

# THE NEED AND OPPORTUNITY OF ESTABLISHING A TOURISM INFORMATION AND PROMOTION CENTER IN OLTENIA UNDER THE MOUNTAIN

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## ABSTRACT

*Currently, the access of information regarding data of general interest for Romania, through specialized tourism information and promotion centers (tourist attractions, cultural and business events, archaeological sites, accommodation structures, restaurants, facilities for leisure or any other facilities accompanying a tourist journey or of tourist interest or leisure facilities in short), is almost impossible due to the lack or sporadic existence of such centers. Tourist areas do not have a suitable network of multi-function centers specialized in tourism, allowing tourists access to information and information services as well as special events. In fact, the level of promotion and development of tourist information centers is now extremely reduced therefore, creating a national network of tourism information and promotion centers (NCTIP) is extremely important for promoting the Romanian tourism.*

**Keywords:** *Tourism, Informatin, Promotion, Center, Oltenia*

## INTRODUCTION

Romania is a country with many tourist areas, cultural traditions and natural resources. Tourism provides an important contribution to the GDP and to employment. Tourism promotion offers new opportunities and alternatives for development of many regions in Romania. Currently, the access of information regarding data of general interest for Romania, through specialized tourism information and promotion centers is almost impossible due to the lack of existence of such centers. Tourist areas are not equipped with a suitable network of multi-function centers specialized in tourism. Therefore, having a national network of tourism information and promotion centers (NCTIP) is extremely important for promoting Romania's tourism. It is equally true for foreign tour operators in order to create their own travel programs for Romania as they need this information available on the web. After analyzing these data the following weaknesses have been identified: low promotion and development of tourism information centers and related services in this area of activity; tourist regions lack an adequate network of multi-function centers specialized in tourism, allowing tourists access to information, information services and specific events. Thus, the possibility to develop the Romanian tourism sector has been identified. The solution for accelerating this process is to create a national network of tourism information and promotion centers; such network could provide useful services and promotional material in all tourist areas. Creating this network will provide the necessary logistics to facilitate the exchange of information in the tourism industry between institutions and information centers in the tourist areas. The introduction of modern information services and the development of a unified tourism information system will create better conditions for storing information and will enable sharing tourism activity data for local and foreign tourists. Such a system can be expanded and interconnected with other information systems such as for example on-line booking system, programs of conferences / international cultural events, etc. Specific objective: Promotion of the Romanian tourism potential by improving the country image in order to promote Romania abroad and to increase its attractiveness, and also by establishing an integrated system of the Romanian tourism offer. Contribution to NSRF [National

Strategic Reference Framework] priorities: – Increase of the long-term national/Romanian competitiveness – Development and improvement of human capital in Romania.

Despite having many tourist areas such as the Danube Delta, the monasteries in northern Moldavia, Vidraru Dam, Maramures, Bran Castle, the Prahova Valley and the Black Sea (although in the case of the latter, foreign tourists would hardly find a place on the weekends), they are poorly promoted abroad thus, resulted in few visitations by foreign tourists. As an example, a family from Germany has the courage and decides to visit Romania; they look for information on the Internet retrieving few pages, two or three, or not more, summarizing comments posted in forums by those who have visited Romania before. As a result, any travelers who wish to visit Romania with limited information will encounter problems as in the following scenario:

*“With a heart full of wishes, but with the mind empty of information, our family gets in the car and quickly, quickly, in just a few hours, reaches the Hungarian border with Romania”.*

Here starts the difficult part, but as in the story of Hansel and Gretel, the family in our example is resourceful. As in the story of Hansel and Gretel, they sprinkled crumbs along the path in order to trace their way back. The family under discussion remembers the trip of last year in Denmark, for example, in the island of Bornholm.

