



## **The competition between tourist destinations and its influence upon the tourism development level of the county-seat cities of the North-East Development Region**

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**Abstract:** The need to identify the tourism development level of a destination lies in the desire to become aware of its position in the evolutionary stage and to determine the aspects to be exploited in order to increase its performance. The model of the tourism area lifecycle developed by R. W. Butler supports this idea. However, there are difficulties in correctly assessing the stage of evolution in the comparative analysis of several destinations characterized by different levels of economic development, despite the similar tourist potential. The present paper aims to determine a method of assessing the current life cycle of the 6 analysed destinations on the basis of synthetic indicators, as well as assessing the extent to which the potential competition between the 6 destinations considered may be a factor of influence on the life cycle stage. The result of the study highlights the ability of competition to represent an impulsive advancement factor to a higher level of development. However, the level of competition between the 6 analyzed cities is not strong enough to influence the life cycle of the destinations under the conditions of an early stage of their tourist development. It has been possible to distinguish between three levels of competition between the 6 tourist destinations, which have proved to have a different impact on their position as a stage of the life cycle. Also, as a final result, the positioning of the 6 destinations in the corresponding stages of Butler's model is noted, having considered a series of tourism and economic performance indicators as a reference point.

**Keywords:** *life cycle stage, competition levels, tourist destinations, tourism and economic performance indicators, Butler's model, hierarchical ascending classification*

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The importance of studying the tourist development level of destinations is of high interest given the growth of the tourism's contribution within the economic sectors at international level. The significant annual increase in the contribution of

tourism to the value of gross domestic product confirms this. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council's (WTTC) periodic analyzes of the tourism sector's impact on the global economy, tourism contributes 10.4% to GDP formation, also contributing 9.9% to employment. In this context, the awareness of the position of the cities as tourist destinations and the determination of the factors influencing this position are essential in identifying the future directions of development.

Butler's model of tourism area lifecycle has the merit of being a tool in determining the level of tourism development, while providing an insight into the stages that can be achieved depending on how tourism resources are managed (Haywood, 2006). Knowing the level of tourism development allows a critical appreciation of destinations, thus making it possible to highlight their position towards those with whom they can be in a competitive relationship. Thus, the analysis of the six cities of the North-East Development Region has the role of highlighting both the position of each as a tourist destination and the type of behavior adopted towards each other (rivalry or collaboration). This aspect is important to appreciate given the fact that they have the same administrative status (county residence), despite the different levels of economic development and tourist attractiveness.

In shaping the level of tourist development of destinations a variety of factors contribute, competition being just one of those who can dictate the direction of evolution. At theoretical level, competition designates the relationship of rivalry that occurs between two or more individuals in order to hold a higher position that can bring various advantages. Thus, in relation to the development of tourist destinations, competition can describe the situation of rivalry between two or more destinations that have similar tourism potential and which present similarities in the tourist offer, this rivalry being developed by the desire to increase the level of tourist attractiveness and implicitly the level of tourist demand. The analysis of the competition levels between destinations can make a decisive contribution to the way that tourism's sector available resources are used and to prioritizing the actions to be taken for their harmonious development (Medeiros Barbosa, Falcão de Oliveira, Rezende, 2010).

Considering the above, the study aims to determine the present level of tourism development of the six county seat cities, having as a benchmark in the assessment of the destination's life cycle stage a series of performance indicators. At the same time, the study aims to determine the type of relationship existing between the 6 destinations and the extent to which it is reflected in the current life cycle stage. Thus, the hypothesis of the research is that competition between destinations is a factor in achieving a higher level of tourism development. The analysis of the tourism demand dynamics, the identification of the competition

levels and the determination of the life cycle stage are the three objectives of the study proposed in order to validate / invalidate the previously exposed hypothesis.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The issue of determining the appropriate lifecycle stage of tourist destinations is one present in recent scientific research. An adaptation of Butler's model to certain territories was also attempted to render it operational. Omar, Othman, Mohamed and Bahauddin (2015), analyzing the development stages of coastal tourist resorts, state that public authorities and private investment are two key factors in the advancement of a destination to a higher life cycle stage. Referring to competitiveness, Ferreira, Santos and Costa (2014) state that the lack of environmental issues and the valorisation of the tourist destinations authenticity are more powerful factors than the quality of tourist services and their price in the view of tourists. Lagiewski (2006) states that among the authors considered to have made the greatest contribution to Butler's model by transforming it into an operational concept, Haywood (1986) can be mentioned with the paper "Can the Tourist-Area Life cycle be made operational?". Thus, similar to the present paper that attempts to adapt the initial model by assessing the life cycle stage based on a series of tourism performance indicators, Haywood raises the question of determining the most relevant unit of measure in assessing the level of development, the number of tourists (indicator used in the initial model) being unsatisfactory.

