

# Marketing and Management Strategies in Order to Increase Rural Tourism in Romania - Implementing National Development Programmes by Government Institutions or Other Types of Organizations

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## Abstract

*In recent years, tourism industry has begun to exploit cultural and environmental distinction (identity, culture, history, heritage, nature, wildlife) as one of the most attractive and valuable attractions offered to tourists. An increased demand for rural destination travelling has been notified over the past years, along with the changes in customers' mentality, who are in search of authenticity and exploring cultural differences and the uniqueness of each national heritage.*

*In this paper we will discuss about rural tourism in Romania, aspects that increase this type of tourism's value and development perspectives, according to management strategies in course of implementation of national development programmes, adopted by organizations and the local government, in order to improve quality of life in respective areas, as well as contributing to economy growth as a result of developing this type of tourism.*

**Key words:** rural, tourism, valorization, development

**J.E.L. classification:** Z32

## 1. Introduction

According to the definition of the World Tourism Organization, rural tourism represents the „type of tourism organized in rural areas and conducted by locals, exploiting rural resources (natural, cultural, historical, human) and touristic facilities, including pensions, guesthouses and agro touristic farms” (Nistoreanu et al., 2003,p.34).

Rural tourism involves the exploitation of natural touristic and anthropogenic resources of the respective rural areas, focusing on economic and social activities in order to generate profits for local communities (Surugiu, 2008, p.13). Another definition of the European Commission illustrates this type of tourism as the touristic activity carried out in rural areas, made up of an integrated relaxation offering, simultaneously satisfying the need of being in contact with the environment and with the local community (Henche Garcia, 2004, p. 51), allowing recreation and recovery of individuals' spare time, a getaway from everyday life and from the urban crowd, in a socio-cultural context, in villages and rustic landscapes.

## 2. Theoretical background. Romanian rural tourism and key factors for its valorization

Romania is still a preponderant rural country. In 2018, the rural population percentage was still at 46,2% of the total population, an extremely high level which clearly differentiates Romania from the rest of the European Union, which indicates the survival of a system of villages and small towns that continue to play an important role in the socio-economical and cultural life of the country.

Traditional rural settlements are established in a group of homes, households, in which locals maintain their own typical lifestyle, where traditions and habits are kept over the generations, being defined by their historical age, their socio-economical position, the duration of occupation and the distribution of households.

In Romania there are villages with predominantly agricultural know-how that has determined a specific lifestyle, distinct forms of organization: diffused, dispersed or concentrated villages. Despite the vicissitudes of time, the Romanian rural space has kept its cultural traditions, habits and hospitality, specifics of our country and is among the few European states preserving these elements almost intact.

Among rural houses, architecture, crafts, folklore, traditions and costumes, Romanian villages have other resources: historical monuments, art and architecture, unpopulated natural regions (mineral waters, picturesque landscapes, hunting grounds), with the possibility to offer other attractions for all touristic categories. (Turtureanu, 2008, p.50)

The social life of rural communities takes place in a certain pace and in full agreement with the variety of collective interests such as ethno-folkloric events (winter holidays, spring celebration, agricultural events, pastoral events, summer ethno-folkloric events, ethno-folkloric celebrations in the mountains).

Among the ancestral attractions of great significance, we encounter: occupations and crafts, traditional costumes, traditional games and songs, traditional holidays, rural architecture, locals' accommodation. The occupations and crafts illustrate a large topological diversity at a regional level.

Habits are defined as creative manifestations of the rural spirituality, where different events of the individual or collective life gain symbolic dimensions and prophetic practices. Romania has true treasures in this regard, represented by traditional clothing, songs and dances. We underline the originality of the Romanian folklore, its great variety and its amazing preservation until today. Traditional costumes from Năsăud, Oaş, Bucovina, Oltenia, Muntenia or Banat represent unique benchmarks for the Romanian rural spirituality.

