

Romania and its Country Image – Then and Now

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Abstract

This paper aims to present facets of Romania's image over the years. From monarchy and communism to EU membership, Romania remains one of the most relevant tourist destinations in Southeast Europe. Considering its history and cultural heritage, but also its economic, political and military roles, Romania needs to focus on the presentation of its country brand in the international and, particularly, in the European context. In this article we will see how Romania has promoted its country image, an analysis which is based on official documents that will give us an insight into the golden days of the 1930s and also into Romania's current role in the 2020s, a new decade with its challenges and opportunities.

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1. Introduction

Romania is the eighth largest country in the European Union. Located on the border between East and West and having the Black Sea coast, Romania has an important geostrategic position, but it is also one of the most beautiful European countries, being similar to France, because it has all the landforms, except the access to the ocean. In terms of architecture, the capital Bucharest was called "Little Paris of the East", several buildings from the 19th and 20th centuries being built in a style similar to those in the French capital, such as the "Arch of Triumph".

But what are the tourist attractions that Romania is proud of all over the world? And what is the image of the country that we have created over time? Questions that we will try to answer in this article.

2. Romania's image between monarchy and communism

In the "Guest Book" offered by the General Commissariat of Romania, led by Dimitrie Gusti, on the occasion of the participation in the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life held in Paris, in 1937, Greater Romania proudly presented its agricultural areas, places of worship, villages and towns, mountain resorts, but less the seaside, which came to be intensely promoted during the communist era, through films like "Uncle Marin, the Billionaire" (1979).

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Also the Danube Delta, a national pearl unique in the world, has been highlighted in numerous books and documentaries of yesterday and today.

We must not forget, however, that 1940 was a dark year for Romania. Then we lost the historical regions of Bessarabia, Northwest Transylvania, Northern Bukovina and the Southern Dobruja (Cadrilater). One of the losses as a tourist attraction was the resort in Balchik, where Queen Marie had a summer house, later converted by the Bulgarians into a hotel. Even though after the end of the Second World War Romania managed to recover Northwest Transylvania, the other regions, Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina and the Cadrilater are lost. Practically, all the joy of the Great Union of December 1, 1918 was erased by some historical decisions taken in the summer of 1940 and, after the Second World War, at the Yalta Conference (1945) and the Paris Peace Treaties (1947). Unfortunately, Romania was one of the countries that were sacrificed.

After 100 years, the memory of the Great Union was reduced only to a few ceremonies in key cities, such as Bucharest and Alba Iulia, but also to some television reports and official documents, but nothing more significant. It was a golden opportunity, which Romania missed, to promote itself as a country brand. However, paradoxically, foreigners took the initiative to present Romania's image to the world, and such a large-scale project was the documentary series "Wild Carpathia", made with the support of Prince Charles. In these documentaries the region of Transylvania is presented preferentially, but the ancient traditions and customs, the images with folk costumes, musical instruments, crafts and the special atmosphere of the rural areas are illustrated with admiration, where the intertwining of the present with the past and the perfect communion of man with nature are observed². As stated by Prince Charles, who has a distant kinship with Voivode Vlad Țepeș and who bought several properties in the Transylvanian villages, Transylvania is the place where we see "true sustainability and complete resilience", considering its tumultuous history, laden with wars and revolutions.

If we were to look at Romania from several perspectives, we could say that since the Small Union of 1859 and the Romanian War of Independence of 1877-1878 and until now, Romania has known several major stages in its development as a national state:

- The beginnings or "young Romania", from 1859 to 1918 (The United Principalities are officially named "Romania" in the Constitution of 1866. The Kingdom of Romania is officially proclaimed in 1881)
- The Golden Age, "Greater Romania", from December 1, 1918 until the summer of 1940
- Communist Romania after World War II (including Soviet influence during the war) and until 1989, crushed by the Cold War / Iron Curtain and the nearby revolutionary movements (Budapest, 1956, Prague, 1968)
- Romania in transition, 1990-2007, after the Revolution of 1989

² Monica Ilie-Prica, *Promovarea turistică a României în filmul documentar și rolul acestuia în consolidarea brandului de țară*, Bucharest, Pro Universitaria, 2019.

- European Romania, 2007-present, taking into account Romania's accession to the European Union (EU) on January 1, 2007

For this article, I chose to make a parallel presentation of the image of Romania in the European context in official documents for tourism promotion and the image of the country, through the "Guest Book" mentioned above and which is part of my personal collection, as well as through the brochure presenting the Romanian tourism brand, the only one of its kind, published in 2011. 10 years after the launch of the Romanian tourism brand at the 2010 World Expo Shanghai, we find that too little has been done to promote Romania's country image. The discussion could reach the political level, but the purpose of this article is to focus on the less controversial issues specific to this country and to address, based on existing documents, the issue of Romania's image of yesterday and today. Tourism, a key component for any country, is the starting point of this analysis and, moreover, the element that will be developed the most in this article.

