

## TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE IN CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** *This paper intend to present the authors' point of view regarding the creation of a tourist information centre in the home town, Cluj-Napoca. The present situation regarding the tourist information centres at Romania's level could and should be improved and Cluj-Napoca is among those cities which need such a centre. The structure of this centre and the involvement of interested stakeholders would be presented below, along with the importance of such a centre for Cluj-Napoca.*

**Key words:** *tourism, information centre, tourist destination, development.*

### Introduction

As World Travel and Tourism Council shows in its report<sup>1</sup> published in 2006 regarding Romania, our country was during 1970s a well known tourist destination in Western Europe and due to an opened attitude of Romania communist authorities tourists from Germany, Belgium, Austria, France visited Romania, mainly the Black See resorts, which were booming, but also the spa resorts well known for their various therapeutically effects. These destinations were very popular among Romanian tourist too.

During that period, tourist information centres were operational in almost every Romanian town through the centralized structure of National Tourism Organization which had offices at every county level, resulting a wide spread network for tourist information, promotional materials included.

But the 1980s brought a radical change in Romanian communist authorities attitude toward border openings and gradually the number of foreign tourist – including those from Central and Eastern European countries decreased to almost zero between 1987 and 1989. Due to the economic situation, but also to the dictatorial regime of Ceausescu, Romanian gave up travelling too. The result: no investments were made to keep the lodging capacities in good conditions, no investments in equipments and infrastructure, poor quality of services and – for no one surprise - the tourism became the Cinderella of Romanian economy. Because they had no object, the tourist information centres disappeared too.

Romanian tourism kept a low profile during 1990s, when the effects of under-investments were more than clear. Foreign tourists were avoiding Romania and the Romanian – due to the border openings – preferred to travel abroad. The main factors which determined tourism industry to remain in the shadow for almost 10 years were:

- Romanian political parties failed to see the important role tourism could play in the country's economic development;
- as a result, no strategy regarding the tourism development was elaborated;
- the privatisation pace of hotels was very slow, which generated further under-investments;
- the obsolete road and railway infrastructure.

Due to this neglecting attitude of Romanian authorities toward tourism, the creation of tourist information centres was not a priority. Despite this, in some – very few - Romanian towns

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<sup>1</sup> WTTC, Romania – The Impact of Travel and Tourism on Jobs and the Economy, spring 2006, <http://www.wttc.org/publications/pdf/06WTTCRomania.pdf>

or regions (like Maramures) tourist information centres were created due to private initiatives or/and financed through international programs. But these were not enough and the lack of a territorial information network, combined with a constant lack of promotional materials – including those available on the Internet, played and play an important role when tourist make their choices.

At the beginning of 2000s the attitude toward tourism started to change and during December 2002 the Minister of tourism publicly recognized the need for the creation of tourist information centres in every county and in every important tourist destination. And a regulation regarding this process was promised. During 2003 the tourism was declared ‘a national priority’ and the project for opening tourist information centres became part of this priority. But it took other 2 years for a regulation draft to appear and only one entry specify that the tourist information centres are specialized services subordinated to and offered by the local authorities in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Constructions and Tourism, through its Romanian National Authority for Tourism. Also the regulation draft specifies the importance of tourist information centres localization.

Despite the lack of regulation in this field, tourist information centres were created and by May 31, 2006 – as the official site of Romanian National Authority for Tourism shows<sup>2</sup> - Romania had 38 tourist information centres of which 22 are situated in the administrative capitals of Romanian counties. It is a positive sign the fact that Constanta – the main town at the Black See – and Tulcea – the main town in the Danube Delta – have 2 information centres each, and important tourist destination like Prahova Valley or Sibiu region developed several information centres, too.

But it is also amazing the fact that Bucharest has no information centre. In November 2005 the opening of 3 tourist information centres in the Romanian capital was announced, but until now nothing happened.

