

THE EVOLUTION OF MARKETING METHODS IN A TOURISM ASSOCIATION FROM ROMANIA

MARIA STOIAN *

ABSTRACT: *The aim of this article is to present how to apply marketing methods, older and newer ones, to the action plan of a tourism association. I chose for this study the National Association of Rural, Ecological and Cultural Tourism from Romania (ANTREC), since I had available a series of chronological information on which I was capable to adapt the idea that I wanted to highlight. The conclusions that I reached from this analysis are closely related to the idea that, like other industries, the type of marketing practiced in a tourism association must adapt continually, to be innovative and to highlight by his unique style and his results. For the preparation work I used only the database of ANTREC Romania.*

KEY WORDS: *marketing, marketing methods, rural tourism, promotion*

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1. THE ROLE AND OBJECTIVES OF ASSOCIATIONS IN TOURISM

1.1. The appearance of associations in tourism field

Tourism associations arose from the necessity to streamline some complex processes that a manager / owner of a hotel / guesthouse / restaurant / travel agency, etc. could not achieve individually, both economically and because of the time factor that it involves. The concept of association was seen with some skepticism at first because no one knew what it entails, what obligations will have the members, what benefits will be and if they can get used or not with that kind of activity. Starting from the idea that "where are many, the power increasing", the concept of association was able to highlight some of the actors in tourism, especially of those who already collaborated or had heard of similar organizations in other countries or even from Romania, but in other areas.

* *Assoc. Prof., Ph.D., University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Bucharest, Romania, prof.maria.stoian@gmail.com*

Attracting members became a reality with the confidence of people, which was realized by actions meant to help them and by concrete results that appeared within a relatively short time. In addition, the registration in a non-governmental organization of this kind doesn't involve risks and does not require any investment, it was necessary only to pay an annual subscription, not expensive at all, and after that the direct involvement in various projects organized by the association.

1.2. The objectives of tourism associations

The attributions of tourist organizations, which were established based on these premises, were: maintaining a permanent link between tourism service providers and authorities; the large promotion made at national and international level using multiple channels; facilitating the preparation of documents required for the well functioning of accommodation and catering establishments; ease the process of preparing profitability analysis on a particular sector and for statistical purpose; close collaboration with other organizations in related fields; mediation if problems appear during their activity; provide advice and answers about starting a new business; offering support in creating new tourist programs and their implementation; support sustainable development of tourist destinations in various ways; attracting funds from investments or from the state for building the necessary infrastructure for tourism, upgrading or restoring some of the objectives of heritage; certified training for people who want to work in tourism in order to provide services that achieve quality standards; facilitating exchanges of experience with domestic and foreign entities.

All objectives listed and many others that can be drawn from them are designed to improve the living standards of country population and provide long term benefits in as many sectors of activity.

2. THE PRESENTATION OF ANTREC ROMANIA

2.1. The establishment of association

More than 18 years ago, when a handful of visionary thought to bring together everything that means tourism in villages area, this activity does not really exist, at least not as we know it today. About tourism is said to be one of the oldest occupations of mankind, and the form referred to is that of receiving guests in people's homes. Then, starting from here, were established the first inns and resting places, strategically positioned along roads and areas highly traveled or on those where were made regular pilgrimages.

However, the transition from housing a lost traveler at late hours and give him something to eat, to put the house in disposal of anyone who is willing to pay for this service and, in addition, the involvement of some foreigners in daily activities, was a large step for Romanian villagers. Looked with skepticism at first, the movement of rural tourism and agro-tourism began to take shape when the first guesthouse appeared – the guesthouse "Santa Maria" from Bran-Moieciu.

After 1990, it was clear that Romanian tourism needed a change, something new. People could move freely and wanted to get out more often and visit; for this, the most easily to reach were still the holidays inside the country.

Another factor leading to the focused attention on rural areas was the long period in which the population has been directed to large cities and centers, even if their function was touristic. At that time, everybody wanted an alternative to escape from the crowds, nature trips, taking children born in towns in the rural villages of which their grandparents came from and return to traditions known only by the stories heard from the elders.

2.2. A few about ANTREC's history



Figure 1.
ANTREC logo

In 1994 the association was founded after a series of meetings and discussions with representatives of several counties.

Already having the example in Bran and being understood the need for collaboration on several levels in order to develop the new concept, was made the passing to more elaborate meetings with people to persuade them to let go their preconceived ideas and open their doors to receive guests. At the same time, started fierce discussions with the authorities to request help in establishing criteria for approval of future pensions. Promotion campaigns were sustained and provided the needed notoriety for a new wave like this.

At the end of 1995, after less than two years of existence, ANTREC already had 15 branches in counties all over the country (Brasov, Sibiu, Covasna, Alba, Harghita, Bihor, Neamt, Suceava, Gorj, Arges, Buzau, etc.) and an impressive number of members - more than 2000. One year later, in 1996, the association already reached the number of 25 county branches and over 2,500 members. This year was marked by the beginning of the Phare Programme for rural tourism in Romania, which gave a greater impetus to the development of organization.