But first, a brief history of Romania.

Romania appeared as a state led by Alexandru Ioan Cuza in 1859, with the union of Moldavia and Wallachia, maintaining the autonomy and the status of a tributary state towards the Ottoman Empire, which the two principalities had. It was recognized as an independent country 19 years later. In 1918, Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia joined the Kingdom of Romania to form Greater Romania, which had the largest territorial expansion in the history of Romania (295,641 km²).

On the eve of World War II (1940), Greater Romania, under pressure from Nazi Germany, ceded the territories of Hungary (Northwest Transylvania), Bulgaria (the Cadrilater) and the Soviet Union (Bessarabia, Hertsa, and Northern Bukovina). About this historical event of unprecedented drama, the historian Neagu Djuvara said: "There is a principle from which we were not allowed to deviate: do not give up a piece of land without firing a gun. This was, in my opinion, the great political mistake we have made in the last 50 years. We were to fight the Russians in 1940, even if it only lasted eight days. Because, after we ceded Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the Russians, we had to cede Northern Transylvania as well. The Germans pounded on the table, and we ceded half of Transylvania to the Hungarians (The Second Vienna Award) and the Cadrilater to the Bulgarians, so we lost a third of the country in a few months without firing a gun!"³ After the abolition of Antonescu's dictatorship, on August 23, 1944, Romania withdrew from the alliance with the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy and Japan), siding with the Allied Forces (England, the United States, France and the Soviet Union). By the Treaty of Paris, signed on February 10, 1947, from the ceded territories, Romania recovered Northern Transylvania.

After the overthrow of the communist regime installed in Romania (1989) and after the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), the state initiated a series of

³ Neagu Djuvara, *O scurtă istorie a românilor povestită celor tineri*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 2002, p. 220.

economic and political reforms. After a decade of economic problems, Romania introduced new economic reforms and joined the European Union on January 1, 2007.

3. Promotion of Romanian tourism at international level

Next, I will present excerpts from Romania's "Guest Book" from 1937, when our country was one of the respected monarchies of Europe. In the introduction written by Dimitrie Gusti, it is specified: "The Romanian Pavilion presents the achievements of a young nation in the fields of art and technology and shows the new spirit that animates and guides it. Before the war, the Romanian people had a great ideal, with a decisive role in their actions from all points of view: the achievement of national unity. Once this union was achieved, the Romanian people thought of multiplying their efforts in order to advance on the path of all progress"⁴.

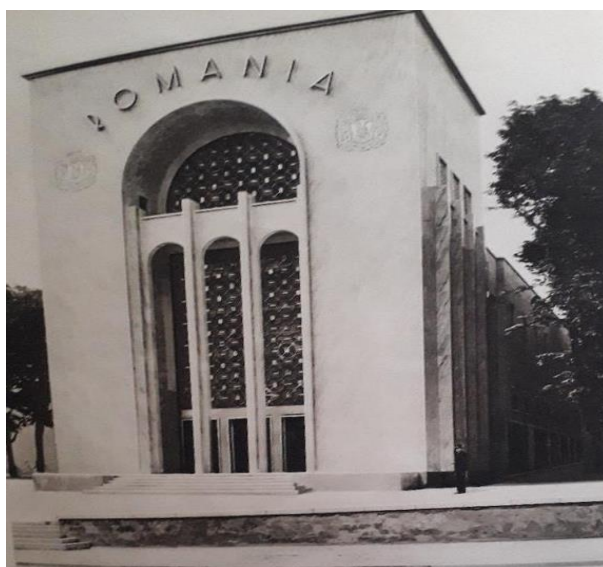


Figure 1. Romania's pavilion at the Paris International Exposition of 1937

Source: "Guest Book", 1937, p. 5. From the author's personal collection.

The document specifies that at that exposition, Romania presented the country's riches, the "gods" being in our favour: wheat, oil, forests, game, fish, orchards, vineyards: "From the Carpathians to the sea, the country is magnificent: the Danube, the [second] largest river in Europe, irrigates our beautiful provinces, and the mountains are home to precious ores"⁵. The book also mentions the "spiritual treasures of Romania", the village world, folk art, costumes, architecture,

⁴ *Extrait du livre d'or officiel offert par le Commissaire Général de Roumanie en souvenir de la participation roumaine à l'Exposition de Paris 1937, p. 4.*

⁵ *Ibidem.*

ceramics, icons, music, poetry, folk theatre. The International Exposition in Paris was intended to be an opportunity to make known "the most characteristic forms of artistic and intellectual life of our country", being mentioned the visual arts, graphics, decorative arts, scientific organisations with the support of the Royal Foundations, based on the huge effort achieved for the education of young people, as well as for the organisation and improvement of the Romanian village.



