

SPORTS AND LEISURE TIME TOURISM – A WAY OF REVITALISING EMERGENT SPACES FROM THE METROPOLITAN AREA OF BUCHAREST

Radu - Daniel PINTILII*

University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography, Interdisciplinary Center for Advanced Researches on Territorial
Dynamics, CICADIT, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: pinty_ro@yahoo.com

Florentina - Cristina MERCIU

University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography, Interdisciplinary Center for Advanced Researches on Territorial
Dynamics, CICADIT, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: krysten1009@yahoo.com

Daniel PEPTENATU

University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography, Interdisciplinary Center for Advanced Researches on Territorial
Dynamics, CICADIT, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: peptenatu@yahoo.fr

Andreea - Loreta CERCLEUX

University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography, Interdisciplinary Center for Advanced Researches on Territorial
Dynamics, CICADIT, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: loretacepoiu@yahoo.com

Cristian Constantin DRĂGHICI

University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography, Interdisciplinary Center for Advanced Researches on Territorial
Dynamics, CICADIT, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: cristi7772001@yahoo.com

Abstract: The aim of this article is to analyse and present the way new forms of tourism contour and develop in the metropolitan area of Bucharest. In the last period, a revitalising and opening of the touristic phenomenon from the metropolitan area of Bucharest can be noticed, with a special accent on the niche of sports tourism. This form of tourism, relatively new in our country, tends to become a dominant form of tourism for a European capital where the possibilities of spending leisure time are somehow limited for its inhabitants. This fact is emphasized by the increase of the number of leisure sports centres in the last years (sports clubs for vaulting, golf courses). In parallel, cultural tourism, which is a form of tourism with tradition for the metropolitan area of Bucharest, also benefits of favourable conditions. In the second part of the article, the attention is centred upon the tourists' profile, comparatively presenting the two typologies which present distinct characteristics from the point of view of the socio-economic profile, as well as of the touristic motivations, globally.

Key words: urban tourism, recreation spaces, golf tourism, recreation, Romania

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* Corresponding Author

INTRODUCTION

In the last years, tourism was included in urban policies, becoming a key factor in explaining several socio-spatial processes of the large towns. The reasons which explain the presence of tourism in urban strategies, both analytical and applied are diverse. There could be indicated some of the effects associated with socio-economic transition, urban crisis and the passing from the fundamentally industrial economy to tertiary economy. The new urban model shows a new hypostasis of towns, respectively that of entertainment centres or „*entertainment machinery*” (Lloyd Nichols, 2000 quoted by Diego and Barrada, 2010).

The process of metropolitanisation is different according to predominant opinions concerning the urban development. It is strongly connected with the selection of the services' and activities' concentrations and with social polarization and spatial fragmentation. It is mainly associated with very big cities (Ionescu and Crenicean, 2009, p. 67).

In this period, a large consuming of space is developed, usually materialized by the urban extension beyond the limits of large cities, thus affecting the dimension of agricultural areas and more, becoming more and more limited. As a result, the quality of the territory and urban experience, the opportunities of recreation, cultural activities, creativity and innovation, power and the capacity to influence or to create positive images, became essential elements for success in the towns' competition on the world market (Cavuta, 2011).

At present, almost all the cities, or at least the most important ones, needed to adapt to these new tendencies, leading to an intense competition, materialized by the building of a new urban picture, by cultural innovation projects (shows, festivals), as well as by the building of some facilities of general or touristic infrastructure (commercial centres, recreation centres, stadiums, museums and so on) (Diego and Barrada, 2010).

There are many positive examples of recent development of sports and recreational tourism in many countries where until recently this form of tourism trends almost did not exist (Greece, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and others) (Vujko and Plavša, 2011, p. 95).

The sport related holiday is a growing segment of tourism and therefore a relevant field of research (Gibson, 1998 quoted by Barros et al., 2010).

