

***The old, dusty image of Romanian tourism, unable to offer quality services despite the high tariffs, which has driven foreign tourists away over the years, can be invigorated through a number of projects focused on regional development. Each area on the country should be developed according to its tourism potential and the internal competition between these regions could generate growth for the industry and revenues for state's budget. Austria is one of the countries that has been using this strategy for many years and has managed to attract large numbers of visitors every year., Stephan Aigner and Christopher Shonn, managing partner at tourism consultancy company Kohl& Partner, talked to Bucharest Herald about the challenges Romania has to face to reach the European standards in tourism.***

**Bucharest Herald:** How has tourism developed in Austria? What are its main features?

**Christopher Shonn:** Over the years the tourism in Austria has developed primarily regionally as Austria has different provinces which are very distinct in terms of culture, dialects and ideas about regional independence. This development allowed the overall improvement of the regions which in some respects were autonomous. Mr Kohl who founded the company in Austria was very much involved in the regional development.

**BH:** Is Austria among the favorite destinations of Romanians traveling abroad?

**Stephan Aigner:** Austria had 70 per cent more Romanian tourists in 2008, than in 2007. In 2007, the increase was of 41 per cent against 2006. Romanians love traveling to Austria for shopping and city tours in Vienna and also for skiing. The Austrian tourism offers them what they need most: very good services and the feeling of being in a community.

**Cristopher Shonn:** I believe that Austria offers to Romanian tourists what they would like to have: excellent services at competitive prices and a lot of attractions to spend their time. And also Austria is reachable from Romania via car in one day. Tourism offices in Romania have many packages to Austria, but the destination is also promoted through word of mouth here.

**BH:** How can Romanian tourism industry reach international standards?

**Cristopher Shonn:** I think Romania can learn a lot about its future by analyzing the behavior of Romanian tourists when going abroad, because in order to make things work here, a successful market should be studied and used as an example. Romania is a European country and the tendencies of development should be European. Tourism authorities should also find and promote what Romania has to offer: cultural heritage, its distinct regions, landscape, cuisine, museum, castles, etc. The Ministry has to take the initiative and provide leadership for county and municipality authorities, because customers' service has to reflect international standards. And this is Romania's biggest challenge. Tourism infrastructure should also be improved. This refers to facilities such as a parking garage for the ski lifts in Poiana Brasov, a visitor center at Nadlac, and websites for regions where people can find places to visit. All of these things need to be thought about and organized.

## Christopher Shonn: Regional tourism development to spark foreigners' interest in Romania

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**BH:** What are the main mistakes that you have noticed in Romanian tourism development?

**Cristopher Shonn:** Tourism does not equal real estate. There is a tendency to believe that the answer to everything is to build more. Why would foreign people come to Romania? To experience the unique elements the country has. Romanian tourism infrastructure does not need to be concentrated it needs to be spread out to promote access. This is a country where people should be able to stop here and there and experience what the country has to offer.

**BH:** What do you think about the strategy used by new Tourism Minister Elena Udrea to invigorate tourism industry?

**Cristopher Shonn:** I think Minister Udrea has many very good ideas but she must proceed in a very classical way. She has to look at what Romania has to offer and then decide how to position the country. And that means first identifying what the country has to offer and then identifying the potential customers. Austria knows exactly who its customers are and that explains the massive increase of Romanian tourist number, because the marketing and the products offered to Romanians are attractive to them. I really think the role of the Ministry is to provide leadership into positioning Romania as a brand and then create programmes that can be implemented on local, i.e county, municipal basis, because the tourism will grow best if there is internal competition. In Austria, every single village has a tourism board or office which is taking responsibility of the tourism promotion in that small community.

**BH:** What chances does Romania have to become in a short time a destination targeted by foreigners all over the world?

**Cristopher Shonn:** Romania has what Europeans are looking for. In other Central European countries even villages that have attractions such as monastery or castles are full of buses with travelers walking up the hill to see the unique attractions. When they come down they buy some souvenirs, have a meal and possibly stay there over night. This is the European perspective on tourism and this is what Romania has to work for.

**BH:** When was Kohl& Partner set up and what services does the company offer?

**Stephan Aigner:** Kohl & Partners was founded 25 years ago in Austria and the company is known for offering consultancy to customers all over the tourism industry. We provide the whole range of services from feasibility studies to concept evaluations and pre-opening management. We have a high expertise with hotel feasibility studies, but we also provide all the steps needed for the development of tourism infrastructure projects, including spa, golf courses and ski resorts and tourism master planning for regions and municipalities. We have experience all over Central and Eastern Europe for either developing a tourism master plan from zero where there is no tourism planning or for improving an existing tourism plan with new concepts. Hotels, municipalities, banks, tourism organizations or private individuals that want to develop tourism projects are among our customers.