Many other considerations can be added here, but the main reason for choosing to experiment rural tourism in Romania, beside the exploration of culture, would be discovering the country's heritage, the getaway from the everyday life in order to enjoy the peace and quiet, to admire the wild nature.

These aspects were probably also taken into consideration by his Royal Highness Prince Charles of Wales, when he decided to purchase a few properties in Transylvania. His choice can be justified by the fact that the Romanian villages still hold the fingerprint of originality, novelty and emotion.

The survival of a diverse culture and rural society full of life makes Romania an attractive destination for a growing number of tourists, interested in the natural and cultural heritage (Light, 2000, p.159). Romania's rural regions have a great potential to attract numerous visitors. The existence of numerous sites included in the UNESCO World Heritage List represents proof of the touristic potential of this country: the Danube Delta, the Lutheran Churches in Transylvania, the Horezu Monastery, the painted monasteries in the north of Moldavia and Bucovina, the Historical Centre of Sighişoara, the wooden monasteries of Maramureş and several Dacian Fortresses.

We can classify the categories of tourists we can encounter in our country according to their preferences. There are tourists that prefer rural areas, for instance Eco tourists, who are interested in the development of legally protected areas, preserving and protecting the environment at the same time; the agro tourist, eager to experiment the life style of the locals from villages and farms; from a similar category come tourists who are mainly interested in exploring the culture and history of every place. We also have geo-tourists, an admirer of the beauty of landscapes and nature, the active tourist, passionate about the outdoor activities, sports and adventures and taking hikes in places difficult to reach.

Balneary tourism is practiced as well by internal tourists and foreign ones, given the big number of natural springs, sludge and gases with healing properties and the diversity of treatment offers based on these natural resources. The country's capital, Bucharest – a business and cultural center – has become a city break and business type destination, for foreigners and Romanians alike.

There are also tourists that are interested in experiencing socializing and nightlife, which are drawn to the seaside area, mainly Mamaia North resort, with its glamorous restaurants and nightclubs or those who are drawn to music festivals (Neversea-which also takes places at the seaside and Untold, held in the city of Cluj).

### **3. Research methodology**

In this paper, we used the fundamental and theoretical research methods by studying the specialized literature, revising articles, reports and books found in the electronic databases. Moreover, the observation method was used to identify the challenges and opportunities to grow the rural tourism in Romania. The study was conducted based on the analysis of the secondary data and the most important indicators were emphasized such as: capacity of units with accommodation functions, average length of stay, number of arrivals. The main data was provided by the National Institute of Statistics and the interpretation was made using descriptive statistics. The study concluded with the proposed strategies for national development of rural tourism that the organizations and the local government should apply that can lead to both economic growth and higher quality of live by enhancing this type of tourism.

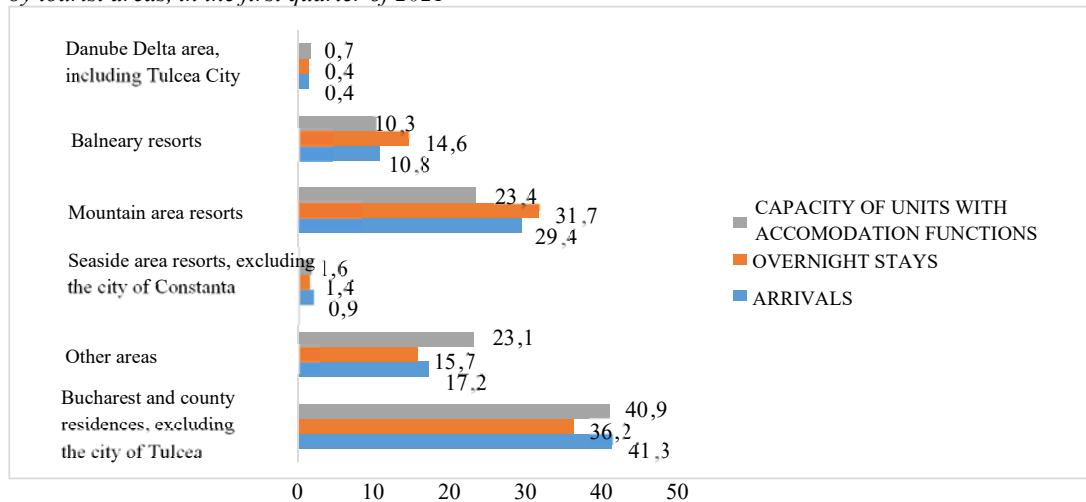
### **4. Results. Statistics regarding tourist frequency of reception units with accomodation functions in the first quarter of 2021**