However, in OMT specialists' opinion, sports tourism is not perceived as a special segment of the touristic offer, but it is enclosed in the category of touristic motivations as: „*leisure time, relaxing, holiday*” (Ciampicacigli and Maresca, 2004 quoted by Iancu and Siddu, 2009, p. 190). However, sports tourism represents an original product, supposing the integration of its own elements into recreative touristic activity. Sports tourism is defined as „*a trip done in the free time in order to practise a sports activity, or as a spectator at different sports events on a determined period (less than a year) outside the residential space*” (Gibson, 1998 quoted by Iancu and Siddu, 2009, p. 190).

The increase of the free time duration represents a common factor, both for the touristic activity, and for the sports activity, which contributed to their amplification along the time. The scale of free time, contents and forms of consumption have direct connection with the development of human personality, with possibilities of satisfying needs of self-realization (Ratkowski et al., 2010, p. 115).

The relationship between sports and tourism develops based on the positive image of sports, as a fundamental activity practiced in the free time, reaching new valences, from the simple physical activity to the competitive character, playful activity and health recovery (Di Marcoet et al., 2004).

The development of an area for sports and recreational activities within the sports and recreational tourism primarily depends on the natural and geographic predisposition of the location and the affinity of tourists and their fitness and health predisposition (Weed, 2008; Plavša and Romelić, 2009 cited by Vujko 2011). Sports centres from the analysed space and which have a recreational role are mostly situated in the field area (The Romanian Plain). Situated in a plain area, the characteristics of the field, from the altitudinal point of view, but also of its reduced degree of fragmentation, indicates the suitability for the development of golf courses and equitation fields in the metropolitan area of Bucharest.

Sports activities have a pure recreational role and they are meant to contribute to an increase of good humour amongst the practitioners (tourists). It is known that attracting tourists in recreational sports activities is based on a strong recreation motivation. The activities practiced are a way of combating stress and thereby they have positive effects upon health and physical condition (Vujko and Plavša, 2011, p. 95). An example in this respect is golf, which from the psychological point of view allows satisfying the tourist's needs of hyper-stimulation and of feeling active, as the protagonist of his/ her own holiday, by experiencing his/ her motoric abilities. In numerous cases, in a competition with other players, the desire to win is strongly present, thus being developed a strong competitive spirit (Perussia 1984 quoted by Iancu and Siddu, 2009, p. 192). Practising golf is an optimal way of combining a dynamic physical activity with relaxation moments, due to the pleasant natural environment in which the golf game takes place (Neulinger, 1981; Castelli and Guasco, 1984; Ingham, 1986; Perussia, 1989 quoted by Iancu and Siddu, 2009, p. 192). In its turn, the free time psychology overlaps in certain aspects with sports psychology, due to the fact that activities dedicated to free time are mostly sports activities (Horn, 1992; Russel, 1993; Lombardo and Cavalieri, 1994).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used within this study supposed a combination of specific methods in the Geography field and the sub-domain of tourism Geography in particular (field displacing, the mapping of touristic objectives). Also, field displacing was continued by the causal analysis of spatial distribution of touristic resources in the analysed space. The analysis of the location of recreation sports centres reflect a tendency manifested at world level of localising and rapid extension around large cities, sustained by intense touristic flows, represented by urban population. Unlike cultural-historical objectives, whose presence is under the influence of the historical and/ or social factors, the location of recreation centres represents a result of a cumulation of factors, which explains the present socio-economical picture of Bucharest's influence upon metropolitan area. The analysis of recreation sports objectives was followed on a larger period of time (2000 - 2010) and it underlined an accelerated dynamic of building sports centres in the last years around the first nucleus of localities which surround the capital. The graphical representation was meant to indicate the expansion of touristic phenomenon/ sports touristic establishments in the northern part of metropolitan area: the „necklace” of recreation centres, which can be also explained by the more and more intense and motivated touristic request, with a recreational purpose. Also, the impact determined by the building of these recreation centres in the spaces where they were installed was emphasized.