As for the studies addressing the issue of the competition's influence upon the level of tourism development, the literature is less comprehensive, but there are researches on the cities from a different perspective than the tourist one. Thus, Lever (1993), referring to the competition between European cities, states that the dissolution of national borders has led to the intensification of the competition between the urban centers as a proportion of the absorbed investments and implicitly to the appearance of some driving poles. Among the factors that influence the competition between cities, competition seen from a tourism perspective, can be mentioned the degree of attractiveness of the destination. Referring to this theme, Bănică (2010) states that in order to increase the attractiveness of tourist destinations it is beneficial to create a brand image that will have the role of increasing the competitiveness in front of other similar destinations. Another factor in shaping the attractiveness and competitiveness level is the uniqueness of the tourist product consumed at the destination. The valorisation of local resources from a touristic point of view can not only lead to an increase in competitiveness but can be an additional source of income for the local population through the diversification of economic activities (Istrate, Horea-

Șerban, 2008). At the same time, the attributes of places (tourist destinations) that express themselves as a pulsating factor in the relations between destinations (Bulai, 2013) have a role in the modeling of the attractiveness level. Addressing the issue of specific competition types, Tribby (2013) distinguishes between direct and indirect competition. If we adapt this classification to the competition that develops between the tourist destinations, then in the case of a direct competition, the touristic resources of the two competitors are the same so that the tourist offer does not differ. On the other hand, indirect competition is manifested when the destinations have different tourist resources that can be substituted because both destinations can ultimately satisfy the same needs or desires, but in a different way. So, despite the lower interest in researching the competition relations between cities seen as tourist destinations, studies addressing the influence of competition on reaching a higher economic level support the idea that rivalry can lead to a higher degree of attractiveness and, implicitly, to advancement on hierarchical scale.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### *Study area*

The study focuses on the six county seat cities (NUTS3) of Romania's Northeast Development Region (NUTS2). Located in the eastern extremity of the European Union and relatively recently integrated in it (2007), the Northeast Region occupies a lower international position as a level of economic development as well as tourism performance. Thus, it recorded in the year 2016 values of GDP per capita at the lower limit (5,300 euro / inhabitant), values situated below the European Union average. The situation is not more favorable either in a national context, with the North East Development Region occupying the last position as GDP per capita in the year 2015. As tourist performance it exceeds 3 of the 8 regions with an absolute value of tourist arrivals of approximately one million people in 2017. The six analyzed tourist destinations, Botosani, Iasi, Vaslui, Suceava, Piatra Neamt and Bacau, benefit both from a natural and especially anthropic tourism potential. Their geographical position is important for the types of tourism that are dominant and, implicitly, for the tourist attractiveness. The cities in the western half (Suceava, Piatra Neamt, Bacau) have the advantage of the proximity of the mountain relief, with a higher predisposition to the development of tourism based on the use of natural resources (eg mountain tourism, agro-tourism). The cities in the eastern half (Botoșani, Iasi, Vaslui) benefit from the presence of Iasi city, which holds the regional supremacy at the economic level, where business tourism dominates. Given the intra-regional tourist attractiveness disparities seen from the perspective of natural tourism potential and the gaps in

economic development, it is challenging to analyze how these disparities are reflected in the life cycle stage.

#### *Statistical data*

In the process of positioning the 6 cities in the present tourist life cycle stage, statistical data were collected such as the number of arrivals and overnight stays, the accommodation capacity in operation, the stable population, etc. The data was later used in the construction of some tourist performance indicators (occupancy rate of the accommodation units, index of the tourist function). As for the source of statistical data related to the tourist activity of the 6 cities, the database provided by the National Institute of Statistics was used, all the information corresponding to 2017 and the first half of 2018. After the touristic characterization of the 6 destinations there were determined the tourist peaks and the intensity of the tourist seasonality phenomenon based on the monthly evolution of the tourist overnight stays, as well as the passenger traffic registered at the existing airports in 3 of the 6 cities. In this case, the database made available on the [www.anna.aero](http://www.anna.aero) website was used, which is also characteristic of the year 2017. The identification of tourist peaks and seasonality allowed the determination of the presence or absence of competition between the respective destinations and implicitly the appreciation of the competition levels .

#### *Methods*

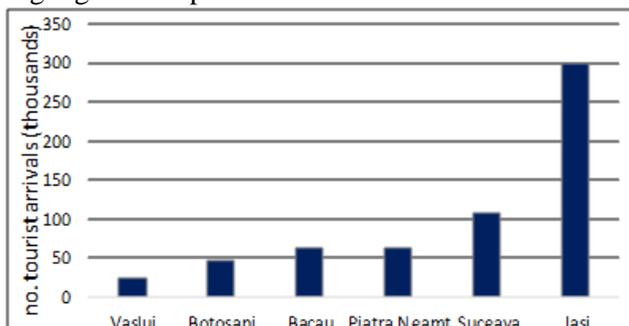
With regards to the methods used in the assessment of the current life cycle stage, the hierarchical ascending classification method has been used. This consists of meshing in different classes of statistical individuals according to the behavior they record by reference to the overall average. This behavior is expressed by proximity or distance from the overall average, the distance being measured in standard deviations. At the base of the hierarchical ascending classification, there were a number of tourism performance indicators as well as general economic indicators. The first category includes the occupancy rate of tourist establishments, the index of the tourist function, the tourist arrivals (useful in the appreciation of the tourist demand), the second category being represented by the value of the turnover in relation to the entire population of the destination. Also, in assessing the level and quality of the tourist offer, a number of indicators were used, among which can be mentioned the number of reviews made by tourists on [tripadvisor.com](http://tripadvisor.com) site under the "Things to Do" section, a symbol of the tourist attractiveness of the six destinations in the online environment. Another indicator of the tourist offer is the number of units registered on [booking.com](http://booking.com) website dedicated to the international online marketing and promotion of accommodation. The statistical data collected from the above-mentioned web pages corresponds to the year 2018. Thus, the merit of using this method is the achievement of a complex characterization of the six tourist destinations, which has enabled a higher degree