The family reflected on their past experience of the island which has all the information and physical facilities. This island is excellent for tourists who come to admire the wild birds or landscape. It is ideal not only for tourism but also for trade and business, being a real connection point between four countries. The establishment of a modern and high-performing information center was funded there from the Regional Development Fund (ERDF) since the early '90s. It was able to provide quality information to all those who arrived on the island, whether tourists or businessmen. In addition, this center had to ensure and promote the island in the Baltic region. The new Information Centre was to replace the existing one, which had been established for a small number of

tourists and could no longer cope with them. The building of a new one (Velkomstcenter) was between 1991 and winter of 1992, and this center started its activity in the capital Ronne in June 1992. Now, the center is a real Danish tourism office, the employees speak three languages fluently and provide information not only on the island of Bornholm, but Denmark as a whole. Most requests addressed to the center were concerned with general information about the island, the sights to be visited and road access that are related to Denmark. Moreover, the center also provides assistance to tourists arriving on the island without prior reservations. The Information Center of Bornholm is managed by the local Chamber of Commerce and is funded by the municipality of Ronne and by the local council of Bornholm, being also sponsored by local firms. This center offers free brochures in which the local firms and travel agencies make their work known and it is also a sale center for the local handmade products.

## **CONTENTS**

In Romania, accessing information through specialized tourism information and promotion centers is almost impossible. Why is this happening? This is due to the fact that we have very few of such centers, and the existing one provide limited information. Thus, a formal existence and functioning tourism information centers/points are crucial than having them presence and not contributing to the tourism community.

In Romania, tourist areas do not have a suitable network of multi-function centers specialized in tourism, allowing tourists access to information, information services and special events. In fact, promotion and the development of tourist information centers today are extremely minimal. Therefore, creating a national network of tourism information and promotion centers (NCTIP) is crucially important to promoting Romanian tourism.

The Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism (MRDT) launched on May 26, 2011. The second call for proposals to establish national centers for tourism promotion and information and their equipment, with the indicative value of financial allocation

is worth EUR 17 million. The total value of projects to be funded through the Regional Operational Program managed by the institution may vary between at least 170,000.00 lei and up to 630,000.00 lei.

In the new call for proposals with rolling submission, the eligible applicants were territorial administrative units or tourist resorts of local and national interest. The projects that were funded had to include at least one of the following operations: construction / rehabilitation of buildings in which the tourism promotion and information centers will operate, software and equipment purchase, creation of data bases with tourist information and development of websites to promote tourism products.

Nonetheless, the greatest regret was that this fund had been spent unwisely. On the contrary, such money could have been spent diligently to create centers catering to national and international interests.

Romania has the resources and we would like to be known to the rest of the world. IMF and the World Bank have allocated funds but what have we achieved? In order to get a clear picture, let's take an example of county of Gorj where tourist information centers have been created in areas without tourism. A Romanian proverb that says "the only thing a bald man needs is a diamond cap", is appropriate for information centers that have been established precisely in villages where no tourist have stepped foot in a lifetime. This unfortunate scenario was inspired by a real case. The two villages are Alimpesti and Calnic where the only 'tourists' who come to visit once in a blue moon are local authorities or grandchildren of inhabitants. Both villages were assigned 7.4, respectively 8.1 billion ROL for two investments that can only be considered as unnecessary, inappropriate and very expensive.

These two places in Gorj have established tourist information centers, given that nobody has ever heard of such activities in that region. However, both villages found it proper to spend huge amount of money to build buildings in non-existent tourist areas. Both projects were financed by the European Union, and the municipal

administration of the above places who thought it was a better idea to build a worthless tourist information center instead of useful roadwork or sewerage network. For example, up to 200,000.00 Euros are spent to build one of these centers in Calnic. The mayor of the village said he submitted a project and, as the center was deemed appropriate, he received funding. The mayor also has an explanation for building this center: it is not addressed only to tourism in the area, but to the county tourism! “We made the project and sent it to Bucharest. If they believed it was appropriate to build it in Calnic, they gave us the funding. It is not just a local center, as it will address all tourists looking for sights in the county”, said the mayor. Now that Calnic is hardly visited, is something else. And besides, if the money comes from the EU, it no longer matters how useful this center is. According to the documentation submitted to SEAP [Society for Excellence in Public Administration], the center value is 8.1 billion ROL.

Therefore, officially, there is no tourism in Calnic. Surprisingly, the fact that there is no tourism in the village of Calnic is confirmed precisely by the county’s institution, namely the County Council of Gorj. A brief overview of Calnic village, from one of the pages of information on the county of Gorj, makes it clear that there is no tourism activity or attraction in this place. The only “tourist attraction” could possibly be the grove where the Miner's Day is organized.