RECREATION PROJECTS BETWEEN DISPUTE AND FAILURE IN THE METROPOLITAN AREA

Bucharest, as a European capital (a status achieved in January 2007), tends to inscribe on a new direction of improving its urban image, which from the touristic and cultural point of view is less visible, compared to other European metropolises. This thing, on the one hand, is due to the presence of touristic resources with a limited character, but also to the lack of a coherent policy of conservation and rehabilitation of the inherited patrimony, but also to the complex functions which the Capital exerts at national level, the latter exceeding in largeness the touristic vocation. This direction is necessary, on the one hand because of the difficulty of adapting to the new economic context, marked by the diminution of the industrialization process. At the same time, joining the European Union represents an action which imposes a change of the way of conceiving the development strategies, in accordance with the directives imposed at European level, the development of services and last but not least the accomplishment of some projects of urban renovation, with direct and indirect effects for tourism being primary.

On the other hand, these actions are meant to contribute to the improvement of urban image, with the aim of becoming an attractive town for tourists, in this respect being started actions of building some new elements of infrastructure for tourism.

The transformation of touristic type is unfolded in parallel with those of the process of urbanisation of the territory adjacent to the capital-city, reflected by the externalisation of the forms of touristic arrangement in the metropolitan area. The tendency reflects the normal course of the post-modern evolution of the town, by the alignment to the models from the occidental countries and their adapting to local conditions in a more or less coherent manner: the failed try to create a recreation park of large dimensions nearby Bucharest (Dracula Park). The problem of the achievement of this wide range project faced a series of critics, which are either connected to the lack of a fundament, which should lead to the historical and cultural symbolics, or to choosing an inappropriate location. Therefore, the project of creating the theme park „*Dracula*” around Bucharest, still from its launching as idea, created a lively debate, which generated the discussing of the character of inefficiency, as well as of its location (the establishing of the location nearby Bucharest would have taken the famous story of prince Dracula out from the historical context) and thus the project entered the phase of decline before it was started. The attempt to organise this space, with a recreation role, produced contradictory results, as it inscribes on the line of producing some stereotypes, which would have as an effect losing the cultural-historical identity of the country, transposed in the consciousness of foreign tourists by the story of prince Dracula. The only connection with the city’s history is connected to associating the reign court established in Bucharest by the prince Vlad Țepeș, as well as of the document of attesting the capital city, which had the prince’s seal.

THE PARTICULARITIES OF RECREATIONAL TOURISM IN THE METROPOLITAN AREA OF BUCHAREST

The development of large cities supposes services’ externalisation, usually in the areas of influence, a fact which is noticed in case of the territory adjacent to Bucharest, too. Services externalisation presents a larger extension in the North and West part of the capital, within which commercial services prevail (Cepoiu, 2009). In the assembly of services developed in the influence area of the capital, in the last years there are to be mentioned especially touristic services, as they are often represented by the organising of some recreation spaces (Pintilii et al., 2010).

Recreation spaces from the influence areas of towns are a continuation of those from inside the towns, most of the times. This fact is due, on the one hand, to the lack of space inside the urban centre, recreation spaces being usually in accordance with their size. In the metropolitan zone there are areas with characteristics which allow the transformation of these spaces into recreation areas: more reduced values of pollution, landscapes less affected by anthropisation. The localising and organising of sports fields with a recreational role around the capital are conditioned by economic factors, too: more reduced costs of the lands in this area.

For the inhabitants from large cities, characterised by agglomeration and pollution, touristic experience is important, as it represents a form of evadation from the urban space, strongly industrialised and with a limited offer regarding the recreation possibilities or a pleasant ambient.

This area tends to be dedicated to tourism in a greater and greater measure, offering possibilities of using directly or indirectly specialised workpower.

