

# The Place of the Public Administration and Gastronomic Heritage in the Destination Branding and Tourism Promotion

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*Abstract:* Romania’s tourism has already known many attempts of promoting its potential and even of discovering, elaborating and communicating a tourist destination brand. We believe that this industry, which seems to be affected by the lack of international competitiveness, still has many opportunities to benefit of. For the present research, we have taken into consideration to discuss the relationships that may be established between the local public administration, specialized restaurants and branded tourist destinations. In this respect, we have built a case study aiming at revealing the way in which public administrations, respectively public alimentation facilities contribute to the development of Romania’s tourist industry. We have assumed that the websites of the city-halls from county residencies and those of specialized restaurants are equally important (yet inefficiently used) message carriers for the tourist offers of destinations that host them. Our analysis includes a number of 42 city-halls and of 169 Romanian restaurants that are authorized by both the former Ministry of Tourism and today’s Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism to provide a specialized gastronomic offer. We have tried to identify the answers to several questions: Are city-hall websites proper promotion tools of local tourism? Do city-hall websites promote local gastronomy? Is Romania’s cultural heritage promoted by the websites for specialized restaurants? Do restaurants focus on attracting foreign visitors? Does Transylvania enjoy a better promotion of its tourist potential through the local restaurants’ websites than the rest of the country? The findings of our paper rely on thorough analyses of the websites of the identified city-halls and specialized restaurants.

*Key-Words:* Romania, Specialized restaurants, Public administration, Websites, (Gastronomic) tourism promotion

## 1 Introduction

“Romania has almost all the features to be one of the preferred tourist destinations: it is blessed with a beautiful landscape, it can offer different types of tourism (mountain tourism, heritage and cultural tourism, rural tourism, spa tourism, geotourism, MICE tourism – meeting, incentives, conferences and exhibitions – seaside tourism) and it has a diversified supply and lodging capacities. [2]

Despite this fact, throughout the past twenty years Romania’s tourism has continuously struggled to discover and define its identity, to establish and communicate a coherent brand image, and, of

course, to increase its tourist activity. Today, more than ever before, struck by the global economic crisis, Romania once again tries to cover its negative trade balance. Everyone admits the fact that a considerable source for the country’s economic recovery lies in a more appropriate management of its tourist demand and offer; regrettably, Romanian tourism has had and continues to have a very poor contribution to the country’s GDP; for example, a comparison with Bulgaria reveals the following figures:

- in 2004 Romanian tourism contributed to the national GDP with 1.5 %, while

- Bulgaria registered a contribution of 5 % [4];
- in 2008 Romanian GDP received around 3.5 %, compared to Bulgaria, where services had a higher impact upon the country's GDP, of about 5 % [12];
  - in 2009 Romanian tourism was reflected in the GDP with a contribution of around 5.1 %, while Bulgaria reached 11.9 % [13];
  - in 2012 or the latest by 2015, according to the Minister of Tourism, this industry could be expected to reach a contribution of 10 % in the GDP, but, like many others, we dare express our doubts [7].

In this respect, there are several aspects that need to be taken into consideration. There are two key issues that definitely affect the development of our country's tourist industry:

- a proper support infrastructure (access infrastructure: highways, roads, railroads and airports; accommodation facilities; and leisure and entertainment facilities);
- a positive image that is properly communicated both abroad and within the national borders (Romania lacks a positive image as a country and as a tourist destination, too; neither foreign, nor Romanian tourists are attracted by our country's tourist offer; everyone tends to admit that Romania possesses a great tourist heritage but, at the same time, it lacks quality services).

The last days of July 2010 have once again brought into light the issue of Romania's tourist brand. Unfortunately, as before, controversies and criticism were the main reactions after the official launching of Romania's newly created logo and brand identity concept at the World Exhibition from Shanghai, China. Critics mainly argue against the fact that, in the deep economic crisis faced by Romania, authorities spend huge amounts of money on brand identity elements that are highly suspected of plagiarism and contested from the point of view of their representativeness [17]. Thus, once again, instead of improving the country's tourist image, central authorities manage to put another stain on an already poor image of Romania.

Still, it is impossible not to understand the importance and need of a good image promoted abroad for our tourist destinations. A generous tourist potential, such as that one enjoyed by

Romania, must be promoted and properly exploited. It has, indeed, the capacity to contribute to the economic recovery of Romania (offering both workplaces and an important contribution to the national budget).

More than ever, nation branding and region branding processes become compulsory strategic activities for Romanian governors and also for the administrative and leading staff. Why branding of its regions? Simply: because destination brands are, in our globalized world, key tools and necessary instruments when it comes to creating distinctive images and competitive advantages. Everybody acknowledges the reality that countries, regions, cities and small localities compete against each other for very many reasons, such as:

- attracting foreign investors;
- attracting financial resources;
- attaining existing investors;
- attracting tourists;
- maintaining their existing tourists, etc.