of accuracy in the identification of the present life cycle stage. The difference from the original model, where the number of tourists was considered to be the point of reference in determining the life cycle stage, consists in the multi-criteria evaluation of the tourist destinations, which allowed for a better comparative analysis of them. Trying to increase the degree of operationalisation of Butler's model, Haywood (1986) uses as a method the standard deviation in objectively determining the appropriate life cycle stage. Thus, the present study presents similarities to the research elaborated by the aforementioned author, by meshing in classes based on the distance expressed in standard deviations of each typology from the general average. The most common methods used in studies concerning Butler's model include various tourism indicators used to assess the destination's life stage, such as accommodation capacity, number of arrivals, travel expenses, etc.

#### IV. RESULTS

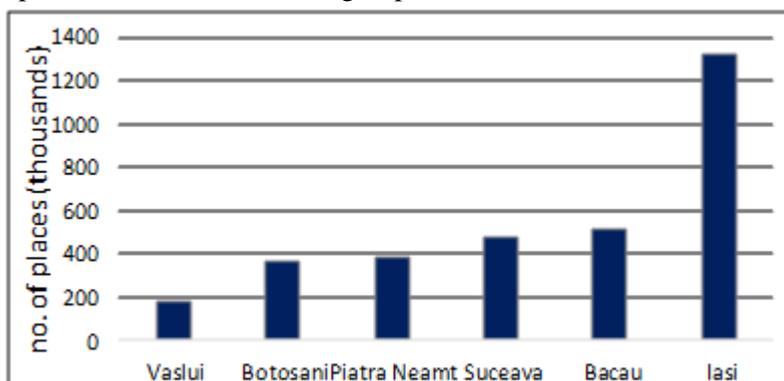
As presented in the introductory part, the study focuses on three objectives, namely the characterization of the current tourist position of the analyzed destinations, the determination of the competition levels and the identification of their life cycle stage. In order to respond to the first objective, the six destinations were analyzed in terms of tourist demand and offer.

In order to appreciate the position as tourism demand level, the tourist arrivals registered in 2017 were used as an index. The resulting classification indicates a net superiority of the city of Iasi, with a significant gap compared to the following ranked cities. With a similar tourism demand level are Botoșani, Bacău and Piatra Neamț townships, which oscillate around 50,000 tourist arrivals. Suceava is the second tourist hub of the region and Vaslui presents only 20 thousand tourist arrivals. In this respect, the analysis of tourist arrivals indicates the presence of strong regional disparities.



**Fig. 1** Classification of the 6 tourist destinations according to the number of tourist arrivals (year 2017). Data source: INSSE

With respect to the tourist offer, the situation does not show any major changes. Iași and Vaslui hold the same extreme positions, the difference between them and the next ranked reaching significantly high values (808 thousand places in favor of Iași compared to the second ranked, Bacău, and 100 thousand minus places for Vaslui compared to Botoșani). If Suceava occupies the secondary position being in the upper part of the value order as tourist demand level, as tourist offer level Bacău occupies this place. However, the distance between the mentioned individuals is not pronounced, the variation range of the values being small in the group of Botoșani, Piatra Neamț, Suceava and Bacău. Despite the tendency to reduce the amplitude of the values in the middle class (fact confirmed by the inclusion of Suceava in this category as a result of its proximity to the next 3 in ranking), the tourist offer expressed by the accommodation capacity in operation shows the permanence of intra-regional discrepancies by maintaining the large value amplitudes between the three groups of cities.

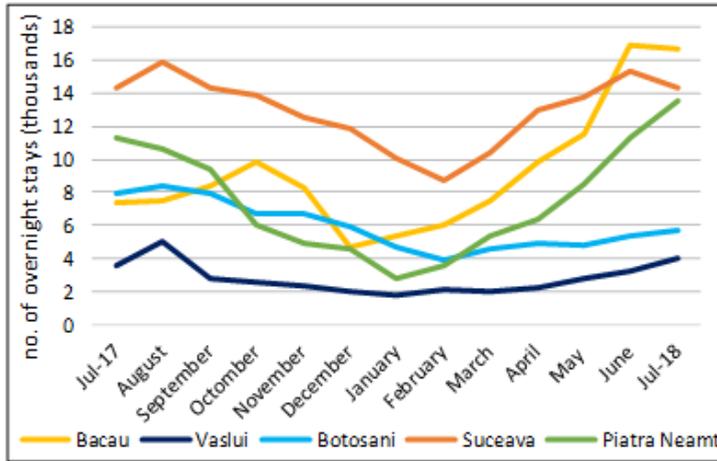


**Fig. 2** The classification of the 6 tourist destinations according to the accommodation capacity in operation (year 2017). Data source: INSSE