Although touristic activities were not determinant in the metropolitan area up to present, these occupied an important place among the services developed in the last years. Tourism development in the metropolitan area of Bucharest, as a result of attracting a larger and larger number of tourists, may determine a touristic specialising of the territory, representing, at the same time, a form of expressing the process of urban regeneration by leisure activities, which are named in the specialised literature as „*industrialisation of leisure time*” (Brenda-Vázquez et al., 2001) or as „*places to play*” (Sheller and Urry, 2004). Thus, these territories circumscribed to metropolitan area will become attractive for tourists, at least from the recreational point of view.

But it can be noticed that the tendency of building sports fields in the metropolitan area of Bucharest is not recent (the sports centre from Snagov was created long ago, or the creation in 1925 of the first golf course in the country, at Băneasa, at the initiative of the business man colonel Grabell). It is also noticed that in the last years, an exponential increase of the sports fields in the metropolitan area of Bucharest city at the level of several types of sports activities (the number of horse racing centres doubled in the last years). Another characteristic of the present period, as regards the dynamic of sports centres in the metropolitan area of Bucharest is connected to the apparition of sports golf courses, an action of touristic entrepreneurship, which distinguishes by large investments flows and attractiveness for an important number of tourists. At the same time, obvious hallmarks in the territory are generated: the golf courses are usually of large dimensions and they present at the same time a series of arrangements which reshape the original relief, thus obviously marking the territory, from the touristic point of view.

The building of recreation spaces also determined a dynamic of building structures of touristic welcoming.

Golf tourism

Practising the touristic sports activities is in relation with the preference of spending the free time in a pleasant way in open recreation spaces, evading from the agglomerated urban space for a few hours or during the week-end. The touristic potential in general, but the weekend's in particular, situated in the metropolitan area of Bucharest raises by the dominant anthopic features, diminunishing the natural ones (Pintilii et al., 2010).

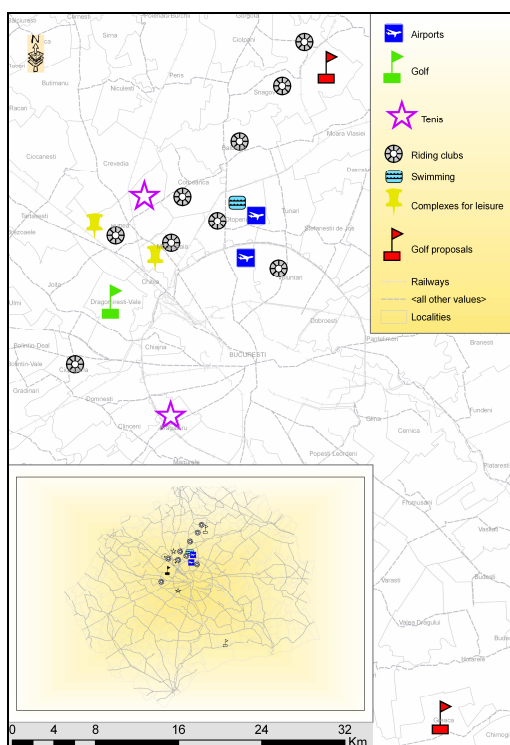


Figure 1. The map of recreational centers situated in the metropolitan area of Bucharest

Golf courses represent, lately, a special extension at the level of the analysed space, which reflects by the action arranging some recreation areas within residential complexes built in the last years in the localities around Bucharest. These are frequented mostly by the capital's inhabitants. Building the recreation touristic establishments is an occasion to develop the metropolitan area from the touristic point of view. This process permitted the development of some poles of recreational interest. Although the oldest golf course was established in Bucharest at the Diplomatic Club, still it presents a limitation which impedes the practicing of this sport by professionals (the golf course has got a limited surface).

In the last years, there is a more and more accentuated tendency of building golf courses in the metropolitan area of the capital, from among the most recent mentioning the golf course from Tunari and the Complex Golf & Country Club Bucharest situated at 5 km distance from the capital, between Chitila and Buftea, in the commune Zurbaua (figure 1). The latter has an impressive length (6,350 m), consisting of golf courses with different degrees of difficulty, also presenting water obstacles and

sand bunkers¹. These elements confer particularity to the golf course, which supposes running through a challenging route, even for the experienced golf practitioners. This kind of establishments are built in order to create a high difficulty for the golf courses, this being the extremely attractive element for those with experience and who are motivated for coming again, also representing the motivation to try new golf courses in other countries, too. Flat golf courses are used by the beginners.

