

Defining and delimiting the concept of adventure tourism and the target group in Romania

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Abstract

Adventure tourism is increasing in popularity and absorbs yearly great numbers of travelers around the world. Even though this branch of tourism is reaching maturity and represents almost 30% of the global tourism, in Romania is still a niche. The aim of this study is to define the adventure tourism and to understand where it falls and where it locates in the perception of Romanian inhabitants. Starting with the definition of the term and its meaning in the specialty literature, the findings are compared to the results of the qualitative study run on subjects with various backgrounds and with data collected from practitioners. Understanding the perception towards adventure tourism and measuring the interest of the potential target group, marketers can understand how to evaluate and present Romania as a tourist destination for this type of tourism.

Kew words: Adventure tourism, marketing

Introduction

Adventure is a condition defining mankind, from discovering new territories in early years, continuing with the young explorers of 1800, reaching a more rigorous form of organization after the Second World War (Mallett, n.d.) and nowadays, representing a proper branch of tourism. The requirements of a certain activity in order to be considered adventurous, is a combination of at least two of the factors representing a certain degree of risk, the natural environment and the use of physical skills (Pop & Baba, 2018). The definition allows us to extend the Adventure tourism on a very large scale. Even though we introduce the other factor being utterly important in an adventurous activity, namely challenge, it is also a subjective element which is differently perceived by people. What represents a challenge for someone doesn't for someone else, and the degree of effort needed, varies from soft to hard. Therefore, having trouble defining this concept in literature (Rantala, et al., 2018), is indeed difficult to communicate and to market it, a basic element in the expansion period for a correct position on the market.

Material & methods

A study provided by ATTA and The George Washington University is ranking Romania on the 10th position in the developing countries having the highest potential of developing Adventure tourism (GW & Adventure Travel, 2016). The study ranks Romania on the 21st position in 2008. The upsurge is also noticeable in the investments in this area, since beginning with 2004 (Gorj Aventura, 2018), when the concept started to be included in the touristic packages (Giddy & Webb, 2018), several Adventure sites and parks have been developed and experiential activities are increasing in percentage and importance (Pelau & Chinie, 2018).

The tendency of the Adventure tourism is constantly increasing (Seaman, 2018) ever since, at a rate of 17% yearly, compared to the mass tourism which only grows with a pace of 4%. An explanatory reason for the phenomena, is the work environment (Safiza, et al., 2018), where productivity and the requirements play a significant role and tourism is considered to be a way to destress (Tomescu, 2015). The time being spent for leisure activities also grows (Buckley, 2018), proportionally to the amount of money invested in hobby (Cheng, et al., 2018), therefore it has been proved, that there is a strong relation (Baltescu, et al., 2010) between the quality of life and the leisure Adventure (Cerqueira, et al., 2018) combat sport (Venter & Kruger, 2018).

Taking into consideration the age-intervals and the reasons (Anon., 2018) for practicing Adventure tourism, there have been delimited three levels of difficulty: soft (Rantala, et al., 2018), middle and high. Extreme Adventure, mainly related to extreme sports, implies danger and attracts few admirers, while on the opposite pole, light Adventure is more accessible (Baltescu, et al., 2011) and attracts through diversity (Ming,

2010). Adventure requires a certain degree of challenge and assumes leaving the comfort zone, but the level of provocation at which this statement is achieved, is different from subject to subject, therefore as an adventurous activity can be classified activities with various levels of danger. Yet, tourism is considered to be a safe activity generating excitement and pleasure (Kane & Tucker, 2004). As much as Adventure tourism is about provocation, stimulation, delight and personal growth (Swarbrooke, et al., 2003), is also about knowing and respecting the personal limits (Large & Schilar, 2018). Accordingly, an activity must not be a thrill seeker (Daily, 2015) to be classified as an Adventure experience (Buckely, 2018). Categories of adventurism also include social or jungle tourism, disaster or ghetto tourism, cultural shock and any other activity that pushes the subject out of the comfort zone.