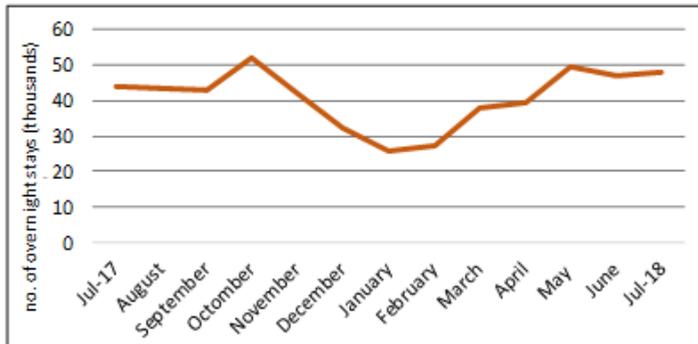
Analyzing the monthly evolution of the overnight stays (July 2017 - July 2018), there can be observed a concentration of the tourist flow between June and September for three of the six destinations (Bacău, Suceava, Piatra Neamț), which indicates an increase in the summer seasonality. There can be identified two categories of cities with specific levels of competition. On the one hand, the cities of Suceava, Bacău and Piatra Neamț are distinguished by a strong competition confirmed by the concentration of the main tourist peak in July. On the other side there are the eastern towns of Iași, Botoșani and Vaslui, where the intensity of the competition is low. If Iași peaked in October, Botoșani and Vaslui in contrast have a slight monotony of the tourist flow, the only slight increase being in July and

August. Another aspect to be noticed is the tendency to accentuate the tourist peaks in the western cities of the North East Development Region.

According to the distribution of the tourist peaks in the 6 destinations analyzed, three groups of cities characterized by specific behaviors can be distinguished:



**Fig. 3 The tourist peak periods and seasonality of overnight stays for 5 of the 6 tourist destinations. Data source: INSSE**

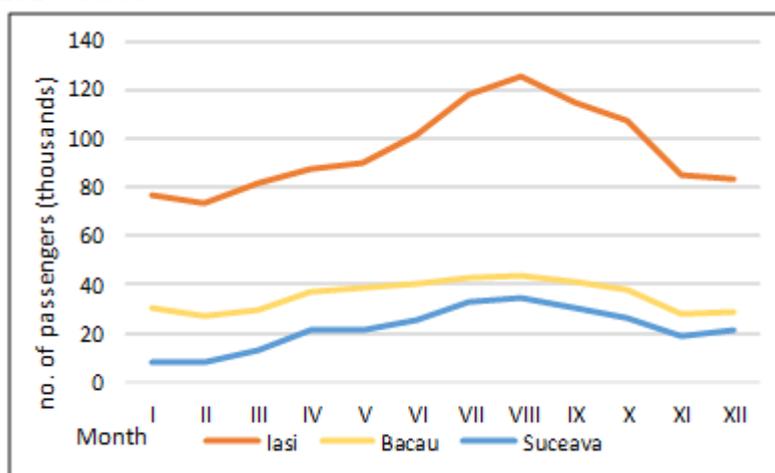


**Fig. 4 The tourist peak period and seasonality of overnight stays in Iasi city. Data source: INSSE**

**Cities with a stagnant character:** Vaslui and Botosani are representative for this category due to the flattening trend of the tourist peak during June-August. Also, the marked distance from the rest of the other four cities of the North-East region as a level of tourism demand determines their isolation in a separate class.

**Cities with a competitive character:** to this class belong the western towns Bacau, Suceava and Piatra Neamt, cities characterized by a pronounced seasonality of the tourist demand due to the concentration of the main tourist flow during summer. The upward trend of overnight stays and the concentration of the tourist peak during the same period are arguments that support the presence and accentuation of the relationship of rivalry between them.

**Leading Cities:** Iași is the only regional representative of this category due to its visible detachments to the other cities of the region. Thus, it dominates the North-East Development Region by developing two tourist peaks that do not overlap with those of neighboring urban settlements with an identical administrative status.