Due to the special characteristics of the golf course, the complex may receive international tours, in which professional golf players can participate. The golf courses and the club quarter occupy half of its surface (approximately 3,500 m).

The investment of approximately 7 million euros was financed by a Swiss firm in partnership with Romanian entrepreneurs. The complex is made up of 3 distinct parts: a professional golf course of 18 pathways (baskets / bowls) for professionals, a course of 6 pathways, meant for those who want to practise, as well as for those less experimented; a residential area with 240 - 300 units for accommodation (apartments, single-family houses, villas) of superior confort, with a unique location and with view directly to the golf courses and partly to the Buftea forest. The offer is completed by a 4 stars hotel, grounds and a tennis court, a restaurant, a bar, a lounge, conference halls and commercial surfaces (not only connected to golf) etc. The association of recreational factor with accommodation services and meals' serving represents a frequent practice at international level, achieved with the purpose of facilitating the continuation of the tourists' stay, especially as at the golf centres' level there are frequently organized sports contests with duration of 2 or 3 days².

There can be also mentioned two projects, which have as main objective the organizing of two golf courses at Snagov, as well as in Giurgiu county (Greaca commune), projects which need the creation of some public-private partnerships, as they impose two conditions: courses with a large spatial extension and high financial investments.

It must be also mentioned that business tourism associates with golf tourism. This continuation, in touristic-recreational plan, of the business activity, represents an appropriate way to establish a climate favourable for collaboration between business partners. Thus, it can be explained the presence, not casual at all, of the structures of touristic welcoming. The presence of a golf playing tourist generates a stay of 3 or 4 days for foreign tourists. In case of national tourists, the practicing of this sport can be achieved both during the week and during the weekend. The relatively large period of the stay is also explained by the golf courses which can take place during several days. This allows the golf player to dispose of free time to visit the attractions of the touristic destination.

Golf is included among the sports which need high costs regarding the field rent and/or the game instruments, to which the costs for accommodation, meals and the entrances to the cultural objectives add. All these lead to an increase of the total costs of the stay (Iancu and Siddu, 2009).

Equestrian tourism

Although the first equitation clubs opened nearby the capital (the Club of Equitation Bucharest 1994 and Ecvalahid in 1998), the tendency in the filed of recreational equitation was to draw away from the big cities and to build a recreation offer which will enclose the pleasure to ride, recently associated to agrotourism, too. Also, a doubling of the number of vaulting clubs in the last years can be noticed, these being built around the capital or at relatively small distances from it (figure 1). At the level of the metropolitan area of Bucharest, most of the stud farms are private³:

- Corbeanca CS Hipocan with a number of 50 - 70 horses with modern facilities for horse treatment and sports club;

¹ www.golf-bucharest.ro/doc/ComunicatdePresa.pdf

² <http://www.golflifestyle.ro/ro/articol/25-Country-Club-Baneasa-Primul-teren-de-18-cupe-din-Rom%C3%A2nia>

³ www.ecvestra.ro/cluburi

- Otopeni: sports club Tracus Transilvania Magna cu 15 - 20 de cai;
- Snagov: sports club Arkadia Horse with 20 - 25 horses;
- Mogoșoaia has a school with the title of Equestrian Academy, sports clubs;
- Dor Mărunt (Călărași county);
- Jegălia (Ialomița county) - administered by Romsilva;
- Buftea CS Cadenta;
- Ostratu CS HipicHolandia;
- CS Piccadilly between the localities Săftica and Tâncăbești;
- Ciofliceni: sports club Asil Horse Farm;
- Ciorogârla: CS Hipic;
- Domnești: CE Agroiinternational.

