

Please cite this paper as:

Arsene, Octavian (2008), "*Oltenia Project*", Case study submitted to the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs and Local Development by the Ministry for SMEs, Trade, Tourism and Liberal Professions, Bucharest, Romania.



The Impact of Culture on Tourism

CASE STUDY OF ROMANIA

**Ministry for SMEs, Trade, Tourism and
Liberal Professions**

Oltenia Project, Romania

Oltenia is one of the richest historical regions in Romania from the tangible and intangible cultural heritage, religious and laic (civil or fortified) point of view. A large part of region monuments are famous not only in Romania but also abroad. The main attraction is Horezu Monastery which is included on the list of UNESCO world heritage, together with more than 500 religious monuments covering more than 500 years of history.

Another point of attraction are the so-called “cule” a mixture of civil and military buildings, unique for Romanian territory, and quite few in the Balkans. In same time the region is also known as being the birth place of the world-known sculptor Constantin Brancusi. Despite this heritage, the region is very little promoted and the tourist traffic is quite low.

Starting from these aspects but also willing to develop the competitiveness of the region on national and international level, the stakeholders in the regions joined their efforts in order to achieve more efficient destination marketing. First of all, they created a regional promotion association who developed international partnerships with other renowned destinations for their tourism potential but also for the tourism weight in their local economies.

The efforts have started three years ago, and the main result is the common way for the private and public sector but also for all types of tourism organisations. Two years after the creation of the regional association, the project continued with the development of new local tourism associations but also of tourism information centres. The goal was to obtain two positive results:

- the involvement of all important decision factors in the development of tourism;
- increasing the quality of tourism services;

In same time, during regional or local meetings, the main action directions for the association members were established:

- performing different studies regarding the tourism potential of the region and a plan of action for promoting it;
- achieving an efficient destination marketing;
- drawing up a working plan regarding the professional training in the tourism field.

Region's identification chart

Geographical position. Oltenia, one of the oldest Romanian historical provinces, is situated in south west Romania, of 29.212 square km, represents 12.3%of the country's territory. The region consists of 5 counties – Valcea, Gorj, Mehedinti, Dolj and Olt – which are inhabited by approximately 11% of the country's total population, with an average density of about 82 people / square km. The region has as an advantage the fact that its southern border is the Danube river, second longest in Europe, on a distance of 417 km, and also includes a considerable part of the vest part of the Carpathians, towards the northern and western side. The region's position, geographically and politically, generates opportunities for its social and economic development, and gives it strategic importance at national level.

Economy of the region. Economic activities are very diverse in the region, diversity given by the variety of local resources, mostly: industrially – energetically, primary goods manufacturing, machinery, chemistry, mining, agriculture – crops and technical plants, craftsmanship, building, trade, tourism.

Cultural resources. The region of Oltenia can be considered one of the most complex areas of Romania as far as its tourism potential is concerned. As far as localizing the tourism resources, two areas are of big tourism potential concentration: are area of the Oltenia's lower mountain region, the area of Danube, which has on the territory of Romania, and of the region, one of the most spectacular ravine in Europe.

But, Oltenia has entered the conscious of Romanians, and of Europeans, as an exceptionally cultural area. Most important elements of cultural material and immaterial patrimony are:

- Hurez monastery is the vastest medieval architectural ensemble in southern Romania, monument included on the UNESCO world patrimony, a monastery built by rucs Constantin Brancoveanu in 1694. The monastery is built in a unique style, called the brancovenesc style.
- The works of the renowned sculptor Constantin Brancusi – the gate of kiss, the table of silence, the column of infinity – on display in the central park of the town of Targu Jiu, are declared monuments of national interests by a special decision of Romania's government, and are also included on the list of European monuments of exceptional value. Close to the town is also the house of the artist, in Hobita.
- The center for ceramic craftsmanship of Horezu – considered by specialists as most valuable enameled ceramics in Romania; this crafts dates back to at least the times Constantin Brancoveanu – 17th century – which set up the ceramics shed next to the monastery.
- The fair of ceramic craftsmanship, an event that will soon be 40 years old, is annually organized in the capital of ceramic craftsmanship, at Horezu, and attracts great number of tourists, more and more coming from abroad.
- Cultural events connected to shepherd's life and activities – connected to getting up and down the sheep from the mountain in spring and autumn, in the shepherd's villages, in the north of the region.
- The festival of the lilac, organized each May, where parades of rural port and songs are held.
- Religious pilgrimage trails, which connect several monasteries from Oltenia's lower mountain region (Cozia, Hurez, Tismana) – all monuments of exceptional cultural, historical and architectural value