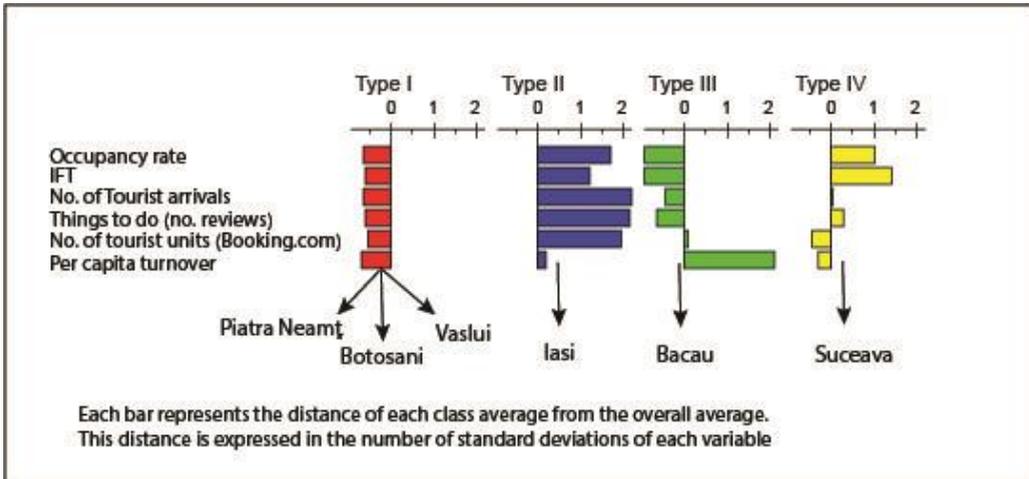


**Fig. 5 Passenger traffic at regional airports and flow seasonality (2017).**

**Data source: [www.anna.aero](http://www.anna.aero)**

For a more accurate appreciation of the relationship between the eastern and western cities of the North-East region, the tourist flows expressed by the passenger traffic on the three regional airports was analyzed. Thus, if the number of overnight stays presents a markedly higher development of the city of Iasi by constructing two tourist peaks in distinct periods compared to the neighboring cities, the dynamics of passenger traffic at the three airports illustrates a peak (in August) for Iasi during the same period as the other two regional competitors. Nevertheless, the position of superiority is maintained by outrunning the values of Bacau and Suceava with almost double their level. Therefore, the three cities (Iasi, Bacau and Suceava) belong to the same previous categories (leading city, respectively cities with a competitive character), being identified the development of a new tourist peak for Iasi, peak that overlaps the one of the competition (Bacau, Suceava).

In order to respond to the third objective, the hierarchical ascending classification method of the 6 tourist destinations was used based on a set of 6 indicators reflecting the level of tourism demand and offer, as well as the position of the cities as economic development. As indicators for the tourist demand, the occupancy rate, the index of the tourist function (IFT) and the tourist arrivals were



**Fig. 6 The hierarchical ascending classification of the 6 tourist destinations on the basis of tourist and economic performance indicators. Data source: INSSE, tripadvisor.com, booking.com**

considered, illustrative for the touristic offer being the number of reviews made by tourists in the section "Things to do" (tripadvisor.com site ) and the number of tourist units listed on booking.com web site, which is specialised in the online selling of accommodation places. Also, the turnover divided to the population of the whole city is considered to be an indicator of the city's economic attractiveness.

The result shows the division of the 6 tourist destinations into four categories due to their different behavior in the three analyzed directions (tourist demand/offer and economic position). Thus, the characteristics of the six destinations are as follows:

**Type I:** comprising three of the statistical individuals, Type I presents the lowest values of all 6 analyzed indicators, as tourist demand, tourist offer and economic position. Piatra Neamt, Botosani and Vaslui are at a distance of about a standard deviation in minus to the general average. Therefore, both the pressure of tourists exerted on the local population (IFT) and the occupancy rate of the establishments indicate lower tourist performance, the same situation being also characteristic to the tourist offer, the reduced tourist attractiveness being the effect of a reduced diversity of tourism activities that can be done (no "Things to do"

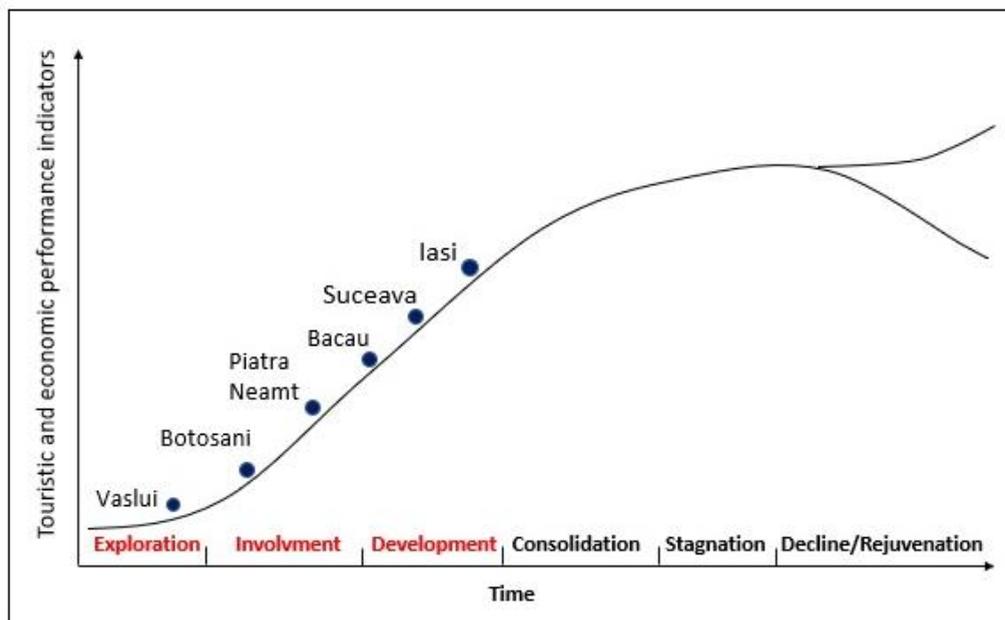
reviews) or of a poor tourism promotion (no. of accommodation units registered on booking.com).