Figure 2. The Royal Foundations supported the promotion of Romanian traditional culture

Source: „Guest Book”, 1937, p. 8. From the author’s personal collection.

Romania at that time was proud of the unique landscapes of the mountain area, but also of the volcanoes, the Iron Gates and the spas. Apart from the capital Bucharest, the city of Sinaia was also mentioned, which was the summer house of King Carol II. Among the tourist attractions of those times, there were mentioned the Princely Church of St Nicholas in Curtea de Argeş, intended especially for pilgrims who wanted to find peace and spirituality, the monasteries in Moldova, Bukovina, the wooden churches in Maramureş, the old buildings with a typical Romanian style, from Oltenia. The diversity of architectural styles on the Romanian territory was also mentioned, which includes the Byzantine art, the Gothic, Greek, Roman and Turkish arts, Romania being a beautiful country, located at the "crossroads between the East and the West"⁶.

A separate chapter from the "Guest Book" was dedicated to the Romanian economy. Agriculture was essential, Romania having a fertile soil and being at that

⁶ Ibidem, p. 7.

time "Europe's granary". It produced a quantity of wheat of 250,000 wagons per year, of which it exported 90,000-100,000 wagons. The document specifies that 80% of the country's population was engaged in agricultural activities⁷. Flax and hemp production was also important. The document specifies the plan which aimed at an extensive modernisation program from the perspective of agricultural equipment, by purchasing tractors, threshers, baling and harvesting equipment, as well as providing funds for farmers. It is very important that at that time Romania was not only an agricultural country, but also a large oil producer, having on its territory one of the most important oil basins in world production, along with countries like the USA, Venezuela and Russia⁸. Also, the Romanian industry was proud of the "huge factories", becoming "one of the most prosperous regions in Europe"⁹.

At that time, using its own resources, Romania procured almost the entire quantity of manufactured products that were so necessary, importing fewer and fewer finished products. In other words, according to the study, Romania had a strong national economy and probably the progress would have been observed even later if the Second World War had not started.



Figure 3. Oil refinery



Figure 4. Forest exploitation



Figure 5. Silos in Constanța

*Source: Images from the "Guest Book", 1937, p. 10.
From the author's personal collection.*

⁷ Ibidem, p. 10.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Ibidem.

Taking a leap in time, more than 80 years after those times, here is the image of today's Romania: a country that has gone through a long, almost unbearable communist regime, a country that went through a liberating but violent revolution and that carried us all to a new world, the West, with a pro-Europe, pro-EU and pro-NATO policy. The ambition and determination to return to the great European family brought us where we wanted in 2007, the year when Romania became an EU member country, together with Bulgaria.