To all these, we dare add another element, that does not yet seem to be noticed by authorities, that one of limiting the brain drainage increasing phenomenon.

Romania faces an important problem when it comes to the financial impact of its tourism upon the economy; this is tax evasion. In this respect, perhaps authorities must understand that a lower taxation level for tourist activities can be expected on one hand to stimulate the legalization of more business activities (that nowadays function underground) and, on the other hand, to stimulate tourism consumption; moreover, high taxes determine illicit practices and contribute to the continuous decline of tourism demand. The tourist offer must also be shaped according to the requirements of the customer. Today, it has become clear that the classic form of tourism which "is known as a series of leisure time or sporting activities, involving visiting picturesque sights or scientifically, historically, geographically etc. relevant ones" [11] has changed. Thus, the idea of promoting a new kind of tourism [gastrotourism] can be put forward based on the spiritual and gastronomic potential and on the cultural traditions of Romania.

Next to (tourist) destination branding, the development of infrastructure must be a major concern of the country's officials; tourism cannot develop unless it benefits from an appropriate support-infrastructure; here we refer to the infrastructure connected to: access; lodging and alimentation; leisure and amusement; cultural activities; health and wellness; shopping;

preservation and development of the historic and archaeological sites, etc. In the context of the economic crisis and of Romania's weak economy, authorities ought to be more determined to access and spend European financial resources. An analysis concerning projects implemented for tourism development financed from European resources illustrates a weak involvement of local, regional and even national authorities in elaborating projects in order to gain European financial support. More than three years after Romania's integration into the European Union, the absorption of EU financial resources is rather dissatisfactory:

- according to the Governmental officials [14], until the end of June 2010, Romania has managed to absorb only 10.17 % of the financial allocations for 2007-2010 (from 18.177 applications of 38.98 billion Euro, there were approved 4,421 projects of 9.4 billion Euro, whereof there were financed 3,146 projects, meaning 6.06 billion Euro, from which there were paid until now 882 million Euro);
- according to the officials from the Ministry of Tourism and Regional Development, by the end of April 2010, Romania has only managed to attract 16.66 % of the available funds, while at the end of May 2010 *Regio* – the Regional Operation Program reached an absorption rate of 18.36 % [15];
- another ministry closely linked to tourism, the Ministry for Agriculture and Rural Development, reports the highest absorption rate of EU funds: over 40 % [18];
- regarding the absorption rates for PHARE and SAPARD (closed at the end of 2009), both programs enjoy very high rates, of around 90 % of the available funds [10] and [25].

It is important to understand that, by means of European financial aid, Romania has a great chance to compensate the weaknesses of its tourist products, which are both underdeveloped and uncompetitive on the international market. Due to its tourist profile, closely linked to rural and agritourism, Romania must attract available funds for the development of this sector. In this respect, we consider it is necessary to present an updated situation concerning the projects that benefited from European financial support elaborated for tourism and rural tourism development, tourist infrastructure

development or for other types of activities related to tourism. Analyzed data refer to two of Romania's regions of development: North-West and Center (see below Figure 3), but the results can be considered as representative at national level. Thus, throughout the past eleven to twelve years, from 811 tourism-related projects that we have identified, only around 17 % were initiated by local or regional public administrations, while the rest belonged to private entrepreneurs (either small, medium or large enterprises, 71 %, of individual businesses and family associations, 12 %). Obviously, state officials' involvement is far from being satisfactory; perhaps the economic crisis shall determine them to show a stronger interest towards accessing European financial resources for the development of their tourist destinations. [21], [22] and [23]

Regarding the general development of Romania's tourist activity, we may reveal the current situation: foreigners visit our country in a rather low number, while Romanians tend to travel oftener abroad. Having a tourist and hospitality industry which still confronts a generalized lack of quality combined with relatively high and unattractive prices, Romania must become aware of the fact that its valuable resources are more and more threatened to be forgotten and abandoned. An important part of our country's tourist heritage originates in rural areas, bio-agriculture, folklore, traditions and customs, local cuisine, spa and mountain destinations, Danube Delta, urban culture and civilization, etc., and less in the seaside and beach tourist products.

Despite the fact that Romania enjoys a varied and diversified tourist potential, its tourist offer is not competitive on the European market, mainly because of the:

- lack of quality;
- lack of infrastructure;
- poor promotion of tourism, both inside the country and also over the national borders.

Romania's economy is deeply affected by the global economic crisis and so is its tourist industry. The crisis' negative influences are still ascending:

- the living standard is decreasing at a very quick rate, while the country continues to indebt itself;
- unemployment increases;
- consumption decreases due to the recent increase of the VAT;
- investments are cut down; etc.

Tourism, despite its underdeveloped infrastructure, can still offer an important source of economic recovery, as it has the ability to create work-places, to attract expenditures, and to encourage consumption; moreover, tourism also contributes to the improvement of Romania's still negative trade balance, as it accounts for exports, too.