According to the statistics provided by INS(National Institute of Statistics), in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the first quarter of 2020, the attendance of tourist reception structures with accommodation functions is characterized by the decrease of the tourist accommodation capacity in operation and the number of Romanian and foreign tourists(<https://insse.ro/cms/ro/tags/frecventarea-structurilor-de-primire-turistica-cu-functiuni-de-cazare-0>).

The tourist accommodation capacity in operation of the tourist reception structures in the first quarter of 2021 was 15141.1 thousand places-days, 1.9% lower than in the first quarter of 2020. In the total tourist accommodation capacity in operation, the hotels held a share of 57.7%, agrotouristic pensions held a percentage of, 15.3%, tourist pensions-12.7%, tourist villas- 4.4%, hostels- 3.5%, motels- 3.4%, tourist chalets- 1.9% and the other types of tourist reception structures with tourist accommodation functions held a share of 1.1%.

The net usage index of the tourist accommodation capacity in operation in the first quarter of 2021 was 17.2% for the total tourist reception structures with accommodation functions, for hotels-20.0%, tourist villas-17.0%, tourist chalets-15, 6%, inns-15.4%, tourist pensions 14.2%, bungalows-13.4%, agrotouristic pensions- 12.8%, tourist stops- 12.5%, hostels 11.6% and under 11.0% for the other types of tourist reception structures. The hotels registered the highest usage indicators (34.2%) in the mountain area. Regarding counties, higher indicators were registered at the tourist reception structures with accommodation functions in Covasna (28.5%), Bihor (25.6%), Braşov (24.9%), Prahova (23, 7%), Mureş (21.6%), Caraş Severin (21.2%), Suceava (20.5%), Gorj (19.7%), Galaţi (18.9%), Vâlcea (18.4 %), Brăila (17.9%), Arad (17.3%), Alba (17.0%), Iaşi and Vaslui (each with 16.9%), Sibiu (16.0%), Constanţa ( 15.3%), Bacău (14.5%), Mehedinţi and Argeş (each with 14.4%), Satu-Mare (14.2%), Harghita and Bistriţa Năsăud (each with 13.7%) and Bucharest (13.5%). 7 The tourist area "Bucharest municipality and county seat cities, excluding Tulcea city" had the largest share in the total tourist accommodation capacity in operation and in total arrivals / overnight stays.

Figure no. 1 The structure of arrivals, overnight stays and tourist accommodation capacity in operation by tourist areas, in the first quarter of 2021



Source: <https://insse.ro/cms/ro/tags/frecventarea-structurilor-de-primire-turistica-cu-functiuni-de-cazare-0>, accessed on 31.05.2021

The average length of stay in the first quarter of 2021 decreased by 0.2 percentage points compared to the first quarter of 2020, on total structures of tourist reception with accommodation functions was 1.8 days. Higher values were recorded for inns (2.2 days), bungalows (2.1 days), and holiday villages (2.0 days). Regarding tourist areas, the longest average length of stay was registered in the area "resorts in the coastal area, excluding the city of Constanța" (2.8 days), followed by the area "spa resorts (2.5 days). For Romanian tourists, the average length of stay was higher in the "seaside resorts, excluding the city of Constanta" (2.8 days) and in the "spas" area (2.5 days). For foreign tourists, a longer average length of stay was registered in "spas" (3.8 days) and "seaside resorts, excluding the city of Constanta" (3.1 days).