Cluj-Napoca is among those cities which have no tourist information centres, but the local authorities recognized the need of such a service and became more involved in the project of opening a tourist information centre. This project is combined with the announcement of a strategy for tourism development at the county level<sup>3</sup>.



For now, in Cluj county operates only a tourist information centre in Turda with the support of the Indrei Ratiu, the brother of the late politician Ion Ratiu.

[www.cit.turda.ro](http://www.cit.turda.ro)

## Material and Method

For our investigations we used exploratory research:

- ❓ secondary data: statistical and published studies; other promotion materials;
- ❓ extensive web sites analysis;
- ❓ the information available on the official web-sites of County of Cluj and Municipality of Cluj;

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<sup>2</sup> [www.mturism.ro/fileadmin/mturism/centre\\_informative.ro](http://www.mturism.ro/fileadmin/mturism/centre_informative.ro)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.primariaclujnapoca.ro/proiect\\_planificare.aspx](http://www.primariaclujnapoca.ro/proiect_planificare.aspx)

- ❗ the Regional Development Plan for 2004-2006 elaborated by the National Agency for Regional Development for North-West Region, where the Cluj County is included;
- ❗ the Strategy for Tourism Development in Romania elaborated by the Romanian National Institute for Research and Development of Tourism.

The present article do not mention other international papers in this field due to the particular situation of Romania and no Romanian paper is analysed because no research in this field was conducted in Romania.

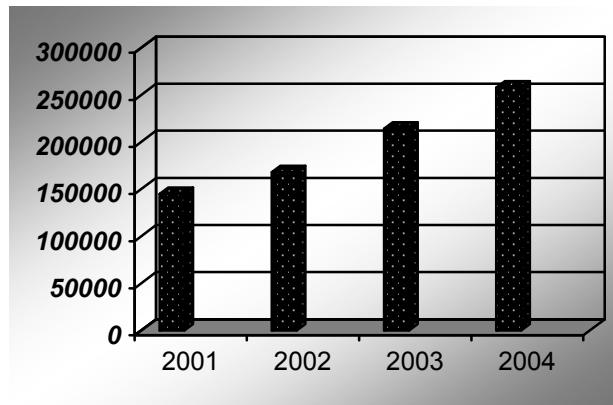
### Results and discussions

Cluj county stands on the 9<sup>th</sup> place out of 41 counties taking into account the number of lodging capacities, but Cluj-Napoca - the municipality of the Cluj county - is situated on the third place after Bucharest and Timișoara. Cluj-Napoca, also, is the second city in the national hierarchy regarding the polarisation potential, on the first place is the Romanian capital – Bucharest, and from this position it is influencing the entire Transylvania region. Cluj-Napoca is one of the most important cities and is the only one in the North-West Region with over 300.000 peoples, and it is considered to be the ‘capital of Transylvania’ being an important cultural and business centre. Though, Cluj-Napoca’s historical buildings and sites could not compete with those of Sibiu and Brasov, they are interesting; its cultural life is rich and its business opportunities are complex. All those factors make from Cluj-Napoca an important tourist destination for various type of tourist.

The main tourist market segments for Cluj-Napoca as a destination are:

- business tourism: Cluj-Napoca is one of the most important business centre in Romania, after Bucharest and Timisoara;
- academic and cultural tourism: Cluj-Napoca is the second university centre after Bucharest and the first in Transylvania;
- medical tourism: Cluj-Napoca is the second medical centre, after the capital Bucharest;
- other forms of tourism like event tourism, leisure or sport tourism.