Year 1997 marked reaching 28 branches and exceeded the number of 3000 members throughout the country. Today, ANTREC has 32 branches and more than 3,500 members, pensions and craftsmen.

2.3. ANTREC's objectives – according to the Statute

Association fosters and promotes rural tourism, environmental and cultural in Romania and abroad, for which purpose works to develop:

- the knowledge and popularization of tourism resources in rural areas of the country;
- editing and dissemination of publications and papers, brochures, maps, information and advertising materials on the development of different tourist areas of the country;
- organization and participation in conferences, debates, scientific sessions, symposiums, colloquia, etc., in the association or in other organizations in the country and abroad;

- establishing and promoting the exchange of data, information, publications, experts, other forms of cooperation with similar bodies in other countries, participation in international events in rural, ecological and cultural tourism;
- providing specialized assistance and representation of its members;
- organizing exhibitions of handicrafts and food products of peasant farmers and their recovery;
- organizing ecological actions for touristic areas and actions of knowledge of specific cultural traditions;
- dispatching at central and territorial level in order to ensure a good travel benefits and services required by this;
- organizing exchanges of experience between households in different parts of the country as well as those from other countries;
- organization and development of adult training courses for tourism (CAEN code 8042) - initiation, qualification, specialization, training, management training and other forms of education for tourism industry;
- coordinating the implementation of external technical assistance programs for developing rural, ecological and cultural tourism;
- promotion of ethics and deontology in rural tourism areas;
- organizing benefits and travel services on consignment or commission in family farms, guesthouses, campsites and other similar structures of accommodation;
- organization with the legal provisions in force, the closing exchange and travel insurance.

3. MARKETING – MAIN TASK FOR ANTREC ROMANIA

3.1. How important is the promotion process

I mentioned on each occasion that this type of associations have a crucial role in the marketing they made for its members. But why is this particularly idea repeated over and over again? The answer is self-evident when we look back and see the facts: because of its importance, obviously.

A peasant house turned into a house for visitors and, later, into a real guesthouse, cannot be totally included in the touristic circuit without people knowing what the services offered by it are. Going back in time, during 1994-2000, will see that this aspect was quite difficult to achieve, most of all because then were just a few kind of mass media promotion, unlike today. How could a villager from Apuseni Mountains, let's say, to make his own campaign of advertising? By what means, and using what funds?

3.2. The graphic of marketing methods applied by ANTREC over the years

One of the main goals ANTREC Romania, established even before the actual birth of the association, was to make a sustained promotional campaign for its members. Drawing up a table of how was the association evolution in terms of its members and referring to the types of marketing used should look like this:

Table 1. Applied strategies

1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ finding members is done by face to face discussions with groups or individual owners; ❖ are made leaflets to present the association in all the country; ❖ starts the first promotion steps; ❖ a unique marketing method: invitation to the festival of gastronomy and traditional customs - "International Festival of stuffed cabbage," at Praid, Harghita (frequency will be annual, from now on);
1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ media campaign of the association in the country continues; ❖ leaflets are created for each county where ANTREC is present; ❖ it starts the collaborations and working more with craftsmen from all over the country in order to achieve a further promotion for holidays in guesthouses; ❖ the promotion aspect is brought in tourism fairs and exhibitions; ❖ occurs EUROGITES membership (The European Federation of Rural Tourism) - promoting ANTREC members abroad, the first appearance of Romanian guesthouses in the EUROGITES catalog;
1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ starts Phare Programme - funds allocated for promotion in rural tourism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ is planned the conceive of ANTREC logo design; ⇒ is starting work for association's web site and reservation network; ❖ guesthouses from ANTREC network appear in the Catalogue edited by EUROGITES for the second consecutive year; ❖ took place massive participation of all tourism manifestations in the country - were shared a lot of promotional materials and were initiate discussions with tourists;
1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ ANTREC edit the first catalog - "National Catalogue of tourist Guesthouses and Farmhouses in Romania" - Phare funds; ❖ is put on the market and distributed to guests first CD with complete information on holidays in the countryside; ❖ the first participation of ANTREC in the Harvest Festival - World Trade Center, Bucharest; ❖ diversifying range of advertising; ❖ guesthouses begin to customize their leaflets and draw up offers, all under the aegis of ANTREC Romania; ❖ occurs ANTREC guesthouses third consecutive appearance in the catalog published by EUROGITES ANTREC;
1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ is printed the second catalog ANTREC, this time from association's personal funds; ❖ new promotional events are added to the touristic circuit of rural tourism - festivals, old customs, handicraft fairs; ❖ the association is involved in organizing and sustaining more and more diverse events - culinary, craft, the harvest, cultural, ecological, religious, etc.;
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ are printed new marketing materials; ❖ at fairs, ANTREC booths are most appreciated and surprise by their uniqueness; ❖ banners and posters is done, separately, for each subsidiary; ❖ the relation with the Ministry of Tourism become closer, ANTREC being invited to participate in fairs abroad; ❖ the emergence of tourist programs like an innovation for Romanian tourism - "Wine Road", "On the footstep of Brancusi", "The Road of Stephen the Great", "Journey to the Land of Cheese", "At Craftsmen's Home ", etc.;
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ was launched the official website of ANTREC - www.antrec.ro - in Romanian and