At the same time, in the metropolitan area of Bucharest it can be noticed the touristic development of the elements of architectural heritage, by their arrangement as spaces of receiving some events related to tourism (cocktails with the occasion of business meetings, conferences). Also, arrangements were done for the practicing of different sports activities, as tennis and horse riding. In this respect, it can be mentioned the Stirbey domain from Buftea, which rents the rooms inside the establishment for different corporate events (business meetings, dinners, training, indoor and outdoor team-building) and private events (receptions, parties, balls, conferences, seminars, workshops). Also, the possibility of practicing equestrian tourism is offered, a spacial alley for riding being arranged in this purpose. The alley has got approximately 700 metres, by the riverside, but for this purpose there can be also used the winding alleys of the park. For children, there are recreation areas with animals (ponies' enclosures).



Figure 2. Area for equestrian tourism – Stirbey Domain



Figure 3 Mogoșoaia lake and nautical sport arrangements

The practicing of equestrian tourism, as a form of touristic recreation, supposes several requests, which start from the way of selecting and breeding caballines, up to the organising of specific tourist activities.

In this respect, there can be mentioned the following activities which attract an important number of internal and external tourists (Simon, 2008, p. 373):

- promenades at a slow pace and/ or gallop walks;
- resistance contest with the horse or with a team of horses;
- medium and small mammals' hunting with the help of the horses;
- walkings by sledge, cart and carriages dragged by horses;
- parade and circus shows;

- contests of derby type, which include obstacles, manege, gallop, trotting;
- continental (European) and world championships;
- etological equitation with a therapy role.

The development of vaulting centres has the purpose to diversify the forms of sports tourism, developing local touristic resources, too.

Nautical tourism

One of the oldest sports clubs for natation from the influence area of the capital was built at Snagov, thus putting into value the presence of the natural lake with the same name. The natural lake Snagov has a length of 13 km and it occupies a surface of 570 hectares, being built for the practicing of nautical sports, recreation walkings and fishing, too.

The establishing of the sports club represented a large scale action, represented by the building of an olympic base of swimming for canoeing. Between 1935 and 1936 there are mentioned canoeing courses on the Snagov Lake, organised by the Sports Club Rapid. Subsequently, the olympic base was used for recreation activities, too.

Because Snagov represents one of the most known recreation oases around the capital, on the one hand for the privileged position (only a few kilometres distance), but also for the forms of recreation it offers, a local tourism agency offers the possibility to accomplish the Snagov circuit during the week-end in the summer, for one day (on Saturday or on Sunday), leaving from Bucharest. It is also included the guiding for the entire journey. Snagov's circuit consists of two journeys:

- Blue Journey (on the lake) by boat

- Red Journey (on the road) by Titicar. This means of transport is very smart, made up of one wagon of small dimensions (18 seats) dragged by a tractor. The road journey has the main aim to visit the cultural touristic attractions from Snagov organised on 3 different routes⁴. In Snagov it was also developed a fishery complex (the pond from Tâncăbești), being divided into two basins for professional fishermen and the second for amateur fishermen.

The Mogoșoaia Lake was anthropically arranged for different recreational activities.

In Otopeni there were proposed works for building a Sports Complex, which will comprise three competition swimming basins, two olympic basins and a polo basin, to which other three public swimming basins for practicing and recreation add. Its building is envisaged to finish this year, and the sports complex will represent the main sports base of swimming in the country. One of the economic effects generated by the building of the sports complex is to ensure the population access to facilities for practicing sports. This complex is part of a larger project which contains: a multi-valent concourse with approximately 5,400 seats, a hotel, and several commercial spaces with sport destination. The natation sports complex from Otopeni is about to be accomplished by the programme „*Swimming basins*” achieved by the National Campaign of Investments „*C.N.I.*” – S.A, developed by the Ministry of Public Works and Settlements, at present the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism⁵.