Main issues identified and measures taken

By the analyses done several issues have been identified as problematic, starting with the region's infrastructure and lack of sufficient funding for its modernizations, and up to the quality of service in the tourism industry, and the training of personal for and from the tourism sector.

Intentionally, and also in accordance with local decision makers, we did not analyze aspects concerning infrastructure and lack of funding, accentuating the concept of "European village", concept that does not refer to the financial value of a community, but to the value of its attitude toward its patrimony.

Starting with these considerations, the following are the main problems:

- Lack of regional identity, of an area's brand, in spite of its rich cultural material and immaterial patrimony. Oltenia is suffering 1st because it does not have an image that one can identify the region with. Basically, there are many images – churches or monasteries of the region, fortified civil constructions, etc – that cannot constitute the brand of the region. We have already accomplished international training and awareness raising programs about the importance of the cultural patrimony of the region. General training seminar were done together with the governments of Italy and Netherlands in which tourism and culture specialists were included, but also programs for developing special programs specific for cultural tourism.
- Disequilibrium among the existing tourism areas in the regions, as far as their tourism potential goes. There are two important tourism areas in the region – one in the north, dominating culturally, one in the south, dominating because of its natural potential. Between these – almost nothing. Despite all these, in the area between these two regions, there are several monuments, renowned through oldness and historical and architectural values, but are unpromoted. Starting with this issue, we have already printed promotional materials for all of the region, outlining the rich areas as far as cultural patrimony is concerned, but also “islands” of the region in order to create complementing tourism products.
- Informational system. The region does not have tourism information centers. Excepting the county of Valcea, where attention is given to this issues, but which means that beside money and time, for setting it up, in no other area are there any info centers.
- Promotion of the region is relatively reduced as far as the promotional mix is concerned. Accent is put on advertising (mainly brochures and leaflets, Internet) and promotion of sales (participating at fairs and exhibitions) without using any other instruments. Because of this reason the region has been supported directly by insuring free participation of the promotion ngo-s at the national tourism fares. In the same time, regional fares have been promoted at national level too. Printing of promotional materials has been co-financed for some important areas as far as cultural tourism is concerned. Documentation trips for Romanian and foreign journalists have been organized for introducing cultural patrimony. Special promotion campaigns for international events were done.
- Lack of public-public and public-private partnerships and of international partnerships for development of the region. Through the efforts done we have managed to give funds for developing some forms of tourism in the region, with implication in rising tourist flow and number of visitors at cultural tourism sites.

Arguments that support government intervention

From a tourism point of view, the main arguments regarding a more profound involvement at governmental level in the region were:

- In spite of an exceptional natural and cultural patrimony, Oltenia is last in Romania, as far as tourist activities go. Frankly, in 2006, in Oltenia there were 371.000 arrivals and 1.641.000 overnights. The gap between Oltenia and the next region (vest) is of over 230.000. As far as overnights go, Oltenia is second last, as the north east region has only 1.599.000 overnights – there are 8 regions of development in Romania. Because of its reduced housing capacity, their use is the highest of all Romania. But, again, it is because the housing capacity is the smallest.

