

BRANDING STRATEGY FOR ROMANIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION

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***Abstract:** In the last 2 years a lot of discussions took place regarding the fact that Romania has no brand – as a nation or a tourist destination. For now, no further actions were initiated to transpose the ideas resulted from those discussions into a project. The implementation of such a project remains a dream. This paper would try to present Romania's competitive advantages and the branding strategy our country should have as a tourist destination.*

***Key words:** branding, strategy, tourist destination, Romania*

Introduction

Romania has an important tourist potential due to its geographical position, its complex natural environment, but also due to its seven World Heritage Sites registered by UNESCO: the Danube Delta, the citadel churches of Transilvania, Horezu Monastery, the painted churches from Bucovina – Moldavia, the historic citadel of Sighisoara, the wooden churches of Maramures and the Dacian fortresses near Orastie – Hunedoara. To all these we could add another long list of beautiful sites – numerous spa resorts among them – and monuments, list which could become even longer when we add the local and regional traditions.

Romania was a well-known tourist destination in the 1970s in Western Europe. By the end of the 1980s the number of visitors decreased as a result of under investment and political situation. After a slow privatisation process in 1990s, according to WTTC's TSA research¹, Romania ranks fourth out of 174 countries in long-term growth in demand.

Brand Romania should be urgently prioritized (said WTTC²), and within it there is a need to promote Romania's diverse and tourist unique regions. In this direction, the National Tourism Authority's promotion director, wants to open several tourist information centres in Romania, which will include 3-4 in Bucharest, in collaboration with USAID.

In 2006, the travel and tourism is expected to contribute 4,8 per cent of Romania's GDP and account for 485,000 jobs (5,8% of the total employment). Over the next 10 years travel and tourism sector is forecast to achieve annualised real growth of 6,7% and 1,6% in terms of employment. In 2016 the share of GDP will be 5,8 per cent³.

Between 2006 and 2008, the Romanian tourism industry will have around 325 million € in government spending. From this amount, ski resorts will receive 130 million €, the mountain areas – 30 million €, Danube Delta and Black Sea areas – 16 million € and 15 million € for Sibiu which will be the cultural capital of Europe in 2007⁴.

Regarding the development of various tourism promotions, from 2007 until 2013 Romania will receive around 3 billion €. Ovidiu Marian, the president of the National Authority of Tourism, part of the Ministry of Transport, Constructions and Tourism – considers that Romania has only two types of tourists:

¹ WTTC, Romania – The Impact of Travel and Tourism on Jobs and the Economy, spring 2006, <http://www.wttc.org/publications/pdf/06WTTCRomania.pdf>

² idem note 1

³ idem note 1

⁴ idem note 1

- a) business travellers (they stay in 4-5* hotels, spend 1-2 nights and bring a substantial amount of money);
- b) leisure travellers (they spend 5-10 days for travel and sight see).

Material and Method

For our investigations we used exploratory research:

- ⇒ secondary data: statistical and published studies; other promotion materials;
- ⇒ extensive web sites analysis;

Results and discussions

This richness of potential tourist products generated a false idea for Romanian people and Romanian authorities – the authorities responsible for tourism included – that at international level Romania is well known and it is a desired and popular tourist destination. This wrong idea can be partly explain by the fact that during 1970s - as World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) shows in its report⁵ published in 2006 regarding Romania – our country was a popular tourist destination for tourists from Western Europe, Israel and USA. The degradation of tourism during 1980s and 1990s seems to be forgotten.

This wrong perception can explain – up to a point – the passive and neglecting attitude Romanian authorities have toward Romania as a brand and their late wake-up as the Romanian accession process is closing to an end.

The reality is slightly different. It is true, Romania have some brands it can use to create its own brand, but those brands are ‘larger than the country’⁶ – like Nadia Comaneci or Dracula. Sometimes these brands are not identified with Romania.

For now, Romania has no brand – as a nation or as a tourist destination – and it is ‘like a plate waiting to be filled’ as Jack Trout said in one of its interviews. But the Romanian authorities did not pass over the declarative stage. During March 2005 two projects for branding Romania were announced – one by the Presidency and one by the Agency for Governmental Strategies. By June 2006 no information on the continuance of these projects was available.