**Type II:** In opposition to the characteristics of type I presented above, this class includes a single statistical individual (the city of Iasi) that overcomes as a tourist and economic performance all 5 tourist destinations with which it might have been in a competition relationship. As a dominant feature, there can be observed a tourist demand around a standard deviation above the overall average, the situation being even more favorable in terms of tourist offer level (plus two standard deviations). As economic performance, the turnover per capita places the city of Iasi slightly above the overall average, with a single higher statistical individual (Bacau).

**Type III:** representative of this class is Bacau, which is characterized by a lower tourist attractiveness, confirmed by the lower level of tourist demand (occupancy rate and IFT), with more than one standard deviation minus the general average and even one step behind the cities of Vaslui, Botosani and Piatra Neamt in this respect. As for the tourist offer, there is a slightly more favorable situation, Bacau being characterized by a negative behavior confirmed by the one standard deviation minus the general average for "Things to do" indicator, but slightly above the average when speaking of tourism promotion (accommodation units registered on booking.com). This fact can reveal that Bacau is a more attractive tourist destination for business tourism than for spending leisure time. As economic performance, the city of Bacau is positioned higher, as the two standard deviations above the average indicate.

**Type IV:** similar to the relationship between the first two types, III and IV largely have a opposite behaviour with regards to the level of tourism demand, tourism offer and economic indicators. Thus, different from type III, Suceava as the one representative of this category is a tourist destination that is distinguished by a high level of tourism demand, at a distance of about a standard deviation in its favor over the general average. As a tourist attraction expressed by the variety of activities that can be done at the destination, Suceava enjoys a superior position being in front of cities such as Bacau or Piatra Neamt, this situation not being characteristic of the indicator that can symbolize the degree of tourism promotion (number of tourist units registered on booking.com). The level of economic development indicates a lower performance in comparison with cities such as Iasi or Bacau, as a result of the slightly more than a standard deviation distance from the general average, but superior to cities such as Botosani or Vaslui, which deviate even further from the average.

As previously analyzed, the 6 tourist destinations are differentiated by a touristic and economic development in opposition if the four categories are taken in pairs of two (types I-II and III-IV). Thus, they were positioned on the 6 stages of



**Fig. 7 The positioning of the 6 tourist destinations on the evolutionary axis of Butler's model according to the result of the hierarchical ascending classification**

the evolution of a tourist destination according to the model elaborated by R.W. Butler, taking into account the previously identified characteristics using the hierarchical ascending classification method based on the tourist and economic performance indicators.

According to the information presented in figure 7, **Iasi** occupies the first position in the hierarchy of the 6 tourist destinations due to its superior tourist performance. This is confirmed both by the way in which it has developed its tourist peaks and by the strong positive differentiation in absolute values of the analyzed indicators (tourist arrivals, accommodation capacity, passenger traffic at airport), as well as by the superiority given by the level of tourism demand and offer. Regarding the characteristics of the life cycle stages, the city of Iasi, seen as a tourist destination, meets the features of the development stage, where the number of tourists is still growing and the big companies in the tourism field (such as hotel chains) are present on the market.

**Suceava** occupies the secondary position, being also located in the development stage but at a considerable distance from the city of Iasi, due to the high amplitude values of the two individuals (Iasi and Suceava). The tourist superiority of Suceava in front of the next ranked cities is confirmed by the level of tourism demand and offer, higher than Bacau but inferior to Iasi. Also, the

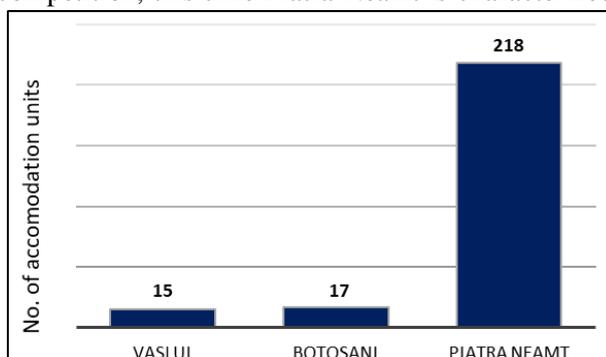
superiority in absolute values compared to Bacau is also confirmed by the way of developing its tourist peaks, at the same time as the latter, but at a higher level.