- Tourism income, directly influenced by the number of visitors in the region, was smaller and smaller, from 1990 on. Because of this, Oltenia was last as far as tourism income goes.
- Issues regarding socio-economic development of the region – after 1990, due to the restructuring of the national economy, several mono-industrial areas in Oltenia had suffered, the main result being the growth of unemployment. Given this, tourism can become an opportunity for a part of the inhabitants of the region.
- Last but not least, we have to remember one of EU's objectives of cohesion policy in the region for 2007-2013, namely, regional competitiveness and employment.

Beyond these general aspects, some particular ones must be noted:

- Through the major intervention field 5.3 "promoting tourism potential and creating the necessary infrastructure for raising Romania's attractiveness as a tourism destination", in "the documents of strategic and financial programming for accessing European funding and the sectorial operational programs through which tourism activities can be financed", the main objective is "promoting Romanian tourist potential through bettering the country's image, with the aim of promoting Romania abroad and raising attractiveness for tourism and business". The main operation of this field is creating a positive image of Romania as a tourist destination, by defining and promoting the national tourism brand. Or, it is obvious that a national brand can be created starting from the regional ones, which shows the importance of having a brand, an image of Oltenia.
- Starting with one of the main objectives of the European policy, mainly regional competitiveness and employment, in the case of the Regional Operational Program, axes Sustainable development and tourism promotion, there are three main intervention areas, two of which refer to cultural patrimony and tourism infrastructure. The two areas will allow reaching the set objectives (raising the importance of tourism and culture, eliminating powerful seasonality in some areas, growing the number of tourists). It must be underlined that these objectives can be met also by restoration, protection and conservation of the national cultural patrimony and modernization of the connected infrastructure in order to be introduced in touristic circulation. It is very important to state that this kind of patrimony includes almost all monuments from the two tourist areas of Oltenia. In the same time, it allows high level conservation and evaluation of immaterial cultural patrimony, mostly because in this area we have the Calușarul, traditional folk dance, introduced on UNESCO's world patrimony.
- Given Romania's cultural and natural patrimony together with the lack of tourism information, a list of tourism information centers have been put together, at national level, which includes the most important regional destinations in our country and, in the same time, to be set up in high traffic areas (intersection of national /European roads). That list is part of the major intervention field „Promoting tourism potential and creating the necessary infrastructure for raising Romania's attractiveness as a tourism destination”. The goal, at national level, of this operation is raising tourism circulation. One of the cities in the program is Ramnicu Valcea, the capital City of Valcea County, from the region of Oltenia. Set at the crossing of two big axes, north – south and east-west, the county and the city are regional leaders as far as tourist circulation, tourism income and housing capacity goes. In the mean time, local public authorities have been supported in training the necessary personnel for the tourism info centers at local level, by the tourism governmental structure.
- Although the tourism potential of the area is high, the number of tourism specialists is reduced and so, in many situations, we cannot talk of a proper marketing and promotion. Because of this, after talks at the regional level, we have decided that it

will be useful to focus our efforts in two main directions: training of specialists in collaboration with teaching institutions of the area, and direct support for the associations at regional or local level, by participating at tourism expositions, country visits by Romanian and foreign journalists, printing promotional materials, using a big and varied number of the promotional mix.

- One of the main problems observed in the region is the lack of partnerships at different levels. Because of this it was thought to be necessary the involvement at governmental level in setting up public-public partnerships (local and central public authority), in order to develop local tourist destinations. In this regard, in the last two years, the central tourism authority has directly supported, with funding, the making of feasibility studies in the region, following that the projects of which the studies will be done, to be financed / co-financed from governmental funding. It must be said that this kind of partnership has positively influenced the creation of public-public partnerships in the area.

Starting with points 2 and 3, presenting the main problems in the region and a short argument in favor of the involvement of (local and central) public authority, and following local level discussions, it has been commonly agreed that the main program to be developed locally is the creation of an efficient marketing policy for cultural tourism at regional level. The goal of this policy is establishing a nationally and internationally recognized regional identity.