However, the first place that had this initiative is Alimpesti - Gorj. While the mayor of this village had no specific explanation as to the usefulness of this center, he merely said that “it enriches the municipal heritage of the village”. Moreover, the mayor of this village said that there is some utility of this center because it is close to Polovragi, which has “several tourist attractions”. Obviously, it matters very little that a potential visitor will not come in Alimpesti to take leaflets. The acme of irony is however that on the website of Alimpesti Mayoralty, where there is a section dedicated exclusively to tourism in the village. Whoever serves this website; to the said section, will be surprised to discover a vastness of white? Not even an old church or anything else likely to attract any tourists wandering in Gorj can be found. Basically, this page confirms what

we know quite well: there is no tourism and no chance to practice it very soon. As we can see in the explanations of both mayors, the buildings were made only because the mayors wanted to grab some money from the EU, whether or not they did something useful with it.

There is another place where such a tourist information center will be established, but here, there is a justification, because it has a very important tourist attraction; Constantin Brancusi's native town. It is about the village of Pestisani, where amounts similar the above-mentioned will be spend to build an information point.

In Gorj region, we take as an example, works of sculptor Constantin Brancusi. Constantin Brancusi was a Romanian sculptor with overwhelming contributions to the renewal of vision and language arts in contemporary sculpture. Constantin Brancusi was elected Member of the Romanian Academy posthumously. Brancusi's vision of life was influenced both by Plato and the concepts of Eastern philosophy. Constantin Brancusi sculpture granted mainly mechanical imitation of nature, refused figurative representation of reality, expressing expected essence of things, the dynamic form, united with spiritual sensitive.

In his work, Brancusi's way of thinking reflected the world of the peasants. With its peasant origin, his work has deep roots in the traditions, myths and magic function of Romanian folk art. Brancusi is, undoubtedly, with such an awareness of modern art, which focuses evolutionary meaning of an entire era of the creative spirit. Representative of modern artistic movement, Constantin Brancusi is considered by many to be the important sculptor of the twentieth century. His sculptures are distinguished by elegance of form and sensitive use of materials, combining Romanian folk simplicity with Parisian avant-garde sophistication.

Brancusi gave our world consciousness pure form, provided the transition from figurative representation of reality, the essence of things and expressing renewed revolutionary plastic language, adding a spiritual dimension. Verticality, horizontality, weight, density and importance given to light and space are characteristic

features of Brancusi's creation. Studies on the work of Brancusi share, without exception, a conclusion made in unequivocal terms: art brancusiana is a source of essential ideas which builds visual civilization of the twentieth century. Brancusi highlighted the western world the sacred dimension of reality. From 1963 to today, all over the world have appeared in over 50 books and monographs and thousands of articles and studies on Constantin Brancusi, causing a decisive place of the brilliant artist and even as "one of the greatest composers of all time" (Jean Cassou).

However, the needs and opportunities are explained. The purpose of this activity center is to provide tourist information about the work, image and all related services composing the tourism product "Brancusi", both to tourists and to economic entities and individuals who provide tourism services. It will also provide support and technical assistance to those who intend to start business in cultural tourism. The center will be also in charge for the publication of promotional materials and their distribution, intense promotion activities (application of an aggressive marketing) and strategic planning of marketing policies covering the tourism product "Brancusi". Based on market surveys, its argumentation and identification of target markets, it is aimed at inducing the design of new cultural tourism products with Brancusi themes satisfying these markets. The web page of the center ([www.e-probrancusi.ro](http://www.e-probrancusi.ro)) is an online travel guide that is mentioned in the most complex web portal in Romania - [www.infotravelromania.ro](http://www.infotravelromania.ro). The tourism information and promotion Center "Pro Brancusi" offers promotion and information materials, tourist services and program packages, information about accommodation and food services and information about natural, cultural and historical sites.

The center provides tourists with a computerized database where they can find any information about the tourist area of Gorj, information by Internet and e-mail for holiday planning and bookings for travel services, tourist information about Romania. In addition, we should note that the tourism information and promotion Center "Pro Brancusi" offers tourism related services such as information, training, consultation and promotion. This is intended to determine the cooperation of the tourist information points and



accommodation centers created in some tourist areas of the county of Gorj such as: Tg. Jiu, Motru, Novaci, Targu Carbunesti.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

For conclusion, any tourist who intends to make a trip to Gorj may obtain information and make reservations using the services of this center, located in Tg-Jiu and offices in the major tourist destinations of Gorj. The cooperation with other tourist information centers on cultural issues in Romania is beneficial for promoting the development of circuits linking neighboring tourist areas (e.g., a circuit in northern Oltenia, including Valcea, Gorj and Mehedinti in the itinerary).