**Christopher Shonn:** As an international consultant we are trying to understand what the objectives of our clients are, what they would like to achieve and then help them complete their

projects at higher standards, faster, spending less money on the execution and maybe earning more money from the business. Austria is a tremendous case study with what could happen with tourism in Romania in the long term.

**BH:** When did you open the office in Romania?

**Christopher Shonn:** Mr Kohl expanded later the offices in Italy and Germany and after the 1990s started to provide services internationally in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Russia and two years ago in Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary. I became the local partner in Romania about 1 year ago and we launched the office here last November, although Kohl& Partner had been working in Romania for 2 years already.

### Dezvoltarea turistica regionala va starni interesul strainilor pentru Romania

*Imaginea veche si prafuita a turismului romanesc, incapabil sa ofere servicii de calitate superioara in ciuda tarifelor mari, care a indepartat turistii straini de-a lungul anilor, poate fi revigorata prin mai multe proiecte concentrate pe dezvoltarea regionala. Fiecare zona a tarii ar trebui dezvoltata in functie de potentialul sau turistic, iar competitia interna intre aceste regiuni ar putea genera crestere pentru aceasta industrie si venituri la bugetul de stat. Austria este una dintre tarile care au folosit aceasta strategie de multi ani si care a reusit sa atraga multi vizitatori in fiecare an. Stephan Aigner si Christopher Shonn, managing partner la firma de consultanta in turism Kohl& Partner, au vorbit pentru Bucharest Herald despre provocarile pe care Romania trebuie sa le infrunte pentru a atinge standardele europene in turism.*

**BH:** Cum s-a dezvoltat turismul in Austria? Care sunt principalele sale caracteristici?

**Christopher Shonn:** De-a lungul anilor, turismul austriac s-a dezvoltat in special la nivel regional, intrucat Austria are diferite provincii, care sunt foarte diferite din punct de vedere cultural, al dialectelor si al ideilor despre independenta regionala. Aceasta dezvoltare a permis imbunatatirea in ansamblu a regiunilor, care erau autonome in anumite privinte. Domnul Kohl, fondatorul companiei in Austria era foarte implicat in dezvoltarea regionala.

**BH:** Austria se afla printre destinatiile preferate ale romanilor care calatoresc in strainatate?

**Stephan Aigner:** Austria a avut cu 70 la suta mai multi turisti romani in 2008, comparativ cu 2007. In 2007, cresterea a fost de 41 la suta fata de 2006. Romanilor le place foarte mult sa calatoreasca in Austria pentru cumparaturi si pentru a face turul capitalei Viena. Turismul austriac le ofera lucrurile de care au cea mai mare nevoie: servicii foarte bune si senzatia ca se afla intr-o comunitate.

**Cristopher Shonn:** Cred ca Austria le ofera turistilor romani ceea ce si-ar dori sa primeasca: servicii excelente la preturi competitive si multe atractii pentru petrecerea timpului. Romanii pot

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ajunge in Austria intr-o zi, cu masina. Agentiile de turism din Romania au multe pachete pentru Austria, dar destinatia este promovata si prin viu grai.

**BH:** Cum poate ajunge turismul romanesc la nivelul turismului international?

**Cristopher Shonn:** Cred ca Romania poate invata multe despre viitorul sau analizand comportamentul turistilor romani atunci cand merg in strainatate, pentru ca, pentru a face lucrurile sa mearga aici, trebuie studiata o piata de succes si folosita ca exemplu. Romania este o tara europeana, iar tendintele de dezvoltare ar trebui sa fie tot europene. Autoritatile din turism ar trebui, de asemenea sa gaseasca si sa promoveze ceea ce are Romania de oferit: mostenire culturala, regiuni distincte, peisaje, bucatarie romaneasca, muzee, castele etc. Ministerul trebuie sa ia initiativa si sa imprime directia autoritatilor municipale si judetene, pentru ca serviciile turistice trebuie sa reflecte standarde internationale. Iar aceasta este cea mai mare provocare a Romaniei. Si infrastructura turistica ar trebui imbunatatita. Acest lucru presupune constructia de facilitati precum garaje pentru statiunile de schi din Poiana Brasov, un centru de informare turistica la Nadlac, si website-uri unde oamenii pot gasi locuri pe care sa le viziteze. Toate aceste lucruri trebuie gandite si organizate.