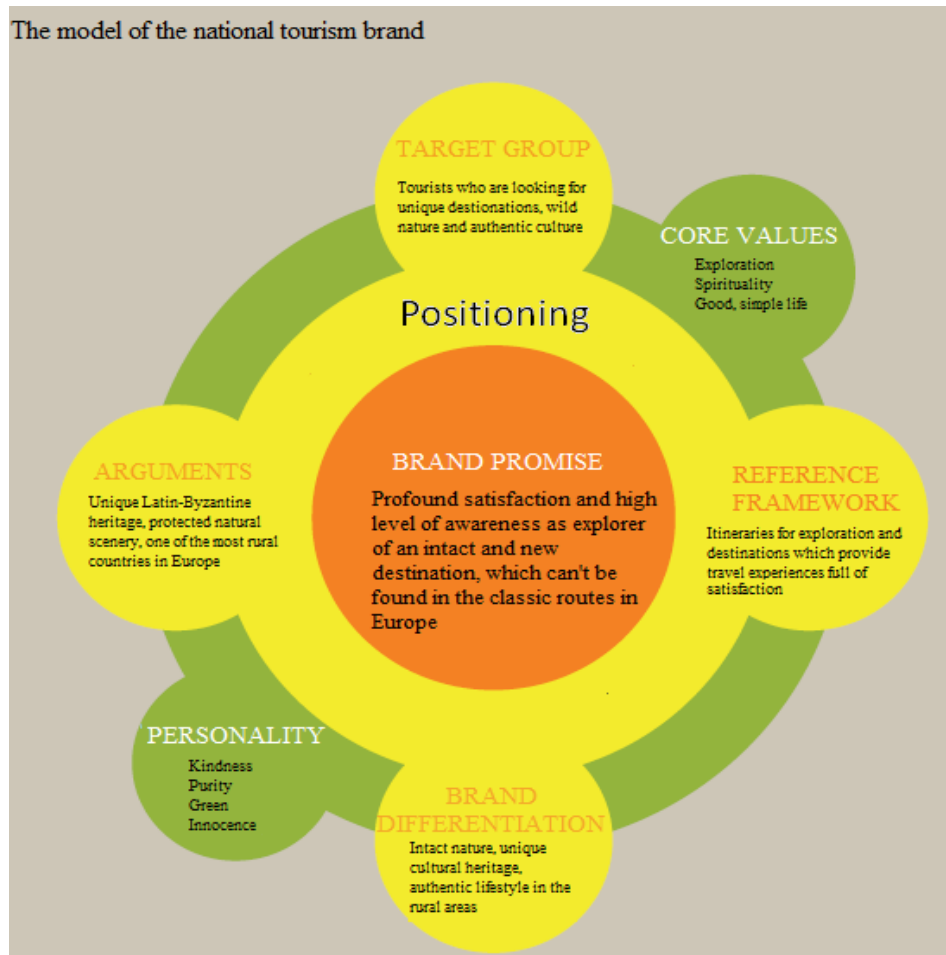


Figure 6. The model of Romania's tourism brand

Source: MDRT, 2011, p. 6.

From the point of view of promoting tourism, Romania did not record major progress after 2010, when the national tourism brand was launched. There are several brochures that present the tourist attractions in our country (some of them mentioned in the 1937 brochure), but of interest is the brand manual,

published in January 2011¹⁰. The model of the national tourism brand is summarized in the Figure no. 6.

Among the benefits of the brand, in the booklet there were mentioned positive surprises, nature connectedness, respect for people and self-respect, health and relaxation, contact with people, sense of courage and adventure, discovery/exploration, good, simple life, living culture, contact with intact nature, escape and slowdown, security.

As for the attributes, there can be found authenticity/originality, mystery/spirituality, purity, authentic hospitality, honesty, the Carpathian Mountains, intact nature and wild landscapes, Latin-Byzantine history and culture, traditions, and the Danube Delta, which is included in the UNESCO World Heritage sites, together with churches and monasteries in Moldova, the historic centre of Sighișoara, the Horezu Monastery, the Dacian fortresses in the Orăștie Mountains (including the Dacian fortress Sarmizegetusa Regia), the fortified churches in Transylvania and the wooden churches in Maramureș (see Fig. 7). This is the first time we see in an official document for tourism promotion the recognition of the inclusion of special places in Romania in the UNESCO heritage.



Figure 7. Location of World Heritage Sites within Romania

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_World_Heritage_Sites_in_Romania

4. Romania's image in a global context

Although we no longer enjoy the prestige of the Romanian Kingdom, we can still point out some achievements that have put Romania on the world map and that have significantly improved the country's image: joining the United Nations

¹⁰ Ministerul Dezvoltării Regionale și Turismului, *Realizarea brandului turistic național pentru crearea unei imagini pozitive a României ca destinație turistică*, ianuarie 2011.

(1955), joining UNESCO (1990)¹¹, the accession to NATO (2004), the Francophone Summit in Bucharest (2006), the accession to the EU (2007), the NATO Summit in Bucharest (2008), the Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the Sibiu Summit (2019), the visit of Pope Francis (2019), 20 years after the visit of Pope John Paul II.

Currently, all countries in the world, regardless of their level of development, are facing the same major problem: the fight against the new coronavirus COVID-19. In a world that seems to be moving completely to the online environment, in a world dominated by social networks and remote contact, it doesn't seem to matter if you come from Romania, Germany or the USA. We are all equal in the face of disease. In this so-called war with the dreaded virus, Romania fights alongside the entire planet, like in a world war, with all the weapons, with all the resources, in the hope that everything will end well one day, even if there are many voices saying that the world won't be the same at the end of this crisis. We are in the year 2020 and we already have the signs of a major post-coronavirus crisis: the economic crisis, the food crisis, but, even worse, the social crisis.

5. Conclusions

We are facing the challenges and dangers of the new decade. The years that will come will surely change the face of the world. For Romania, we can say that it is a privilege to be an EU member country, to receive European funds to recover economically and to avoid a severe health crisis. In addition, it is comforting for us to know that we are in the group of the 27 European countries that remain united as one family. This is, I think, the image of Romania as a country that we should keep in the next period: a country anchored in its European path, which has withstood major changes – some of them for the better, others quite dramatic – all these bringing us to the place where we are today and that we should be proud of every day.

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¹¹ Autoritatea Națională pentru Turism, *Promovarea brandului turistic al României*, iulie 2013.