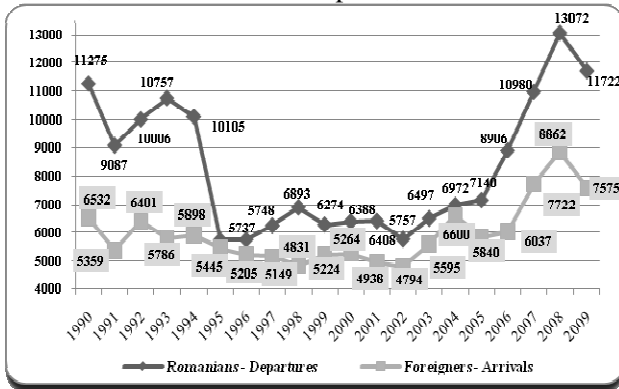


Fig. 1. Romania's International Tourism (expressed in Thousands of Persons) [26]

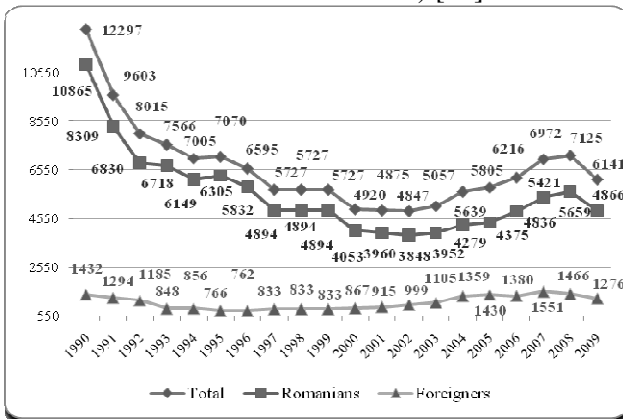


Fig. 2. Tourists Accommodated in Lodging Facilities (expressed in Thousands of Persons) [26]

A reflection of the way in which the crisis has affected Romania's tourism is presented in Figures 1 and 2, where we have illustrated, on one hand, the country's international tourist activity and, on the other hand, the evolution of the tourists' accommodation in lodging facilities. Both arrivals and overnights decreased in 2009 compared to 2008 (arrivals, by 13.8 % and overnights by 16.4 %). This trend continued in the first semester of 2010 compared to the same time-span of 2009, too; thus, overall arrivals decreased by 3 % and overnight stays decreased by 3.7 %; Romanian tourists are more affected than the foreign ones [27].

Compared to other destinations, Romania has the opportunity to turn into a competitive advantage the fact that its prices are relatively low; its maximization can become truly profitable for the country's tourist industry. Therefore, Romanian hospitality operators must acknowledge the situation

and must become aware of the manner in which they can benefit from this potential opportunity. Coming up with a straight-forward, sincere tourist offer, that admits its weaknesses but attracts through low prices, can be the winning solution. Products such as agritourism, cultural tourism and even spa and wellness, respectively medical tourism can all be provided with fair quality but at low prices.

In order to be able to create a competitive tourist product, hospitality providers must understand several aspects such as:

- where their customers come from;
- what are their needs;
- how much they are willing to spend;
- what they like;
- what they do not like;
- what they desire to receive, etc.

In a sentence, they must get to know their clients. McIntosh et al. suggest four categories of motivations for tourists:

- physical motivators;
- cultural motivators;
- interpersonal motivators;
- status and prestige motivators. [8]

The large majority of Romania's tourists and visitors is provided by European countries, mainly by the EU members but also by other European countries; traditionally, percentages are registered around the same figures as in 2009:

- Europe generates 95.1 % of Romania's foreign tourists;
- the Member States of the European Union account for 63.4 % of Romania's international tourism; from among the EU members, the most important providers of tourists are:
  - Hungary with 38.5 %;
  - Bulgaria with 18.3 %;
  - Germany with 9.2 %; and
  - Italy with 7.8 %. [28]

Two aspects do not seem to be taken into consideration when attempting to promote Romania's tourist potential: the multilingual communication skills of the people and its gastronomy. Besides for their native tongues (due to the multicultural environment of our country, here there being spoken: Romanian, Hungarian, in the case of the largest minority group, and German, for

a small but very important minority group), Romanians are fluent in English, French, Italian, Spanish and other foreign languages.

Based on previous experiences, we have assumed for the present research that Romanian hospitality providers have not yet understood the importance of communicating and promoting their services and tourist offers in foreign languages. Between 2004 and 2005, the Ministry of Tourism carried out several researches on the most significant tourist providers of Romania, with the purpose to identify their consumer profiles. The two tables given below (Table 1 and Table 2) synthesize a few of these findings. We have only selected those that we consider relevant for our current research [19]:

Table 1. Profiles of Romania’s Foreign Tourists

Country	Age (Years)	Income	Season
Austria	20-60	Average	60% Summer
China	25-55	Average / High	Golden Weeks
France	55-70	Average	Summer
Germany	25-35; 60+	...	Entire year
Italy	...	...	...
Holland	Seniors	High	Summer; winter
Russia	28-45	Average / High	...
Spain	25-60; 60+	...	Entire year
Sweden	...	...	...
UK	25-54; 55+	High	Summer; entire year
USA	25-60	Average / High	Summer; entire year