According to the results of the above mentioned research we can state that the marketing and promotion strategies for the Romanian rural tourism must be taken into account, in order to attract more tourists towards this type of tourism.

## 5. Prospects for the development of the Romanian rural tourism – Management and marketing strategies adopted by government Institutions and Organizations

The regions that already have the experience of rural tourism are regions whose natural heritage is already internationally known. Thus the ideal circumstances through which the local development takes place are those in which rural tourism interacts and overlaps with cultural tourism and ecotourism, which demonstrated the significance of integrated marketing and proper promotion of the heritage through local, national or international initiatives.

The relation between rural tourism and the preserving of local tradition is one of great significance. Iorio and Corsale state that the preserving of a vivid and culturally diversified rural society will transform Romania in an attractive destination for a growing number of tourists, interested in the cultural and natural heritage (Iorio et al., 2010, p.152)

According to Turtureanu and Ioan , the objective of valorisation of Romanian rural tourism (heritage, culture, history) can be reached with the following actions:

- Stimulating parallel activities that can generate additional earnings (rural tourism and agrotourism)
- Promoting the rural space and stimulating the local economy;
- Promoting legislation that covers current problems with the rural space, including special protection(protecting ecotourism);
- Strengthening the traditional houses and of the entire agriculture policies;

- Stimulating agricultural complementary activities, especially by creating new economic units (for instance: agro-production and services by valorisation of the touristic and agricultural potential);
- Elaborating studies and projects for sustainable development (ecotourism), improving, for instance: implementing projects for the practice of sports, of leisure activities and cultural entertainment, itineraries programs, in order to offer tourists a wide spectrum of activities and attractions (Turtureanu et al., 2005, p.124).

The development of rural tourism develops opportunities for exploiting the respective regions as well as for other local economical activities, for instance butcher’s shops, bakeries, handcrafts and other types of small, successful businesses.

A well performed administration from all parties involved in such activities could bring multiple benefits to these rural regions and communities, including creating of better living conditions but also attracting young people to settle in these regions (avoiding emmigration), given that they will have work opportunities. In this way, the risk of emmigration is reduced, being a well known fact that many young people from the rural environment leave their country in search of better workplaces.

Minciu describes the role of the government in the development of tourism as being direct by stimulation, control, supervision and promoting, and indirect by supplying tourism product (Minciu, 2004, p.60). The political commitment is thus essential in an effort to approach a sustainable development of a country, but we mention that besides government institutions, the implication of NGO’s and other stakeholders is necessary, such as the academical and research environment (Bulin, 2015, p.77).

Following the entry into the European Union, Romania has approached development strategies, including in the tourism sector. We mention Romania’s Sustainable Development Strategy for 2030 and the National Tourism Master Plan for 2007 – 2026.

Firstly, the Sustainable Development Strategy which focuses on two main areas, namely the development and planning of infrastructure in order to capitalize on natural resources and to promote tourist and to create the necessary infrastructure, having the following objectives (Bulin,2015, p.78):

- a) Valorisation of the cultural heritage and natural resources for tourism, meaning:
  - Modernization and development of accommodation and leisure activities units;
  - Valorisation of the potential of mountain resorts
  - Planning of objectives regarding the natural tourism;
  - Health and spa tourism development.
- b) Improving the quality of the tourism specific infrastructure:
  - Development of domestic tourism through diversification and marketing specific activities;
  - Defining and promoting the national touristic brand.