The economic performance of **Bacau** city, which proves an outrunning of all the other northeastern county residences, including the city of Iasi, determined its localization at the beginning of the development stage, the reason for its lower level location in comparison to Iasi or Suceava being its negative distancing by the general average in terms of tourism demand and offer. Thus, the city of Bacau indicates the presence of tourism development potential through its economic performance, despite the current low tourism demand and offer level being possible a valorization of its potential on the basis of the development of business tourism.

According to the hierarchical ascending classification, the cities of Vaslui, Botosani and Piatra Neamt are considered to be part of the same category due to the similarity of their behavior from a tourism and economic perspective. Located in the queue of the ranking, they are characterized by a lower tourist and economic performance than all three other regional competitors, as confirmed by the one standard deviation negative distance from the average in all three aspects (tourist demand / offer and economic level). However, the differences as a level of tourist demand and offer and the extent to which the 3 urban settlements are known as tourist destinations make it necessary to separate them on distinct hierarchical positions and implicitly on distinct tourist development stages. In this respect, the absolute values of the number of tourist units registered on booking.com website were used, an indicator of the offer relevant for the appreciation of tourism promotion level. Thus, as can be seen in figure 8, the three destinations follow the hierarchical order of Vaslui, Botosani and Piatra Neamt in ascending order. Similar to the number of tourist arrivals, where Iasi was positioned at a remarkable distance in absolute value compared to competition, this time Piatra Neamt is characterized

by the same behavior in relation to Vaslui and Botosani. The latter show a level of tourism development, expressed by the number of accommodation units, close to the same ranking with a slight superiority of Botosani which is not, however,

sufficiently significant.

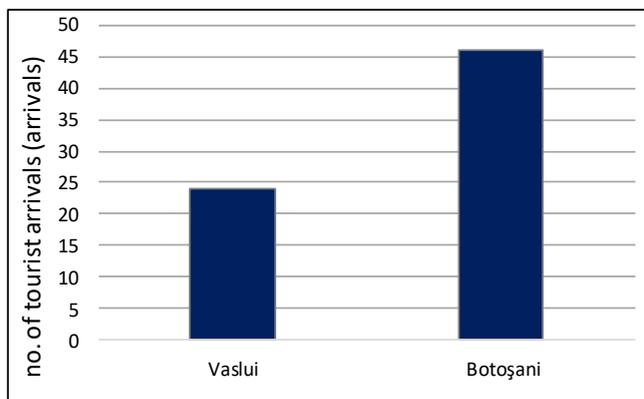


**Fig. 8** Hierarchization of Vaslui, Botosani and Piatra Neamt destinations according to the number of accommodation units registered on booking.com web page. Data source [www.booking.com](http://www.booking.com)

Given the proximity of Botoșani and Vaslui cities as values of the previous indicator and the need to differentiate them, the original indicator used in Butler's model for the assessment of the lifecycle stage, namely the number of tourist arrivals, was retained. In this case there is a pronounced distancing of the two statistic individuals, Botosani outrunning its rival with a double value. Thus, taking into account the above-mentioned idea, the three cities belonging to the same class respect the order Vaslui, Botoșani, Piatra Neamț in a rising direction if the gaps confirmed by the tourist offer indicators are taken into account (number of accommodation units registered on booking. com) and those of tourist demand (number of tourist arrivals).

Therefore, Piatra Neamț and Botosani destinations can be considered at the involvement stage (with a superiority of the first mentioned) due to a higher level of both cities in terms of tourist performance.

The inferiority of Vaslui in front of all the other county residences, inferiority confirmed both by the tourist and economic indicators, leads to its isolation at the exploration stage, being the only representative of it in the present situation.



**Fig. 9** Hierarchization of Vaslui and Botosani destinations by the number of tourist arrivals. **Data source: INSSE**

## V. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The inferiority of the Northeast Development Region in front of other regions from an economic perspective is known at national level. The analysis of the tourist performance of the county seat cities of the northeastern region has the merit of highlighting the presence of existing intra-regional disparities, which may result from multiple causes. The different tourism potential, both naturally and antropically, the degree of its utilization and the intensity of tourism promotion can be only a few of the causes of intra-regional disparities, adding to other issues that are harder to quantify, such as the interest of public authorities to stimulating the tourism sector and the destination's attractiveness for private investments (Oman et al., 2015). Also, a defining factor in the development of an urban settlement in a tourist destination is its tourist valences, their absence making it impossible to occupy a satisfactory

position in relation to the competition (the case of Vaslui). Under these circumstances, an urban settlement can not be developed so as to attain the value of a tourist destination in the true sense of the word, becoming at best a transit city.