Table 2. Romania’s Foreign Tourists’ Profiles

Country	Fortified Churches	Tours	Nature	Mountains	Culture	Spas	Cities	Seaside	Danube Delta	Dracula
Austria			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
China		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
France		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Germany			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Italy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Holland		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Russia			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
Spain	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Sweden	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
UK	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
USA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Any serious branding project must begin by a thorough identification of the target markets; in this

stage, profile sketches are absolutely compulsory, as they provide valuable information when it comes to identifying the needs and wishes of a country’s main tourist providers. Regrettably, most of the entrepreneurs who act on the Romanian hospitality market do not seem to properly understand their customers or their needs. Moreover, we have sensed that they do not even know how to communicate with them and, when they promote their hospitality establishments, they do not do it properly. Sadly, this is continuously proven by the poor performances of Romania’s tourist industry.

Statistics have shown the fact that Romania’s tourist destinations are not anymore perceived as long-term vacation destinations. Foreigners are definitely not attracted by our seaside, winter and even spa resorts; this has also become an increasing trend in the attitudes of Romanian tourists, too. Most destinations constantly register average durations of stay (Figure 5) that correspond to:

- business tourism (a declining sector today from the point of view of the demand but, paradoxically, a still developing one from the perspective of the entrepreneurs who keep investing in up-scale lodging facilities and conference rooms, that both end up unused);
- cultural trips, and
- city-breaks.

For a better understanding of the development of Romania’s tourism and of its hospitality industry, we are going to briefly present the figures registered per regions of development. From an administrative point of view, Romania is divided into 41 counties, plus the capital city, Bucharest, that constitute eight regions of development. Figure 3 presents the administrative map of Romania:

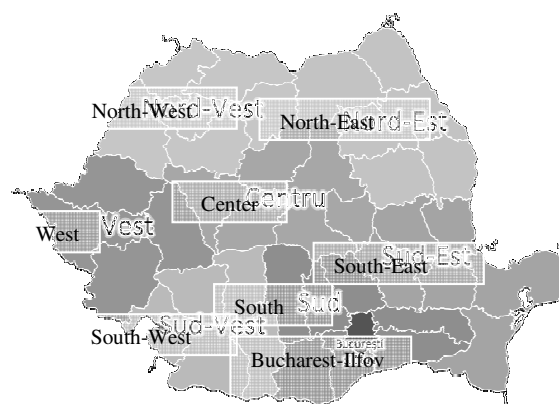


Fig. 3. Romania’s Administrative Map

- North-East concentrates the most representative religious destinations (for

example, the painted monasteries of Bucovina, that are included in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites); this region is also renowned for its cuisine and for its wine cellars (Cotnari, Huși and Iași);

- South-East consists of the Romanian seaside resorts and of the Danube Delta (another UNESCO World Heritage Site); the destination also enjoys both a generous gastronomic offer (especially fish dishes from the Danube Delta) and valuable wines (Nicorești, Vrancea, Panciu, Odobești, Sarica-Niculițel, Murfatlar, Colinele Tutovei, Istria-Babadag and Ostrov);
- South concentrates an important part of Romania’s mountain resorts (Prahova Valley); there are wines, too (Dealu Mare, Pietroasele and Prahova Valley);
- South-West is a relatively poor region and unattractive destination (except for the Horezu Monastery – UNESCO World Heritage Site, the renown architecture of the houses from Oltenia – “cule oltenești” – and some spa resorts) but it has some good wines (Dealurile Drâncei, Drăgășani and Sâmburești);
- West is a well-developed economic zone of Romania, that also concentrates important cultural tourism resources (such as the Dacian Fortresses – UNESCO World Heritage Sites) and valuable spa resorts (some of the oldest European spas, at Herculane, which were established by the Romans); it also has its own wines (Podgoriile Banatului, Recaș, Miniș and Teremia);
- North-West is another key economic development region of Romania, that also concentrates important leisure and natural destinations (in the Apuseni Mountains), spas (in the North-West), and cultural heritage sites (the wooden churches of Maramureș, also protected by UNESCO); it is well-known for its rich and flavored cuisine based on Romanian, Hungarian and German dishes; there are also some attractive wine cellars (Lechința and Sylvania);
- Center concentrates Romania’s most important mountain resorts, spas and cultural sites (the Saxon Fortified Churches and the fortress of Sighișoara, that are included in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, too); it is also well-known for its rich and flavored cuisine based on Romanian, Hungarian and German dishes; it concentrates some of Romania’s best wines (Jidvei, Târnave,

Ciurbrud, Aiud, Alba-Iulia, Sebeș and Secașe)

- Bucharest-Ilfov – the region that is established around Romania’s capital – is considered to be the country’s key economic and political center; it is also an important cultural destination. [24]

Analyzing both the profiles of Romania’s international visitors and the average duration spent by all of the country’s tourists in lodging facilities, by regions of development, there can be drawn several conclusions.