It should and will provide visitors with information and promotional materials in particular cultural (guides, brochures, leaflets, booklets, maps, video tapes, CDs) on the tourist attractions (natural, cultural sights etc.), possible circuits and possibilities for accommodation, meals, transportation, recreation, therapy in the county of Gorj and the neighboring ones. These promotional materials must be diversified, with a special graphic, artistic and information quality and they must be provided free of charge.

The creation of such a center aims to promote tourism in the area through activities assisting and informing tourists about the places where Brancusi was born, lived and worked. Hence all travelers must be provided with useful information.

With a high influx of tourists, an ideal place should be visible and accessible. Regardless of the location, the center should include tourist guides, promoted by all tourism operators, and equipped with proper signage from the city entry gates, railway station, bus stations respectively for long distance and county trips.

Similarly, the information on the existence of this center, maps of Gorj and the data are to be published in international guides or in pages that have already published chapters about Romania. This center also needs the establishment of an electronic street tourist information point based on a tourism promotion software

application. The pilot information point must be located in a place with maximum transit (Brancusi axis - the place where the influx of tourists is at the most). The point will provide information necessary for any tourist planning to visit the county of Gorj, in an original and simple presentation with a maximum impact concentrating all the necessary information to tourists.

The tourist information point could possibly be integrated to the planned center. It should be provided with a large monitor in a protected window and connected to a powerful computer. This monitor will run non-stop a presentation software application, which will group: the presentation of the main sights, roads and means of access, the possibilities for accommodation, food, complementary services, the tourist information points already existing in the rural area, train and plane schedule, information on exchange rates, useful addresses (hospital, police, travel agencies, currency exchange offices, etc.). This system will be placed in a clearly visible area and work round the clock.

The application must be spectacular (it will attract tourists), bilingual (Romanian and English) and will present the most important data (access roads, accommodation offers, food, etc.), in a simple manner, easy to remember. It will be designed in a modern manner (animation, special effects, sound), lasting about 15-20 minutes so as not to let tourists get bored.

This application will also run on the Internet and CD-ROM. The multimedia presentation will include sites that will provide detailed information on the major tourist attractions. The tourist information will be structured based on a geographical classification; the user may opt for a selection "by objective". The CD-ROM promoting tourism in Gorj may contain this multimedia application and the other sites of tourism presentation of the county of Gorj, providing full information about any point of tourist interest.

Another proposal on promoting tourism in Gorj consists in placing tourist information points (info-desks indicated by a sign with the already known international "I") in the accommodation units. Here tourists can find information on the area attractions, the

calendar of cultural events (festivals, craft fairs, folk customs, destinations, accommodation, meals, recreation, therapy, museums, cultural centers, etc. Specific products, local or regional, will be also displayed here, such as folk art products, pottery, folk masks, wooden spoons and other handicrafts, that are marketable as well. The role is instructional, for education and cultural and aesthetic training.

In order to facilitate Gorj visitors' information on the locations of tourist attractions we believe it is essential to create a network of tourism signaling. In this respect there must be defined:

- the information to be provided (maps, view of sight locations and accommodation structures, addresses for direct contact with them, etc.) and the languages in which they will be provided;
- the levels of information (entrance in the territory, proximity to the areas mentioned);
- exact locations of the tourist information points;
- aesthetic of signs, graphic standards and materials used;
- organization of the implementation and maintenance of these signs.

We believe that one of the most effective ways of promotion is to invite representatives of tour operators and travel agencies to come to Gorj and find themselves the features of this tourism product and eventually decide whether to accept it or not. Although this type of action is relatively expensive, experience has proven that foreign travel agents' documenting in the resorts and accommodation units is the best way to promote their services.

Performing cultural info-tours in Gorj with tourism journalists is a promotional action that could be undertaken by the Association for Tourism "Brancusi" which will be very successful, considering the articles published after the information visits, in the German and U.S media.

Given the fierce competition on the international tourism market, we believe it is necessary to participate with one's own stand in as many international fairs and exhibitions, both in the national

pavilions and shops specializing in tourism issues, where the tourism product “Brancusi” must have an aggressive promotion.

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