In order to better understand the perception of the Romanian people, in-depth qualitative research has been done, on the basis of free interview on 9 subjects (S1...S9). The first three subjects, (S1, S2, S3) are touristic guides with over 10 year-experience, regarding the topic from the practical experience and from a touristic point of view. Three subjects (S4, S5, S6) are athletes practicing different sports and S7, S8, S9) are practitioners of Adventure tourism as well as they are involved in organizing those activities. To identify the differences in perception a guideline has been developed and the rests have also been checked with the reality, comparing the findings to the statistical data of the biggest contest involving an Adventure activity.

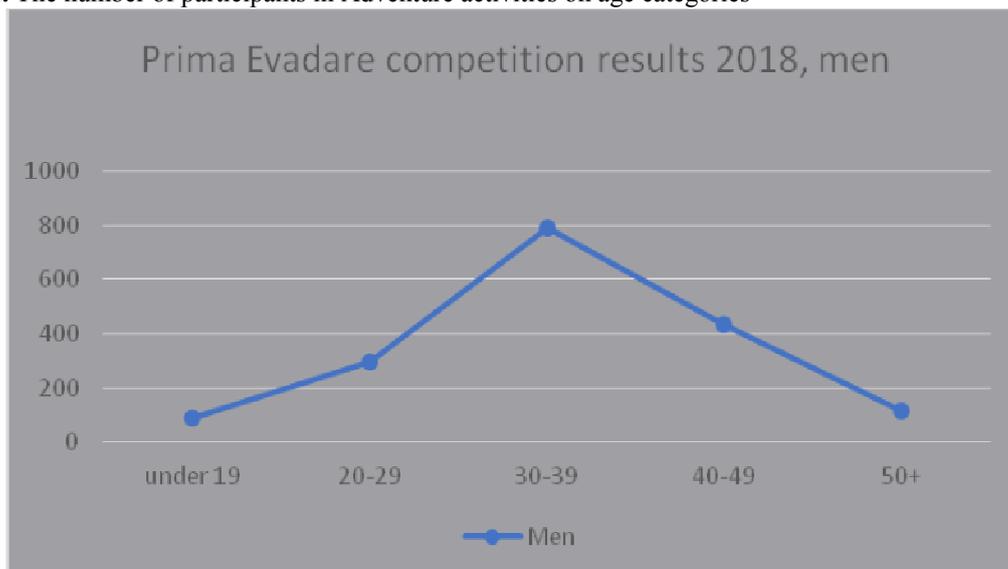
Results

The discussion with the subjects started from four hypotheses aimed to clarify the concept of Adventure tourism and to help understand the profile of the practitioners for a better relationship marketing strategy (Pop, et al., 2012).

One of the most significant introductory methods for people wishing to practice Adventure activity, is through amateur contests. "Prima Evadare", taking place in Romania, reaching the 10th edition in 2018 and being the biggest competition of its kind in Romania and Eastern Europe, gathers together 2324 people from all ages and all backgrounds to participate in a Mountain Bike contest. Analyzing the results in the competition and the ages of the participants, a Gauss's curve of the amateur participants has been established.

As it is shown in **Figure 1**, and based on the in-depth interviews with practitioners, until the age the 19, an Adventure activity is considered to be an extreme sport, and the ones who get involved in it, aim to reach performance. Therefore, people under 19 are more often becoming elites than representatives of other categories. They participate in a reduced number, but they are having the best results and regard the activity as a potential asset for their future development. Another area of interest is the age interval 30-39. In this category is the highest involvement, 791 participants, but also the most reduced performance level. Few people discover real ability at this point, the good results come from the ones continuing the performance which starts years in advance and the most are people trying for the first time the certain activity. Their reason to beginning an Adventure activity is the need of personal discovery and redefining in the consequence of the fact that stress is high and the low esteem low as well as a need of membership.

Figure 1. The number of participants in Adventure activities on age categories



Source: Data processing from the "Prima Evadare" contest results <http://primaevadare.ro>

Hypothesis 1: Adventure tourism is often confused with extreme sports.

Adventure activities have been divided into the three main sections – soft, medium and extreme. The respondents were asked to choose which of them are considered to be Adventure activities.