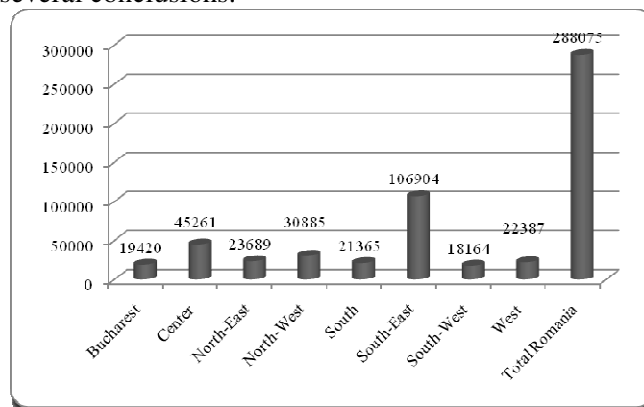


Fig. 4. Bed-Place Distribution in Lodgings, by Region of Development and at National Level [20]

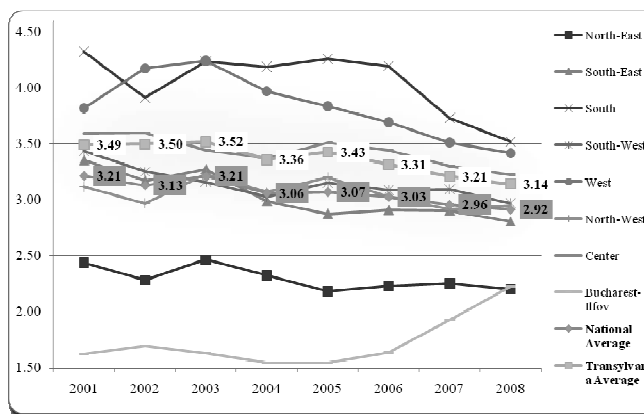


Fig. 5. Tourists’ Average Duration of Stay in Romania, by Region of Development, in Transylvania and at National Level [26]

The evolution of Romania’s tourism throughout the past eight to ten years indicates the fact that Romania has definitely turned into a short-stay destination. Average stay durations between 1.5 and less than 4.5 nights are clearly associated with tourism types that are characterized by short-term stays:

- transit tourism;
- business tourism;

- city-breaks;
- weekend breaks (seaside and mountain destinations), and
- cultural tourism.

In this case, the declining trend of the figures can be also explained by the economic crisis, combined with the underdeveloped tourist offer of the country. Facts and figures [28] concerning last year reveal a worrisome situation: a national occupancy rate of only 28.4 % (and still declining), which is definitely unable to provide any profits. Moreover it is absolutely clear that our country's offer of lodging facilities, does not respond to the needs of the tourists (both Romanian and foreign).

Obviously, foreign tourists represent a very important source of economic development. Still, Romanian tourists must not be neglected. Under the conditions of a general declining trend registered by the global tourist industry, with over 70 % of the Romanians spending their holidays at home [16], and many of the remainder travelling abroad, authorities have not yet managed to comprehend the importance of creating attractive tourist products for local clients.

Because our present paper deals with the way in which public administration institutions and restaurants contribute and can contribute to the promotion and development of tourism, further on we are going to discuss how, on one hand the city-halls of county residencies and, on the other hand, those restaurants that provide a specialized product contribute and can contribute to the improvement of Romania's tourist destination image.

## 2 Problem Formulation

Throughout this paper we attempt to find answers to the questions:

- *Are city-hall websites proper promotion tools of local tourism?*
- *Do city-hall websites promote local gastronomy?*
- *Is Romania's cultural tourism promoted by the websites of specialized restaurants?*
- *Do restaurants focus on attracting foreign visitors?*
- *Does Transylvania enjoy a better promotion of its tourist potential through the local restaurants' websites than the rest of the country?*

Until now we have not been able to identify any studies concerning the direct involvement of local

administration institutions in the (gastro) tourism promotion, although this should be done, as local and national officials authorize service providers, respectively set up development strategies for tourism as well. There are many reasons that determine the intervention of the public sector management in gastronomic and tourist activities (including (gastro) tourism promotion):

- the legal framework requires their involvement (any kind of business must receive from the local public administration all sorts of approvals for its functioning; for example, the city-hall approves the location, sets the timetable, can determine the business owner to furnish the facility according to certain restrictions, collects taxes, controls the activity, etc.);
- public administration institutions are responsible for controlling those factors that can damage the public interest, people, communities and culture, national resources and environment;
- local administrations can and must determine the manner in which the image of a destination develops; thus it can encourage or, on the contrary, discourage certain businesses, including restaurants (for example, a city that desires to be perceived as a cultural destination is expected to also have a strong specialized restaurants' sector);
- public institutions are responsible for attracting native and/or foreign investors; etc. [3]

