the area of beach occupied by a person, considering the number of tourist arrivals on the entire coast / year, respectively in 2019, was of 6.4 m² / tourist. In the three preceding months alone, there were 1,025,722 tourists in Constanța County in 2019; an analysis that shows that the space that was available for each tourist was of 7.2 m² – which is very little for a fair degree of comfort. Even so, this value is often lower because of illegal constructions and of the sports fields located on the beach. There is also a surplus of tourists who are accommodated outside the tourist units and who overcrowd the beaches.

Currently, the beach area where a tourist can place a chaise longue and an umbrella, or just a simple sheet is of 2 linear meters long, and 1 m wide, respectively 2 m² / person. The distance required by the pandemic protection rules demands an additional 1.5 m on each side that is translated into 20 m² / tourist. In these conditions, only

51,113.55 tourists had access to the beach (with 20 m² of beach available for each). These values are given by the number of officially registered tourists arrivals, but, in reality, there are a large number of tourists staying in accommodation units that are not considered by the authorities and, consequently, are not included in any statistical records.

As a concrete example, for the municipality of Constanța and the adjacent Mamaia resort, the calculated beach area is of 900,000 m² (the average width taken into account is of 150 m). When considering the 20 m² needed for a tourist, it results that only 45,000 tourists could benefit from the seaside, or, in the event they could spend only four hours at the beach, the number of tourists that could be properly accommodated would be double. However, in 2019, the city of Constanța and the resort of Mamaia (the busiest seaside resort) received 401,005 tourists and, in 2021, it received 284,418 tourists in three months of the summer season (June, July, August) - by 115,000 less.

Another example is represented by the commune of Limanu - with a beach area of only 250,000 m² (and an average width of only 80 m), that can accommodate only 435.45 tourists (in June, July, August), should a person be provided with only 20 m² / tourist. Obviously, here the beach space is insufficient compared to the number of tourists that visited the commune during the tourist season – 18,745 in 2019, and only 8,709 tourists in 2021. This high tourist interest is motivated by the fact that the natural heritage is better preserved here and by several tourist sights (Limanu Cave, the marina, an Orthodox monastery, the traditions of the Lipovan and Tartar minorities).

These case studies explain the high congestion that takes place here each summer, the poorer quality of tourist services, the high prices applied when demand exceeds supply, the discomfort associated with beach pollution, but also the noise pollution that are manifested in these areas.

The current research and the calculations made by the authors have showed that the pandemic can generate a new approach to coastal tourism. The number of chaises longues placed on the beach areas was reduced to a half. Regardless if one prefers a natural or a landscaped beach, the need for maintaining a proper physical distance remains valid. The pandemic has shown that there is a need for a different way

of making use of the beaches should one aim to run a high-quality tourism and to keep up with the competition in Bulgaria and Greece. In this respect, it is necessary to reduce the excessive congestion of the beach areas, resulting in an increase in the comfort level of any tourist arriving at the Romanian Black Sea coast.

Conclusions

The current analysis shows that a rethinking of coastal tourism is needed in order for it to become more attractive and competitive. Above all, if the main objective is to attract more foreign tourists. We state below a few final aspects derived from the analysed documentation, and the processed statistical data:

- Over the last 30-40 years, Romania has lost over 2,400 ha of beach as the Black Sea retrieved sand from the entire coast. In the last 35 years, the coast has lost between 180 and 300 m. About 80 h / year of beach are lost, because of erosion but also because of violent waves and winds.

- Marine constructions: defence dams, stone embankments, and independent dams – built to reduce erosion – are in poor condition, and many of them grow to be inefficient when approaching the end of their operation lifecycle, and the new investments in improving or replacing the current infrastructure are insufficient or are delayed.

- The entire palette of climate change effects – manifested as a raised sea level, changes in the wind and wave regime, in the number and intensity of storms, in terms of the intensity of precipitations and temperature modifications – will play an important role in the future evolution of the Romanian coast.