	<p>English version;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ the link to the site of ANTREC is posted on the site of EUROGÎTES; ❖ is published the third edition of the ANTREC Catalogue, with a greater number of guesthouses; ❖ are printed leaflets and promotional materials in several international languages - English, French, German;
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ are signed partnerships deals with other tourism associations in the country and abroad, but also with the associations of craftsmen; ❖ starts to focus, increasingly, on the promotion made by the Internet - emails, posts on various portals, banners and links on partner sites; ❖ are sustained the collaborations with local and regional authorities, especially to support events;
2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ is published the fourth edition of the National Catalog of Guesthouses and Farmhouses from Romania; ❖ as a particular method of marketing is created the Special Program "Holidays in the countryside", which will have two annually editions, giving everyone the opportunity to spend several days in a rural guesthouse;
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ for the first time, the ANTREC Catalog is printed in his English version, with a circulation of 2000 copies; ❖ the website reconstruction, in a more current and more attractive style for tourists;
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ ANTREC founds the magazine "Holidays in the countryside", a monthly newsletter and a good way of promotion; ❖ annually, will be a list with the event initiate by ANTREC and with the one that it is a partner or a participant; they reached an impressive figure of events; ❖ ANTREC members are required to travel at fairs in Germany, France and other countries;
2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ is the beginning of sponsorship, for various major events; many of them are promoted in the media through TV spots or radio ads; ❖ is made the French version for the ANTREC website and new guesthouses are added;
2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ ANTREC organize their own fairs in Easter, Christmas, Saint Mary and other religious celebrations, inviting members - guesthouses with gastronomical products and touristic offers and tourist offers, eco products manufacturers, artisans with unique products that make live demonstrations, folklore groups, etc;
2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ creating and implementing new programs in the main rural tourism theme, but also in those with tourism potential least exploited - "Room with hay - antis tress therapy", "Wallachia Sauna", "The Wedding of Sibiel", "Road cellars", etc.;
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ ANTREC subsidiaries offer a number of new events which are in the attention of media, promoted both at home and abroad: "The longest Plescoi sausage ", "The biggest salad," "The greatest bulz", etc.;
2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ there is increasing importance of social networks and ANTREC adopt this new way of marketing and customize it for their needs; ❖ the Association create accounts on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn; ❖ in social networking are posted all kind of attractive events and so, the global crisis is easily passed away;
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ is projected the appearance of a new marketing method, especially for crisis period, aiming to increase the occupancy rate in low season and during the week: sites of special offers, with vouchers; ❖ ANTREC subsidiaries make their own accounts on social networks, on Facebook,

	<p>Twitter;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ the Association is involved in several European funded projects that support the personnel qualification in tourism area, but that is also a good way of marketing; ❖ conclusion of agreements with ANAT (National Association of Travel Agencies) and OPTBR (Organization of Spa Tourism in Romania) to minimize the effects of the global economic crisis through touristic programs initiate together;
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ the website adjustment, including now versions in four languages: Romanian, English, French and Hungarian; ❖ the support of all marketing methods initiated over the last 18 years of continuous activity.



Figure 2. Arges Gourmet Festival

As you can see, marketing methods adopted by the association developed in the same way as the evolution of society, economy, environment and others. We can say, without being wrong, that one of the reasons why the organization has survived over time that is just get over the threshold of rigidity, constantly trying to attract a large number of tourists in rural areas, all this being achieved by adopting the latest techniques in promotion area. The support received from authorities and from members was also a consequence of the continuous inputs of marketing, so that it was obvious that this is the right path.

3.3. The necessity to keep up with new marketing methods

Running for so many years in its current form, the association had to continually adapt to the needs of tourists, only doing that it managed to advise her members what to do to achieve optimum quality standards in their activities.

Provided such a fluidity and assured a pass so slow and yet immediate marketing from traditional methods to new, depended very much on people who were in charge. Presidents of subsidiaries and active members have proved so sound knowledge in the field, but also passion performing this activity during the years.

To lose a moment, an opportunity has always been a problem for any field, and for an association as ANTREC Romania, since most are pursuing a voluntary activity, step back would be very easy to do. But in this case we could have said that wasn't a step back, but a hesitation to step forward.



Figure 3. Chalet Ancuta at Praid Festival

3.4. Results of all the work

Because of the persuasion with which he sought the whole process of marketing over the years, ANTREC Romania managed, from beginning until nowadays, to keep their leading status in the tourism field, being able to boast that its membership was constantly growing. Another achievement is the take in, as rural tourism branches, of related activities such as crafts and cuisine.

The intersection between the rural, ecological and cultural tourism was realized by itself, in time, by combining several components of each category in the events organized or supported and promoted through tourism programs.

Here are some of the consequences of the entire marketing process: 1. an important contribution to the current status of Romanian tourism; 2. an international reputation and respect for the organization; 3. attracting funds for rural areas and especially for rural tourism and agrotourism; 4. Romanian customs and traditions are now well known almost all over the world, as well as the festivals and events.

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