For the present research, we have only intended to determine the measure in which local administration institutions contribute to the promotion of tourism, respectively to that of a gastronomic offer. In this respect, we have decided to analyze the websites of the city-halls from the 41 towns that are county residences and of Bucharest. Despite the fact that we have expected Romanian city-halls to be more involved in the life of the city and in the development of its tourist industry, the results obtained throughout our analysis indicate a different situation:

- of the 42 "most important" towns of Romania, two do not even have a website of their city-hall;
- around 90 % of the city-halls host a tourism-related section on their websites but only fewer indicate the main attractions (81 %) and mention the heritage sites (64 %) or the

surrounding areas (60 %), while only 48 % offer information about accommodation facilities; very few have gastronomic information (especially about the addresses of the restaurants: 29 % and bars: 21 %);

- despite the fact that Romania possesses many wines, only one city-hall refers to those ones that are in its area;
- communicating in foreign languages is essential when a city or town tries to attract foreigners (either as plain visitors or as business visitors and, eventually, as investors); local officials have not yet understood this fact (or perhaps they rely on “online translators” or “translator sites”, which we do not recommend at all.

Table 3. City-Halls’ Websites and Foreign Languages

Regions \ Languages	En.	Fr.	Ger.	Hu.	It.	Sp.	Other
North-East	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
South-East	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
South	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
South-West	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
West	2	0	1	2	0	0	1
North-West	5	2	2	2	0	0	0
Center	4	1	2	3	0	1	1
Bucharest-Ilfov	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total Romania</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>

Being present on the Internet and doing so in a single language (Romanian) is equivalent to not being online at all. Except for three Regions of Development (West, North-West and Center), where official websites have been translated in more than one or two foreign languages, the other websites practically address only to the Romanians. We must also point out the fact that the overall quality of the tourism-related information provided by them is rather poor: most of the websites are crowded with unattractive texts (not to mention that they are written mainly in Romanian). From the 42 towns, only 25 have at least one Tourist Information Center.

“Today’s experienced and educated traveler is constantly changing his behavior. The ability to recognize and deal with changing factors in the environment is the only way to survive on a competitive marketplace. Tourists are also more conscious and better informed in food consumption. There is a significant number of them who expect the food to be a source of pleasure or even a pleasant experience or travel adventure.” [6]

Thus, further on we are going to refer to the analysis regarding specialized restaurants; we need to state that there are very few figures concerning Romania’s gastronomic offer: only two incomplete official databases [19] offered by the Ministry of Tourism and by the present-day Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, which provide two different lists of authorized facilities for 2009. Staring by the two databases, we have reconstructed the list and we have established what Romania’s gastronomic offer consists of (Table 4):

Table 4. Public Alimentation Facilities by Main Types and by Regions of Development

Regions	TOTAL Rest.	Restaurants			Bars	Fast-Food	TOTAL
		Classic	Specia-lized	Other Types			
<b>Romania</b>	<b>2.831</b>	<b>2.196</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>1.618</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>4,898</b>
North-East	405	256	146	3	115	21	546
South East	666	505	67	94	492	141	1,315
South	272	227	41	4	129	15	420
South-West	227	187	33	7	49	6	288
West	281	268	9	4	128	23	437
North-West	386	308	67	11	399	101	897
Center	430	331	76	23	183	32	649
Bucharest	164	114	32	18	123	55	346

Gastronomy can be assimilated to a cultural tourism offer because of various reasons [9]; among these ones there are possibilities to discover:

- traditional dishes;
- specific cultural activities related to agriculture or other fields connected to food production;
- rural and urban cultural components of dishes;
- celebrations and feasts (Christmas Eve, New Year’s Eve, Easter lunches and dinners);
- special drinks (from strong authentic spirits to wine);
- experimenting local traditions in food production;
- food-related tales and stories;
- bio-products, etc.

For the present research, we have resumed to taking into consideration only “specialized” restaurants, thus our sample includes 169 facilities registered under this category; we have excluded the restaurants of the boarding houses because most of them do not use the Internet to provide their offer, and information concerning their activity is rather scarce. Moreover, most boarding houses do not register their restaurants due to practices related to



tax-evasion. Another fact that needs to be pointed out derives from the situation that we have discovered during our research: authorities lack seriousness; thus, they have “forgotten” or “lost” an important number of restaurants (many of them are renowned establishments). The structure of the investigated sample is presented below (Table 5):

Table 5. Investigated Sample

Wine Cellars	33
Local and Regional Food	44
National Cuisine	58
International Cuisine	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>169</b>

Surprisingly, according to the information provided by the governmental officials, 15 counties do not have any specialized restaurants; this is a rather peculiar situation, which confirms once again our lack of trust concerning official figures.