THE TYPOLOGY OF SPORTS TOURIST

The new forms of anthropic touristic attractions from the influence area come in contrast with cultural attractions whose age confers them special attributes. At the same time, the two types of anthropic touristic attractions share the mass of tourists in two distinct categories, both as socio-economic profile, and from the point of view of touristic motivations.

In case of touristic attractions with a recreational role (sports establishments: swimming bases, sports centres of vaulting, golf clubs), the touristic request presents a series of distinctive attributes: there are usually middle aged persons, with high financial possibilities (sports recreational

⁴ www.snagov.ro

⁵ www.mdrl.ro/_documente/transparenta/consultari_publice/consultare71/nf.pdf

establishments mentioned, except for the swimming basins, suppose the allocation of important financial resources, especially as it is necessary to rent the instruments useful for practicing sports).

Sports tourism itself presents under three forms, generating varied types of tourists (Ciampicacigli and Maresca, 2004; Gibson, 1998 quoted by Iancu and Siddu, 2009): „*leisure sports tourism*” or „*active sport tourism referring to people who travel to take part in a sport event sport tourism*” which refers to people who travel to watch a sporting event and „*nostalgia sport tourism*” which includes visits to sports museums or stadiums.

It is appreciated that the dynamic of touristic population shaped on sports tourism will intensify once the intense promotion and their extension in the territory, the increase being due to international arrivals, as this category of touristic request is much better informed and they frequent more largely the forms of tourism with a recreation role.

In case of cultural tourism, whose attractions are represented by the diversity of cultural-historical and religious objectives, it addresses a special category of the touristic request, usually to young tourists (including children), but also to middle age persons attracted by the history and culture of the capital's area and its surroundings. Numerous historical events related to the capital and its leaders hallmarked the space around it (the Palace from Mogosoaia – the summer residence of the ruler Constantin Brâncoveanu, the Știrbey Palace). The segment of tourists which practice cultural tourism is defined by a series of specific attributes: lower and average incomes, numerous flows in certain time intervals, having as main motivation the desire of knowledge.

Besides cultural-historical objectives, there are the religious objectives, able to generate touristic flows, attracted by other touristic motivations and they present a dynamic which varies in time, being more intense with the occasion of religious holidays. At the same time, these resources from the metropolitan area were brought into the public's attention and into the attention of potential visitors by the insistence upon the cultural image, promoted by media, but also printed forms of promotion, as leaflets, which emphasized the programme of the public transport courses in order to provide access to religious objectives, as they are representative for the metropolitan area of Bucharest (the monasteries Cernica, Pasărea).

Although both types of touristic resources belong to the category of anthropic attractions, still they differ by the touristic movements they generate, different as duration: in case of sports-recreational tourism, the journeys/ stays can be both during the week and in the week-end.

CONCLUSIONS

Sports tourism supposes the excursion is subordinated to accomplishing a sports experience, the holiday place being identified with the space where the favourite sport will be practiced. We can assert that sport has become a universal behaviour of recreative life.

The establishment of sports fields with recreational role nearby the capital city is the result of the adapting to the West European touristic model, but it is at the same time the result of some economic factors: the costs of fields are more reduced in the nearby territory of the town. On the other hand, metropolitan areas of large cities present a series of advantages: large surfaces of ground, suitable for being arranged/ organised as recreation spaces, landscapes unaffected by pollution or by the process of excessive urbanisation. At the same time, the organising of open-air recreational spaces needs large surface, big cities presenting the disadvantage of their absence in their interior. The placing of recreation centres in the influence areas presents an advantage from the perspective of the power to attract the population from the urban centres localised at small distance, which represent the main source of touristic circulation, motivated to escape in the free time outside the urban space which is „*suffocating*”.

Sports tourism is an activity practiced at large scale at world level, whose touristic request is growing, becoming an important segment of the present touristic market.

The tourism from the metropolitan area of Bucharest presents a new and distinct model compared to urban tourism, developed inside the city, which is different as motivations, dynamic, duration and costs.

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