



Politics of Fantasy and Tourism Development in Romania

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Abstract

Diversified natural landscapes and wildlife, rich cultural heritage and multi-ethnic history, and high increase and upgrade of accommodation infrastructure nourished the vision of Romania as an emerging destination for international tourism. Still, this ambitious goal has not been reached mainly due to policy inconsistencies, institutional instability, financial shortages, stumbled capacity building and loose coordination. In the attempt to explain the failure of bridging the gap between policy goals and outcomes, this paper follows an unexplored direction of research examining the logics and mechanisms that produce and reproduce political fantasy that prevents achieving the goal of tourism development. Starting from the assumption that tourism destination is a social construct we examine the normative and conceptual foundations pertaining the political strategy of tourism development to show how fantasy is structurally intertwined with meanings and understandings that drive political options. Two policy areas seem to be persistently framed by fantasy: policy design with recurrent and timeline overlapping national strategies that reflect the changing and uncertain environment where adjustment is an illusion of accomplishment; and, the overuse of certification of tourism resorts (their number more than tripled in the last two decades) to take advantage of EU non-reimbursable funding that strengthens the supply side while neglecting the demand through political marginalization. By looking into the way political imaginaries and ontologies split apart from reality-grounded assessments and undertakings, we search to emphasize the move of tourism politics into the realms of a national fantasy.

Keywords: Tourism, politics of fantasy, planning, tourism resort, Romania