Regarding the analyzed restaurants, we may point out that 41 % do not have a website, while around 43 % are promoted by the websites of associated accommodation facilities; there are also a few cases in which restaurants promote themselves both independently and on associated websites:

Table 6. Websites of Restaurants

Webistes Regions	Restaurants	Own Website	Accommodation Unit Website
North-East	18	10	9
South-East	33	12	5
South	11	6	4
South-West	8	4	3
West	9	5	5
North-West	23	18	9
Center	43	24	23
Bucharest-Ilfov	24	20	14
<b>Total Romania</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>72</b>

Further on, we may notice that almost 50 % of the specialized restaurants promote themselves primarily for tourists, and less for locals (which is actually reasonable and perfectly acceptable, especially under the conditions of the economic crisis). Those restaurants that do not own a website usually advertise themselves on public tourism promotion sites and on websites that promote leisure and cultural activities (except for very few, under 5 cases, that could by no means be identified on the Internet). Being given their orientation towards tourists, it becomes obvious that the main target is offered by foreign tourists. Thus, we were interested

in finding out how many websites also contain promotion materials in foreign languages (Table 7):

Table 7. Restaurants’ Websites and Foreign Languages

Languages Regions	Ro.	En.	Fr.	Ger.	Hu.	It.	Sp.	Oth.
North-East	10	4	1	1	0	0	0	0
South-East	12	7	1	0	0	0	0	0
South	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
South-West	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
West	4	5	0	2	2	1	0	0
North-West	18	8	0	1	2	2	0	0
Center	24	17	5	4	1	1	1	0
Bucharest-Ilfov	18	10	1	1	0	1	1	5
<b>Total Romania</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>

Anyone may easily notice the fact that three of these restaurants do not have a Romanian website; in fact, they only have English websites (one in the Region of Development West and two in Bucharest); this makes sense, because these restaurants belong to hotels that are affiliated to international hotel chains. We were surprised to find out that only a relatively small number of the restaurant owners have translated their websites into what we consider to be the most important foreign languages from the point of view of our country’s tourist activity and tourism promotion (especially if we take into consideration the target markets as identified by the Ministry of Tourism and the countries that provide most of Romania’s visitors). Obviously, Romanian entrepreneurs have not yet understood that an important part of their customers is generated by the online promotion.

Table 8. Website-Pages of the Analyzed Restaurants

Pages Regions	Home	About Us	Location Contact	Menu	Photo Gallery	Clients’ Opinion	Tour. Prom.	Oth. (Av.)
North-East	10	9	10	4	10	8	7	3.8
South-East	12	12	12	10	10	5	2	4.3
South	6	5	6	4	5	2	2	1.3
South-West	4	4	4	1	3	3	3	1.8
West	5	5	5	1	5	2	1	4.6
North-West	18	16	18	12	16	5	2	3.3
Center	24	19	22	6	18	7	8	3.2
Buch.-Ilfov	19	16	19	15	16	4	5	3.3
<b>Total Romania</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>3.2</b>

Starting by the results from above, we may draw a few conclusions:

- the large majority of the analyzed restaurants have rather “primitive” websites; most of them have the classic 4-5 pages: *Homepage*,

*About Us, Location and/or Contact, and Photo Gallery;*

- very few care about their customers' opinions, or even less focus on advertising themselves based on the testimonials of their visitors (less than 10 of the restaurants have genuine *Guestbooks*, meaning under 6 %);
- regrettably, only a little over a half of the analyzed restaurants promote their menus online (and what for, as long as they do it in Romanian?);
- tourism itself and the surrounding areas are little promoted by restaurant owners (only a total number of 30 websites, that is around 30 %, promote more or less tourist destinations that they benefit of);
- there are very few restaurant owners who understand the importance of promoting a special type of food, and even less focus on lifestyle, for example (only the managers of the large, international restaurants have this in mind).

Our analysis continues by investigating the measure in which specialized restaurants contribute to the promotion of the local, regional and national cuisine.

Table 9. Restaurants Promoting Local Specific

Regions	Menu				Local Cuisine Prom.	Wine Cellar	Wines	
	House Specialty	Events	Specific	Inter-national			Ro	Intl.
North-East	0	7	9	0	9	5	5	0
South-East	3	9	6	6	6	4	5	1
South	3	5	5	2	5	1	1	0
South-West	1	3	3	1	3	2	2	0
West	0	3	3	2	4	1	0	0
North-West	5	15	9	9	9	6	8	1
Center	3	12	17	8	16	13	12	1
Bucharest-Ilfov	2	11	6	12	6	2	5	3
Total Romania	17	65	58	40	58	34	38	6

Those restaurants which promote their own menus mainly focus on food services provided for different events (especially weddings and baptisms), and secondarily on general local, regional and national plates; few of the restaurant owners realize that having a good cook and a renowned house-specialty can positively influence their revenues. In spite of their declared orientation, more restaurants promote international food, too.

Wines and wine cellars are a very important resource for Romania's tourism promotion; still, a quite low number of entrepreneurs seem to have understood this. Regardless of the fact that Romania

claims to have different wine-routes, very few are the cases in which these routes and the wines provided are associated with a local gastronomic offer. It is indeed an unfortunate situation, especially under the conditions in which local administrations are not doing better, either, when it comes to tourism promotion.