**BH:** Care sunt principalele greseli pe care le-ati observat in dezvoltarea turismului romanesc?

**Cristopher Shonn:** Turismul nu este acelasi lucru cu dezvoltarea imobiliara. Exista tendinta de a crede ca raspunsul la toate lucrurile este sa construim mai mult. De ce ar veni strainii in Romania? Pentru a experimenta elementele unice pe care le are tara. Infrastructura turistica romaneasca nu trebuie sa fie concentrata, trebuie sa fie extinsa pentru a promova accesul. Aceasta este o tara in care oamenii ar trebui sa se poata opri in diverse locuri si sa incerce ceea ce tara are de oferit.

**BH:** Cum vi se pare strategia folosita de noul Ministru al Turismului Elena Udrea pentru a revigora industria turistica?

**Cristopher Shonn:** Cred ca Ministrul Udrea are multe idei foarte bune, dar trebuie sa le aplice intr-un mod clasic. Trebuie sa vada ce are Romania de oferit si sa decida apoi cum sa pozitioneze tara. Iar lucrul acesta presupune identificarea a ceea ce are tara de oferit si identificarea potentialilor clienti. Austria stie exact ce clienti are si asa se explica cresterea masiva a numarului de turisti romani, pentru ca marketing-ul si produsele oferite romanilor sunt atractive pentru ei. Cred ca rolul Ministerului este sa ofere directie in pozitionarea Romaniei ca brand si apoi sa creeze programe care pot fi implementate la nivel local, judetean si municipal, pentru ca turismul se va dezvolta mai bine daca exista competitie interna. In Austria, fiecare sat are un birou de informare turistica care se ocupa de promovarea turismului in acea comunitate mica.

**BH:** Ce sanse are Romania sa devina in scurt timp o destinatie cautata de strainii din toata lumea?

**Cristopher Shonn:** Romania are ceea ce cauta europenii. In alte tari din Europa Centrala, chiar si satele care au atractii precum manastiri sau castele sunt pline cu autobuze cu turisti care urca pe dealuri sa vada atractiile unice. Cand coboara cumpara suveniruri, iau masa si

poate isi petrec si noaptea acolo. Aceasta este perspectiva europeana asupra turismului si spre ea trebuie sa se indrepte Romania.

**BH:** Cand a fost fondata Kohl& Partner si ce servicii ofera compania?

**Stephan Aigner:** Kohl & Partners a fost fondata in urma cu 25 de ani in Austria si compania este cunoscuta pentru serviciile de consultanta oferite clientilor din intreaga industrie turistica. Oferim intreaga gama de servicii, de la studii de fezabilitate la evaluarea conceptuala si managementul inaintea deschiderii. Avem o experienta bogata in realizarea de studii de fezabilitate pentru hoteluri, dar ne ocupam si de toti pasii necesari pentru dezvoltarea proiectelor de infrastructura, incluzand centre spa, terenuri de golf si statiuni de schi si master planning pentru regiuni si municipalitati. Avem experienta in toata Europa Centrala si de Est, fie in dezvoltarea unui master plan de la zero, acolo unde nu exista nicio planificare turistica fie in imbunatatirea cu concepte noi. Printre clientii nostri se afla hoteluri, municipalitati, banci, organizatii turistice sau persoane fizice care vor sa dezvolte proiecte turistice.

**Christopher Shonn:** Din pozitia de consultant international incercam sa intelegem care sunt obiectivele clientilor nostri, ce si-ar dori sa realizeze, dupa care ii indrumam sa isi realizeze proiectele la standarde inalte, mai repede si cu cheltuieli de executie mai mici si poate chiar cu castiguri mai mari din afacere. Austria este un studiu de caz extraordinar pentru ceea ce s-ar putea intampla cu turismul in Romania pe termen lung.

**BH:** Cand ati deschis biroul din Romania?

**Christopher Shonn:** Domnul Kohl a extins birourile in Italia si Germania si din 1990 a inceput sa ofere servicii la nivel international in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Rusia si incepand din 2007 in Romania, Bulgaria si Ungaria. Eu am devenit partener local in Romania in 2008 si am lansat biroul de aici anul trecut in noiembrie, desi Kohl & Partner lucra deja in Romania de 2 ani.