The number of tourists in Cluj-Napoca increases constantly in the last few years (figure 1):



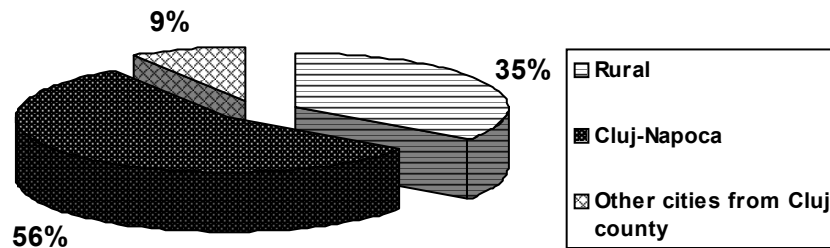
source: [http://www.primariaclujnapoca.ro/proiect\\_planificare.aspx](http://www.primariaclujnapoca.ro/proiect_planificare.aspx)

**Figure 1:** Number of arrivals in Cluj-Napoca

The tourist offer for Cluj-Napoca has a great variety:

- cultural and historical monuments (medieval and modern monuments, churches, museums, festivals, exhibitions);
- a diversified portfolio of lodging capacities, restaurants, clubs, tourist agencies;
- an attractive natural-geographic space

Cluj-Napoca's lodging capacities represent around 56% of the Cluj county as shows figure 2.



source: own

**Figure 2:** Lodging capacities repartition in Cluj county

The necessity of a tourist information centre (TIC) in Cluj-Napoca is the result of the national tourist development strategies and on the other hand the result of the local authorities wishes for implementing a sustainable development strategy at the local level. The opening of a tourist information centre in Cluj-Napoca could transmit the message of welcome to the tourists and residents too.

Even if the authorities have started at the end of 2005 to analyse the potential of the Cluj-Napoca tourist market and formulate a strategy for its development – one point being the opening of a TIC, but without any deadline – until now, after almost a year, there is no result.

In our opinion, the main factors which should be taken into account in order to open a tourist information centre are:

- its role for the implied destination;
- the function of the TIC;
- its structure and subordinations.

A tourist information centre is an important promotion tool for the tourist destination. The most important general information sources used by tourists are:

- o Personal sources: self experience and recommendations from friends, relatives etc.
- o Commercial sources: internet, TIC, promotion materials of the destination, consulting from the tourism agencies and other.

Although, if we take into consideration local information sources, the tourist information centre is the first option, followed by lodging capacities, tourism agencies, ticketing offices, residents etc. For this reason, the TIC can be consider a “visit card” of the tourist destination. The main purpose of its existence is the presentation of all tourist services.

The tourist information centre must offer:

- tourist information;
- intermediary for lodging and board services or reservation;
- sale/ intermediary for city tours, tourist guide, cultural attraction guide etc;
- sale of transport tickets;
- sale of informative materials (maps, tourist guide, books etc.)
- sale of souvenirs.

Usually, the tourist information centres should establish relations of cooperation or are dependent of diverse local and/or regional administrative structures; TICs could be:

- part of a local administrative structure (City Hall);

- part of a regional administrative organ (County Council);
- part of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry;
- part of a regional structures of tourist promotion;
- a NGO or are part of it.

From the localisation point of view, the tourist information centre must be situated downtown and it needs a good traffic signalisation to coordinate the tourists on time.

As Romanian regulation draft shows, a tourist information centre in Romania is directly subordinated to local authorities and the future TIC of Cluj-Napoca should follow this model.

## Conclusions

If Cluj-Napoca authorities want to increase and consolidate its position as a tourist destination, the opening of at least one tourist information centre is needed.

The initiative for creating and opening a TIC for Cluj-Napoca was launched by the end of January 2006. Until mid June 2006 no other steps were made for this project to be completed. We were able – after discussions with the some local representatives and hoteliers – to identify the following reasons for which the project is stalled:

- the local authorities declared their intention, but their involvement in this project seems to be superficial;
- the hoteliers from Cluj-Napoca do not speak the same language, every one (and they are around 50 lodging capacities owners now) wants to control the centre and no one seems to perceived the benefit of the centre for all;
- the lack of printing promotional materials for Cluj-Napoca, which bring us back to the first reason; no one at the local level thought to start the writing and editing of those much needed materials.

A project for a tourist information centre is not enough, the implementation of such a project is important.

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