### 3 Problem Solution

Returning to the three questions that we have raised, we may show the following aspects:

- Romania's cultural tourism is little promoted by the websites of the city-halls of county residence towns, respectively, it is very little promoted by the websites of specialized restaurants; this situation must be quickly changed, as food – being a physiological need – can be associated with cultural tourism at any time;
- moreover, given Romania's tourist offer, a gastronomic tourist product can be easily integrated into its offer.

While city-halls "fish" for tourist and investors and restaurants seem to focus on attracting foreign visitors, their webmasters and administrators have not yet understood the importance of the manner of appropriately communicating their offers; a local, regional or national (gastro)tourist offer is mainly targeted at foreigners; moreover, Romanians tend to decrease their consumption; thus, entrepreneurs must acknowledge the fact that they need to improve their communication skills and, why not, their offer, too; as many of the restaurants are incorporated into or associated with lodging facilities, it becomes clear that they mainly focus on tourists. These websites must also be associated with those of the local administrations, too.

It looks like Transylvania, Bucovina, and Bucharest enjoy of a better promotion of their tourism offer than the rest of the country: the first two regions, because of their cultural tourism heritage, and Bucharest mainly due to its greater international exposure; unfortunately, this is not the case of the city-halls' online communication; only the counties from Transylvanian seem to do it better.

On one hand, authorities really have the means to determine investors to orient towards investing in the development of specialized restaurants for the sake of tourism development and promotion and, on the other hand, entrepreneurs must understand that this specialized market is still rather empty and that an authentic food offer enjoys the benefits of

gaining the desired competitive advantages based on differentiation. As Kevin Fields points out, “a large number of destinations use gastronomy as a tourism marketing tool, and many also use tourism to promote gastronomy<sup>1</sup>. There are signs, however, that such marketing efforts are less effective than they could be. Because of the separation of the fields of tourism and gastronomy, many tourism marketers often do not understand the gastronomic product and many gastronomers do not understand tourism.” [5]

#### 4 Conclusion

Due to the fact that “the Internet has the great potential to link specialist suppliers of gastronomy and tourism products to a dispersed but vast global market of skilled consumers” [5], authorities and entrepreneurs must acknowledge the importance of foreign language communication.

Very much of the development of Romania’s tourist industry depends on the manner in which the public administration interferes; this can be done by means of a coherent tourist policy that is imperative for the revival of tourism. The policy must aim at:

- taxation reduction;
- treating international tourism as an export activity;
- exempting the reinvested profit from taxes for a certain period of time;
- continuing the improvement of the legislative and institutional frameworks;
- involving the state in the financial support of tourism investments, especially of those of public interest (infrastructure), as well as the international and internal tourist promotion;
- developing the special professional training and the professional reorientation for the unemployed from the other economic sectors;
- founding the network of tourist education institutions integrated into the European network of tourist and hotel management education;
- correlating the programs and the development of tourism projects with the regional development programs (transportation, telecommunications, landscaping etc.);
- awarding a greater attention to opinion surveys;
- imposing quality brands, in order to increase the competitiveness on the tourist market and the acknowledgement of the service quality in tourism.” [1]

“As the competition between tourism destinations increases, local culture is becoming an increasingly valuable source of new products and activities to amuse tourists. Gastronomy has a particularly important role to play in this, not only because food is central to the tourist experience, but also because gastronomy has become a significant source of identity formation in postmodern societies.” [9] The Romanian food-industry has the potential to become an excellent vehicle of tourism promotion because it is associated with an authentic, healthy and bio gastronomic product. A local, regional or national food offer can easily become a special product of Romania’s cultural tourism offer.

Both local administrations and hospitality entrepreneurs ought to implement all what others have already done, and to keep in mind the manner in which all that can be improved: “Many destinations have been taking the advantage of electronic media for some considerable time, developing extensive websites that sometimes include virtual tours. But few of these sites are designed to link with the motivations of individual consumers or the experiences they seek.” [5]

Fields also points out that many tourist destinations seem not to have realized the fact that tourists have become more sophisticated and educated; thus, they are not anymore attracted by lots of information concerning the various attractions and sites of the visited destination but they are for sure motivated by the experiences they can expect to gain during the visit; (gastro) tourism is, for sure, an experience-based type of tourism, and so is business tourism, too. [5] This is what administrations and entrepreneurs must focus on.

We believe that a gastro-tourist product can be developed based on the book of the regretted Radu Anton Roman; then, a more sophisticated gastro-tourist product can be developed for the *connoisseurs* and *gourmets* with the help of the very special writings of several forgotten writers from which we mention only Alexandru O. (Păstorel) Teodoreanu, such as: *Gastronomie, De re culinaria* or *Inter pocula*. Obviously, what is indeed necessary is “more knowledge of the gastronomy tourism market”. [5]

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