Table 1: The perception of Adventure activities, of different categories of people in Romania				
Respondents	Category	Soft Adventure (horse riding, hiking, off road, diving, cultural shock)	Medium Adventure (Jeep Safari, off road, free flying)	Extreme Adventure (rock climbing, rafting)
S1	Tourism background	X	X	
S2		X		
S3		X		
S4	Sports background			X
S5				X
S6				X
S7	Adventure practitioners		X	X
S8			X	X
S9			X	X

Source: Adapted from the in-depth qualitative interviews realized by the authors

People active in tourism admit that soft Adventure activities are very much liked and appreciated by tourists, being the highlight of a tour and offering the highest satisfaction. If travel is not intended to follow Adventure, then the activity has to be a soft one in order to challenge the practitioners but not to overcome a certain level where it becomes uncomfortable for the majority. Usually the adventure activities dedicated to tourists, which have to be softer, are organized separately with a closed circuit by request and are not the same ones offered to passionate so that those requirements are fulfilled. On the other hand, the organizers themselves, regard the more dangerous activities to be adventurous, therefore they address them to people willing to experience a more increased level of challenge. The demand and the supply do not meet in every case, as they have different perception of the concept of Adventure tourism. People practicing sport, they also practice a form of Adventure tourism but at a performant level, therefore they define those activities as extreme, a perception that is being adopted also by the population not interfering with the subject. Although Adventure tourism has a wide range, the extreme one is more easily being communicate, therefore the adepts of a softer experience often remain untargeted. The definition of the concept affects and influences the Adventure market.

Hypothesis 2: *Communication and trust-building are the most efficient methods of attracting people.*

Adventure tourism, regardless of the level it is practiced, implies a certain degree of challenge having the purpose of getting one out of the comfort zone. The ones who practice Adventure at a regular basis (S6-S9) know the principles of this activity and can appreciate if an activity is a qualitative one or not. The athletes (S3-S3) consider safety and quality of equipment and staff to be very important when practicing an activity, therefore they only consider an offer as long they find the before mentioned characteristics. For the travelers, (they are represented through S1-S3) Adventure is an added value which they accept only if they feel that it would bring a plus advantage, that means that they need to be communicated to, about the overview, benefits, safety and about the experience itself. An Adventure activity does not only have to be attractive and innovative, there must be created a relation among the organizer and the participants, each category having distinct requests.

Hypothesis 3: *A main social benefit of the Adventure tourism is the community.*

Besides the communication and the trust that must be created by the organizer, people also need a personal moral support during a challenging activity and vice-versa, a challenging activity supports and strengthens personal relations. Thus, this kind of tourism is being addressed to groups of people rather than individuals. Possibilities and offers for groups are attracting already consolidated communities and also represent an interest, for team buildings, parties and celebrations. As much as the requirement of a group can also be regarded as a disadvantage for individuals, it can be turned into an opportunity (Cater, et al., 2018). The need of belonging is one of the most common issues nowadays and many misfits or loners are seeking opportunities to interact and to have a membership. Adventure activities have been proven to be extremely benefic for those who want to develop confidence, to rethink or rebrand, or to overcome a bad event in life.

Discussion

A concept, either of interest or not, must be properly understood in order to be evaluated and embraced. Terms and ideas that are not comprehensive or are misinterpreted, generate a state of confusion and if the topic is not of direct interest, one does not try to fill the lack, but rather ignores and stays neutral. Adventure tourism was introduced in Romania and developed without preparing the market in advance. The marketing communication of this subject has been realized through people-to-people interaction and the general perception is the one of extreme activity, danger and challenge. Organizers communicating the concept and targeting the activities accordingly to the groups more likely to choose a category, can reduce the confusion and engage more people in activities they actually desire but don't understand or don't create connection.

Conclusion

Adventure tourism is considered to be "the tourism of the future" as it helps improve some of the actual psychological issues as belonging, personal development, the desire of becoming better, health and movement,

reconnection with the nature. As this type of activity can be extreme, the less challenging options are less known, and the general perception is being altered, having people believe there is not more than extremism. A target-oriented communication, a trustful positioning on the market and a better understanding of the people can positively influence the position of Adventure tourism on the market, especially in the perspective that Romania ranks as the 10th developing country having the greatest potential of cultivating it, which might be the “new” tourism.

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