The second planning instrument, adopted and implemented by Romania, with focus on the tourism industry, is the National Tourism Master Plan, developed in collaboration with the International Tourism Organization. The experts pointed out a number of expected benefits that the Master Plan can bring for the Romanian economy and for the tourism sector: growing the investments in the tourism adjacent sectors; stimulating the creation of new work places and of the labor market; preserving of the natural resources and of the natural heritage; improving the quality of life. The following marketing strategies are illustrated:

- a) Recommendations regarding the following changes in marketing approaches:  
Markets – the tourist sources must be classified in categories based on market opportunity for Romania in the short, medium and long run, based on a three-tier classification system:
  - primary / priority markets, such as Germany, Austria, Italy, France, Great Britain / Ireland, Hungary, Russia and USA;
  - secondary markets, such as the Scandinavian Countries, Benelux, Iberian Peninsula and other EU states;
  - opportunity markets, such as China, Japan, other countries (according to the identification through research).
- b) Elaborating a strategy based on a number of market segments, established as an objective, following a study on the international tourism trends.

- c) Conducting market research studies in series of installments, on the primary / priority, secondary and opportunity tourist markets, in order to draw conclusions on:
- the market size and potential (including forecasts) ;
  - the profile and characteristics of the key market segments that need to be targeted;
  - the evaluation of the future possible mix of touristic packages and individual tourists;
  - the evaluation of the efficiency of different marketing instruments and techniques, promotion and public relations, regarding the transformation of key market segments’ potential.
- d) Conducting an immediate cost – benefit analysis study on the network of abroad ministry bureaus, especially regarding:
- marketing agreements with local companies;
  - reporting system between bureaus from abroad and headquarters;
  - evaluation of the ongoing marketing and promotion activities;
  - defining performance standards and criteria with which one can measure, follow up on and evaluate the bureaus’ efficiency.
- e) A significant annual programme for traveling with educational and knowledge purposes for tour operators and main tourism agencies. Participants must be selected based on their capacity of conducting business for Romania. The Directorate for Promotions within the National Tourism Office must be restructured in the form of a Directorate for Marketing and Promotion, and must focus on:
- market statistics and research on the source segments and markets;
    - responsibility for every source market or market groups through a system of “bureau inspectors” that work with the bureaus from abroad and market representatives;
  - digital marketing – development and maintenance of the website;
  - industry development within Romania – among others, by encouraging public / private partnership initiatives and programmes;
  - employing of a specialized agency for the exploitation of Romanian image and destination brand;
  - key attributes and resources must be integrated in the image and brand concept, distinctively developed, that allows Romania to differentiate itself from its regional competitors; it is also important that these developed concepts to be able to serve as “house brands” for a series of sub brands associated with interests or touristic attractions from all over the country, such as Transylvania, Maramureş. These subbrands must be developed as a part of the process and will need a large dialogue between the employed agency and the ministry, as well as with regional and local authorities.
- f) implementing a sustained marketing and promotion programme, for the internal market as well as the international markets, which will be conceived in such a manner that it will be able to valorize Romania’s potential on identified markets and market segments. This will encompass three components:
- public – advertising and promotional activities (paid media publicity, promotional materials, website, tourism fairs);
  - touristic products commerce;
  - publicity and promotion activities for selling of touristic products (commercial advertising, visual photo-audio library, supporting tour operators, mixt promotion, tourism fairs, get-to-know visits);
  - mass media – public relations (representation abroad, press articles, informing summaries and letters, media visits, endorsements, publicity events).

In the short run, the focus on international markets will lay mainly on image development and less on the intensive promotion of specific products – thus allowing the progress of different products from their development and improvement standpoint; at the same time, for the internal market a more intense marketing and promoting programme based on the products will be needed, in order to restrict the vacation flux of Romanians towards foreign countries.

All these preservation and rehabilitation programmes must be conceived by cultural development and according to other aspects of social and economical development. The role of management and marketing from rural areas is to reunite all individual initiatives with easy to access reglementations and standards.

The well-defined organizational and legal framework represents the starting point for Romanian rural tourism intensification. Subsequent regulations must be adopted in order to improve the infrastructure, access routes and roads, providing running water to the respective villages, publishing certain promotional materials regarding rural tourism.