- In the southern sector, between Cape Midia and Vama Veche, the beaches are already lacking in sediment, and, therefore, the net impact will be the loss of beach sediment, which in turn will increase the economic and human pressure on the high beach area.

- The tourist intensity in the summer season generates a very high-pressure on the environment, as the amount of domestic wastewater and road traffic is doubled, which implicitly leads to a doubling of traffic emissions and an increase in noise levels. The proximity of industrial platforms, shipyards, and commercial ports is an important

risk factor – that contributes to environmental degradation and generates air and water pollution.

- During the entire summer season, seaside tourism will remain the first option for spending larger time intervals, holidays, weekends. Because of the pandemic, people think less about having fun, and more about a basic form of relaxation.

- After the pandemic, we witness an increase in fares and a reduction of journeys, correlated with spontaneous decisions, alongside a trend – among visitors – to seek more unique experiences in these tourist destinations.

- The Romanian coast still features various downsides (the degradation of accommodation and food units, neglected green areas, poor public lighting, damaged sidewalks, the lack of public toilets, damaged roads / streets, insufficient parking spaces; poor arrangement of the sea front areas and of promenade areas, poor pedestrian access to the beach) and stands as evidence of the lack of integrated, permanent tourist products needed to cover and stimulate demand during the off-season.

- There is a strong seasonality of tourist demand – about 85-90% of tourists and 90-95% of the number of overnight stays take place in June-September – causing an excessive congestion during the peak season (July-August), especially on weekends, when the beach's carrying capacity is often exceeded.

- The lack of interest in applying for EU funding under as many European-funded projects possible – for the modernization of the urban infrastructure – and the reduced budgets of public authorities, along with the subsequent cut-back trend resulting from the major budget deficit of the national economy, is a factor limiting possible future investments in tourist sights.

- In Mangalia, the European projects run by the City Hall attracted 50 million Euros, between 2007-2015 and 2014-2020, and focused more on the rehabilitation of cliffs, streets, access alleys, sidewalks, but also resulted in the acquisition of electric buses. They were the biggest investments made in the last 30 years, but failed to create new parking lots and green areas.

- The last three decades show that direct investments were very low (most of them focused on building new accommodation and entertainment units), and chaotic (e.g., the north of Mamaia resort). Also, there is fierce competition from seaside destinations in Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Croatia, Montenegro, which benefit from more favourable weather conditions and more attractive tourist products, leading to a reduction in the number of foreign tourists in Romania, over time.

- In addition, the lack of a unitary development and advertising approach throughout the county, the lack of coherent tourist information on leisure alternatives outside the beach area and outside the tourist season, accentuated this concentration of tourist demand.

- The current pandemic has led to a significant improvement in the tourist services provided to tourists, to a better care and a higher responsibility towards tourists, but also to a greater attention paid to maintaining beaches, green spaces, and parking lots. These measures offer tourists coming to the Romanian coast more security and confidence.

Recreation and entertainment activities do not have a balanced distribution among the resorts, reaching their maximum concentration in Mamaia and Neptun. Aspects such as a poor number of parking spaces, well-maintained green spaces, an unbalanced ratio between the number of accommodation units and the accommodation capacity of beaches, resulting in overcrowding, that leads to a significant discomfort. Often, hotel management is deficient, while unfair competition is developing between units, instead of them building partnerships for better managing tourism activities. Over the last five years, instead of longer stays, most tourists have focused on spending weekends in the analysed area, thus generating lower incomes compared to the average of the tourism season.

The Romanian coast still features various downsides (the degradation of accommodation and food units, neglected green areas, poor public lighting, damaged sidewalks, the lack of public toilets, damaged roads / streets, insufficient parking spaces; poor arrangement of the sea front areas and of promenade areas, poor pedestrian access to the beach) and stands as evidence of the lack of integrated, permanent tourist products needed to cover and stimulate demand during the off-season.

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