The result of the application of Butler's model (with the changes made) allowed the differentiation of the 6 destinations analyzed on the criterion of tourism development, under the conditions of holding the same administrative status. Thus, with regard to the competitiveness relationship developed between the 6 tourist destinations, three levels of competition can be distinguished as follows:

- Strong competition (the case of western cities of the region): it is manifested by concentrating the tourist flow in the same time interval (June-September) and pursuing the same annual trend of the number of tourists. This may have the effect of advancing destinations to a higher life cycle stage, which is confirmed by the higher position of western cities towards Botosani and Vaslui (between which the competition does not manifest at a significant level), which occupy lower levels of tourist development. Nevertheless, strong competition can lead to significant intra-regional differences that favor the hypertrophy of the tourist phenomenon in certain cities and the premature decline of others (Botosani and Vaslui). Another negative effect is the intensive valorization of tourist resources in polarizing cities and the lack of capitalization of tourist potential in the losing ones. However, at the scale of the North-East Development Region, more precisely of the county seat cities, there can't be such a situation in the condition of a low intensity level of competition and the existence of cities with different tourist development potential (eg Vaslui - transit city vs. Piatra Neamt - tourist resort)

- The moderate competition (Botosani-Vaslui or Suceava-Iasi) is characterized by a similar touristic potential but used to a different extent by the two competitors (in the case of Botosani-Vaslui couple). Thus, the two individuals generally follow the same course of evolution of the tourist flow but on different stages, one of them superior to the other (Botosani higher than Vaslui). At the same time the amplitude of the values of number of tourists, calculated between the maximum recorded by each individual is not pronounced, being undoubtedly inferior to the one encountered in the case of a strong competition. Although included in this category, the Suceava-Iasi group makes a discordant note by registering the tourist peaks in distinct periods, the reason for their appreciation as a pair between which a moderate competition develops being the tendency of Suceava destination to approach to the values of the regional leader, fact confirmed by the occupation of the second position in the leaderboard.

- Low or Absent Competition (Iasi vs. Vaslui): its specificity is a strongly accentuated amplitude of the maximum values recorded by individuals, the distance between them making it impossible to compare them in absolute values. The superiority of one to the other is strongly asserted by the tourist valences of the leader

and its polarizing character to the detriment of the other at a lower position as a result of its tourist repulsivity. Also, the period of manifestation of the main tourist flow is different, the superior individual having more than one tourist peak and being characterized by a more marked tourist seasonality (Iasi), unlike the inferior individual exhibiting a monotony of the tourist flow (Vaslui) .

As for the positioning of the 6 destinations on the axis of Butler's model, the results confirmed their positioning in the first three stages. Thus, the exploration stage is characteristic of a single city (Vaslui) due to its inferiority in relation to the development level of its regional competitors, but also to the absence of its tourist valences. At the stage of involvement there are two destinations (Botosani and Piatra Neamt) specific to which there is a tourism demand and offer in a development phase, the touristic potential although distinct being present, capitalized and registering an ascending trend. Being recognized as the best ranked regionally in terms of tourism development, the towns of Bacau, Suceava and Iasi represent the stage of development, due to the superiority at the level of tourism demand, offer and economic performance. In spite of their inclusion in the same evolutionary stage, they are distinguished due to the accentuated distances expressed in the values of the performance indicators. Thus, Iasi tends to advance towards the final stage of development, while Suceava and Bacau are still in the first half of it. The causes can be represented by the different level of tourism attractiveness and investments, which have a primary influence on the values of Iasi due to the stimulation of business tourism. Several others can be added to the above, such as cultural, natural heritage, etc.

As mentioned in the first part of the present paper, besides the objective of determining the stage of tourism development and the relation of competition between the 6 destinations, it was also intended to appreciate the extent to which competition can be reflected in the life cycle stage of the destination. The result of the study indicates the presence of a more intense competition between the western destinations (Suceava, Piatra Neamt and Bacau), these being in the stages of involvement and development, in front of some less competitive destinations (Botosani and Vaslui) but not on the first position in the development stage, which is attributed to Iasi. This location on the evolution axis confirms the ability of competition to be a factor of impulse and advancement to a higher stage, in this case not being decisive in the positioning of the 6 destinations due to its reduced intensity. In support of this idea comes the city of Iasi, whose position of leader and eastern location (excluded from the group of competitive westerners) attests the reduced capacity of competitiveness to influence the level of tourism development in the present case study.

Consequently, the hypothesis from which the research has started can be confirmed at a theoretical level, the relationship of competitiveness between

destinations being able to generate a faster advancement of them on the axis of Butler's evolution, as confirmed by the development stage of the western competitive cities (Suceava, Piatra Neamt, Bacau). However, with regards to the study area, it is found that at a practical level the hypothesis can not be fully confirmed as a result of the existence of an individual who is excepted from the rule by overcoming all competitors despite the absence of a rivalry relationship developed with one of them. Thus, the competition seems to be a factor with a marginal influence on the level of tourism development of Iași due to its regional monopoly character.

The merit of the study is to illustrate the intensity of the disparities that can develop in an apparent homogeneous territory as economic and tourist development, the reason for including them in the same administrative organization form being the territorial continuity and the proximity of the 6 county residences and less their closeness as a level of tourism development. Also, the assessment of the lifecycle stage allowed both a differentiation of the 6 cities in terms of their tourist function and a determination of the extent to which the levels of competition could affect the evolution of the destinations. It remains to be seen what other aspects can be judged to have an impact on modeling the evolution of cities seen as tourist destinations, factors which may have a positive or negative impact on their life cycle stage.

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