In Romania, The National Association of Rural, Eco and Cultural Tourism (A.N.T.R.E.C.) has implemented such management for the development of rural tourism, which resulted in a unique idea, being provided with its own national network. By integrating A.N.T.R.E.C. subsidiaries, they can allocate technical assistance to village inhabitants, with the purpose of developing this activity, as well as for increasing the types of cooperation in rural tourism. A.N.T.R.E.C. is also involved in the professional training of persons involved in rural tourism activities, systematically organizing trainings and applications in the area.

As Stoian (2011) stated, what local tourism management and marketing is concerned, A.N.T.R.E.C. focuses mainly on:

- identifying and promoting rural tourism potential;
- organizing professional training for owners (hosts), rural tourism agencies, seminars, etc;
- obtaining experience and information exchanges with other similar organizations or associations from abroad;
- communicating useful information to government institutions, public administrations, in order to support this type of tourism;
- organizing active publicity campaigns for categorized and approved units, included in the network through mass media;
- attracting new rural motels in the A.N.T.R.E.C. network and supporting them for approval and licensing;
- participating to important events that develop internally and externally, at a national, regional and local level, and that include fairs, exhibitions and conferences.

In the last few decades, the European Union’s regional development policy, in conjunction with the member states’ national policy, encourages tourism by focusing on rural areas, considering its effects as being positive.

A country’s tourism policy should be contingent upon the national plans for economic development. Strictly from an economical point of view, the main objectives are increasing the tourism benefits, diversifying activities, integrating tourism in the national economic circuit, developing of an area through tourism etc. Of course, there are also the social objectives, such as eradicating poverty, a better distribution of wealth, implicating and enabling local entrepreneurship, in the specific industry respectively, and environmental objectives: protecting the heritage, spatial planning, preserving biodiversity etc. Because tourism’s socio-economical impact is significant for the national economy of many countries, the government is directly interested in developing this sector and establishing a national strategy by sectors, for example the way resources are being allocated (Bulin, 2015, p.80):

In order to exploit rural areas’ advantages, measures must be taken for the infrastructure’s development (running water, residual water and heat administration, improving and modernization of access roads) in order to increase tourists’ comfort according to the required standards and to facilitate the accessibility to and from the respective areas, developing and diversifying technical, commercial and sports facilities. Among all these marketing activities for promoting the area at a national and European level as an organic, unitary product, other measures must also be enforced, taking into consideration the foreign tourists’ tendencies of concentrating on nature and unmodified values of rural communities. Individual initiatives have drawn the local and national authorities’ attention on the potential of rural tourism as a driver for local economy. Sustained efforts are necessary in order to increase the attractivity potential and an analysis of criteria that must be met in order to increase the entire potential of the discussed areas.

## 6. Conclusions

Tourism is a phenomenon of the modern society which responds to people's needs to cut loose from the tumultuous everyday life. The global economic process has suffered many changes, and the local communities must adapt to current challenges in order to maintain and develop their economic and social competitiveness. Rural areas must serve, in their own advantage, to people's needs to spend their vacations away from crowded urban areas. Lately, the potential of rural areas has been recognized, fact that is owed to nature, traditions and habits, kept by the rural communities, to the quiet and unmodified environment.

The rural space sets its geographical components at people's disposal, and in exchange, people model it according to their needs, filling it with anthropological creations. The rebirth of rural tourism happened thanks to the need of a new form of spending vacations, in a quality, pure environment and in new touristic destinations; traveling at the end of the week has become as important as annual ones, the European Union has acknowledged the importance of rural tourism and has encouraged its development, and it is considered the key point for the development of local and national economy.

The significance of rural tourism is acknowledged at an European level through the regional development policies of the European Union, combined with the national policies of member states, which encourage the orientation of tourism towards rural areas, taking into consideration its positive effects and its implications. Thus, thanks to the tourism activities for bringing the natural environment and the cultural and historical heritage in the domestic and international economic circuit, these are directly contributing to the economic development of rural areas.

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