Other initiative for branding Romania as tourist destination was launched by Romanian National Authority for Tourism in collaboration with USAID and announced during 2005⁷. Since than to other information was available on the development of this initiative, an exception being made in November 2005 when the chairman of the Romanian National Authority for Tourism announced that a strategy for promoting Romania and a strategy for tourism at national level would be written ‘as soon as possible’, but the report of WTTC was waited as a base for it⁸.

WTTC issued its report during the spring of 2006 and is urging Romanian authorities to start the project for branding Romania. By mid June 2006 it is not yet clear if the project was launched or the authorities will wait the Fall to do it. The postponement of this project shows clearly that Romanian authorities are only now thinking to a strategy for Romanian tourism and branding.

The steps for creating a destination brand are:

1) Market investigation, analysis and strategic recommendation

At least the direct competitors were identified⁹: Poland, Czech Republic and Bulgaria which have similar natural environments; Hungary for spa and business tourism. And we must add that

⁵ WTTC, Romania – The Impact of Travel and Tourism on Jobs and the Economy, spring 2006, <http://www.wttc.org/publications/pdf/06WTTCRomania.pdf>

⁶ Business Magazin, ianuarie 2005

⁷ Banii nostri, 6 mai 2005

⁸ Jurnalul National, 3 nov.2005

⁹ Piata Financiara, februarie 2006

Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary have capitals which are important tourist destination with which Bucharest can not compete. We want to highlight several strap line for Romania and its competitors:

- Romania: *Come as a tourist, leave as a friend* (around 1998-1999); *Romania – Simply surprising* (since 2003);
- Czech Republic: In the heart of Europe
- Hungary: The essence of Europe

For now, Romanian travel and tourism is characterized by a high level of seasonality. New type of tourism and new products are necessary for minimizing this effect. From this point of view, the main segments market for Romania as a tourist destination could be:

- meeting, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (Bucharest is an interesting destination for international companies organising such events);
- mountain tourism (in winter and summer too);
- heritage tourism (for cities like Brasov, Sibiu, Sighisoara, Cluj-Napoca);
- rural tourism (festivals, the road of monasteries, wine, mineral water);
- spa/wellness tourism (Romania has one-third supply of the thermal water in Europe);
- Danube Delta (one of the UNESCO's World Heritage Sites);
- geo-tourism (for 2007 the launch of the guide for geo-tourism in Romania – in collaboration with National Geographic – is expected).

2) Brand identity development

What can be done? What could we offer foreign tourists so as to attract them to come and visit us, to choose us ?

Romanian tourist destination are situated near one to each other. The country offers a complete package (mountain, cultural destination, Danube Delta, Black Sea). Another interesting aspect is that Romanians prefer to travel abroad. Better is the fact that Romanian authorities tries to focus now on promoting local tourism. We must underline that the Romanian tourists prefer increasing of the quality of the Romanian tourist services more than promotion of these destinations.

Romania has several national and international values which should be exploited properly; among them we choose to mention: cultural values (Brancusi, Enescu), sport values (Nadia Comaneci, Gheoghe Hagi, Ilie Nastase) and historical values (Vlad Tepes – known as Dracula). Studies available through media show that foreigners seldom identify Nadia Comaneci with Romania and the same is available for Dracula. Sometimes Dracula is connected with Transilvania, but a lot of people (outside Romania) do not realize that Transilvania is part of Romania¹⁰.

3) Brand launch and introduction – communicating the vision

Romania - Simply surprising was a program initiated in 2003. The target was informed tourists, 20-55 year-old, having an average income, interested by new experiences, culture and history. The objectives were: 1) Presentation of Romania as a tourist destination; 2) Change of perception and attitude to Romania, mainly in EU countries and USA. The message was: Romania has changed from a tourist's point of view and the slogan - "Romania - Simply surprising" (60 seconds advertisement). The media used was: Euronews, Eurosport, Discovery, CNN, BBC one broadcast per day per TV channel.

The year 2004 seemed to be one with a lot of ideas for new programs: Super Ski in Carpathian Mountains, Cruses on Danube river, Romania as a Wine country etc., but the offer is too various,

¹⁰ Business Magazin, ianuarie 2005

with no focalisation. Some of the programs announced (like Sigla Q) were not known among those who should implemented them.

Our recommendations is not to ignore Dracula – maybe through tour based on books like Dracula by Bram Stoker and The Historian by Elizabeth Kostova, or as a special product for Halloween – it is a competitive advantage, Dracula as brand can not be exploited by the Romanian direct competitors. Unfortunately, Romanian people consider the myth of Dracula not representative for the national identity and this is the main cause Romania did not exploited this cash cow only seldom.