Name of the program

Efficient marketing policy for cultural tourism

Characteristics of the program

a) Defining the problem

As the necessity of an efficient marketing policy for cultural tourism in the region has been established as the main issue, it has been commonly agreed by local and central public authorities, specialists, and civil society representatives, that a marketing research is needed in order to establish both potential and already established target tourism markets of the afore presented destination.

b) Marketing plan phases for a tourist location

Starting from this goal, it has been commonly agreed by regional representatives and specialists in the field, that there are three main steps: evaluation of existing markets (regional target markets), analyzing the tourist destination from a tourism marketing perspective (efficient promotional mix instruments for the discussed region), and establishing strategic goals (tourist volume, earnings from tourism activities).

c) Target location

Taking into account the vastness of the presented region and the diversity of its cultural patrimony, a target location has been established in order to facilitate the observation of potential problems in the marketing planning process. By combining elements of location analysis (see 4.2.b) and region audit (both external – competition, political, economical, social and technical (PEST) analysis, and internal – available resources, ongoing tourism activities, and so on), it has been established that the program would start in a region called “Oltenia de sub munte”. One of the arguments for choosing this region is that it covers three of the five counties in Oltenia, well-known for the rich material and non-material, as well as secular and religious cultural patrimony.

d) Target group

Market research at regional level on existing consumers established the following targets:

- Persons with above average level of education;
- Persons with above average financial capability;
- Targeted age: 40-65 years;
- A large share, but not a dominant one, being families with children;
- People who can afford longer vacancies than the average for the region (approximately two days), but lower than spa tourism (some 7.5 days);
- From the cultural tourism perspective, two main target groups have been identified: monomaniacs (those interested only in religious tourism), and bulimics (those generally interested in cultural aspects).
- With regards to the country of origin, the target group is comprised of visitors from Romania, since they represent about 93 percent of total tourists in Oltenia and about 95 percent of total over-night stays in the region.

e) Financing

In order to implement the program, public financial sources (both local and central) have been used, and there was also private financing (owners of accommodation structures in micro destinations with a cultural profile have been especially involved in the program). Furthermore, some of the funds allocated to the region are of European origin, and they were accessed by both local public authorities and the private sector.

The following promotional mix instruments have received financing, strictly for cultural tourism: *i*) advertising; *ii*) sales promotion; and *iii*) public relations.

f) How does the program work?

The program has been initiated some two and a half years ago. The main problem was the lack of communication at local and regional level. In time, this deficiency was overcome by creating an association to represent the interests of all the actors involved in tourism activities in “*Oltenia de sub munte*”. Furthermore, the existence of this association, which includes public authorities, the private sector, and local associations of tourism, allowed the establishment of a “Board of Directors” that decides, through simple majority, over all necessary measures for promoting cultural tourism in the region and regularly informs the members of the association. It should be emphasized that, in the meantime, local craftsmen (especially potters) were included in the association.

Sometimes the association was also able to function as a tourism development administration, making decisions at region level.

g) Specific measures that have been put in place

In order to increase the association’s involvement in the region’s tourism development and to transform it into an organization for destination management, in 2007 a special program for training the varied actors in the region was started, especially in relation to marketing issues. In 2008, the training will include destination management elements. Furthermore, in 2008, the region was included in the international project under the patronage of the European Commission, European Destinations of Excellence.

Moreover, there have been discussions at central authority level for the development of:

- the region’s general infrastructure (transportation network, public utilities)
- specific infrastructure (facilities for tourist destination development, tourist information centers)

The services offered by the association focused on two aspects in order to emphasize the potential for cultural tourism in the region: at the destination level, consultancy was

provided in cooperation with specialists in the field in order to develop several local tourism projects; as far as visitors of the region are concerned, the association has concentrated on two components: information and spare time activities.

h) Promoting cultural resources

The main instruments of the promotional mix that have been used are as follows:

- **Publicity:** advertisements were printed and broadcasted at regional and national level, as well as international; two web sites were built (www.olteniadesubmunte.ro and www.eco-oltenia.ro), and brochures, flyers and posters for micro-destinations in the region were printed; a system of advertising panels was constructed, especially for the most renowned monuments in the region, and audio-video materials were created to present religious monuments and the art of sculptor Constantin Brâncuși.
- **Sales promotion:** participation to national tourism fairs, documentation visits for the media, contests, lotteries, gifts and discounts for out of season cultural micro-destinations.
- **Public relations:** seminars about the region, cultural tourism forms that can be practiced in the region depending on the types of monuments (classified/rated buildings and sites, museums, memorial sites);

Important aspects of the region's cultural resources must be emphasized:

- The creation of certain tourist products can be observed, products that combine tourist destinations, tourism forms and different resources (for example, cultural tourism is combined with religious, active tourism, or eco-tourism is harmoniously mixed with cultural tourism, especially the non-material patrimony).
- A series of cultural events (traditional holydays) have been transformed in a credible tourist offer of the region allowing the development of important tourist flow for stable periods.

Institutions. Agencies in charge of implementation

a) Institutions

The main institutions involved in the project were the central public authorities, through institutions specialized in tourism, culture and religion, as well as the environment, local public authorities at the level of the county, city, and village, tourism associations at national, regional and local level, the private sector, both individually and as part of varied associations, the Agency for Regional Development, tourism specialists.

b) Responsibilities

The responsibilities of each aforementioned group were mainly related to legislative capacities, namely to the statute of each structure. It must be emphasized that, at the central level, the focus was on regional policies that would be a part of national policies (tourism development strategies, natural and national parks).

At region level, associations and partnerships were formed in order to attract tourism investments, pre-accession funds were used and projects for structural instruments were prepared. Furthermore, partnerships were formed for financial support and participation to cultural actions, social and educational activities. Attempts were made to correlate projects for the development of regional level tourism in order to make a complete tourism offer. At the local level, the focus was mainly on the promotional mix.

Lessons learned and evaluation

- a) The program was evaluated annually, in cooperation with local authorities and representatives of regional tourism and associations.

b) The main criteria were as follows:

- number of members in the tourism associations in the region; there can be seen a year-on-year growth of this number, although not a spectacular one;
- the number of accommodation structures in the area; in the last two years, the numbers of such structures have doubled;
- the increase of the general visitors' flow in the region (some 10 percent) and of the micro-destination flow (for example, in Horezu there was a 17 percent increase of tourists, in the last three years);
- the destination appearance in internet searches: Google registered 117.000 searches in the last two years;
- the growth of traditional craftsmen (potters) from just a handful of people to over 70 in 2007;
- the creation of new tourism associations in the last two years, at micro-destination level or social categories (potters associations, traditional craftspeople associations).

The main lesson to be learned in the "Oltenia de sub munte" region was that of communication and the setting in place of regional private-public partnerships for tourism development. The model created for this region is starting to become an example owing to the fact that other two micro-destinations in the region of Oltenia are starting similar projects (the counties Gorj and Mehedinți). Thus, Drobeta Turnu Severin, capital city of Mehedinți county, created a public-private partnership for cooperation in the field of tourism development and in 2007 the first euro-regional tourism fairs was organized. In Gorj county, the partnership focuses on combining active and cultural tourism, especially in relation to Constantin Brâncuși's works.

The main success factor of the project was changing the attitude of actors in the tourism sector. Thus, there was a shift from individual projects, without communication between beneficiaries, to common projects for promoting tourist destinations in the region. Such projects allowed know how exchange at the individual, micro-destination and association level, eliminating a series of communication-determined errors in tourism development.

Putting such projects into practice has led to greater visibility for the region in general, as well as a better promotion of material and non-material cultural patrimony and has brought: *i*) the increase of visitor numbers in the region; and *ii*) the increase of tourism, hotels and restaurants share in the region's economy.

Previous paragraphs mentioned the communication lesson and the change in actors' attitude as a factor for success. It must be emphasized that such elements, without a proper marketing plan would not have generated success for such a project. Thus, the main recommendation is a planned development of tourism, in order to allow the working of all resources a destination offers.