4) Brand implementation

- The first part of the campaign – a story in which there are inserted the main points of tourist interest;
- The second part of the campaign – the development of concrete tourism offers;
- Is it an image campaign or a tourist product? The answer of this question is only partly affirmative. *Simply surprising* could suggest the idea of simplicity, conserved traditions and warm hospitality; but the word surprising also could have a negative interpretation due to a related bad image Romania which was attached during 1990s, but also due to low quality services, lack of recreational facilities and a underdeveloped infrastructures.

We are not sure regarding the continuity of the 2005 promotional campaign (spots and prints) due to the lack of information. The quantity of printed promotional materials is very low and not accessible to a large public.

5) Monitoring, evaluation and review

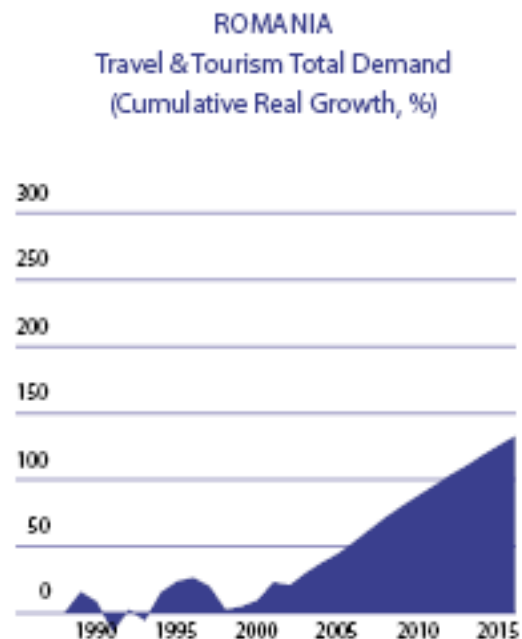
Romania Travel and Tourism had a positive trend in the last few years. For 2005 there were the following results:

- revenues amounting 150 million €;
- 7 million visitors;
- 2,2 % in the nation’s GDP.

As it can be seen in the following figures (source: WTTC, Romania – The Impact of Travel and Tourism on Jobs and the Economy, spring 2006, <http://www.wttc.org/publications/pdf/06WTTCRomania.pdf>) the prospects for Romania are positive.

WTTC LEAGUE TABLE EXTRACT
Travel & Tourism Economy GDP
(2005, % of Total GDP)

30	Croatia	20.1
43	Bulgaria	16.0
44	Montenegro	15.7
48	Greece	15.1
52	Slovenia.....	14.6
62	Czech Republic.....	13.6
69	Bosnia and Herzegovina.....	11.8
99	Poland.....	9.1
101	Hungary	9.0
162	Romania.....	4.8



Conclusions

As we could see to construct a brand for a tourist destination is a complex process and Romania timidly started one. For a strong brand as a tourist destination Romania needs a strong brand as a nation – connected with national identity which now is blurry for Romanian people. The road to build all these is long and difficult.

We have to have in mind that as a tourist destination the main competitive advantages for Romania are the spa resorts (needing a lot of investments), the Danube Delta as an eco-tourism destination, rural and heritage tourism. The other products should be complementary for these main three.

Even the delay of a brand construction is a negative thing, being optimists we can see it as a ‘blessing in disguise’ because Romania can observe its competitors, learn from their mistakes and build a fresh and different image (but we are too optimist).

The attitude of Romanian authorities is mixed, but it is predominant neglecting and passive with picks of some activities: one was in 1998 when it was prepared the first spot for Romania as a tourist destination due to the total eclipse of the sun fully visible; until 2004 the attitude was – again – mixed: a lot of declarations – even ‘tourism is a national priority’ – but steps were made in the opposite direction when the Ministry of Tourism was integrated in the Ministry of Transport, Constructions and Tourism. There are a lot of accusations of political involvement and personal interests in the tourism development.

Despite of an uncertain strategy toward tourism and no clear brand strategy for Romania as a tourist destination, the number of foreign tourist grew slowly, but steady since 2002 meaning that Romania has a positive image among those who already visited it and speak about it to their friends.

We must conclude that it is better to have a low notoriety connected with a positive attitude than a high notoriety and negative attitude. Romania should capitalise on this.

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