

PROMOTION TECHNIQUES FOR RURAL TOURISM FOR THE “IZA VALLEY” MICROREGION

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ABSTRACT: The development of rural tourism in the Iza Valley Microregion, Maramureş Depression, is based on a wide natural and anthropogenic potential. The main types of rural tourism in the region are cultural tourism and recreational tourism. Due to the fact that the tourism in the Iza Valley Microregion is seasonal, with an intense traffic in winter and summer, it is vital to have diversity in approaches of promoting tourist products and services so that rural tourism be present all around the year. Although it has a rich tourist potential, the rural tourist consumption presents an uneven distribution in time and space; only some of the villages have a significant number of pensions and tourist services. This is due to the lack of information of the rural population regarding the ways of promotion, as noticed by some surveys conducted by AJOFM. Following these surveys there were courses for informing people and for re-qualification.

The promotion of the tourist products in the region, by different strategies, can influence the development of the rural tourism both in the localities where this type of tourism is already present and in the localities where the rural tourism is at an initial stage.

The choice of promotion strategies is conditioned by the target market, the objective and the strategies of promotion.

Key words: Iza Valley Microregion, rural tourism, promotion techniques, Maramureş, tourism product

The existence of a diverse tourist potential in rural regions is not enough for the tourism to begin its development. Direct or indirect promotion is the feature that influences the development of tourism, regardless of the region. After analyzing the phenomenon of “rural tourism” in the Iza Valley Microregion, we noticed that there are very few ways of promotion known and used. The first step to inform the rural population about the promotion was taken by AJOFM (County Agency for Labour Force Employment) Maramureş by organizing re-qualification courses.

The tourist potential of the Iza Valley Microregion is determined by its place in the Maramureş Depression, located in the northern part of Romania. The Maramureş Depression is one of the great intra-Carpathian depressions, crossed by the Iza and the Vişeu valleys. There are also high hills, smaller depressions, valley corridors, basins and piedmonts.

The space of the Maramureş Depression, rather isolated, is a unitary entity from the economic, social and spiritual point of view. It can be distinguished among neighbouring areas by the original image of the architecture, outfit, language and customs. They are all traces of an archaic life-style structured from generation to generation. This conscience of the people, together with the geographical isolation, determined the Maramureş society to focus on local resources, to develop a rich culture, an original folklore, a particular language rich in archaisms, thus developing a community preserved like a living museum, a little altered, however, by the modern elements which enter naturally the daily life of people.

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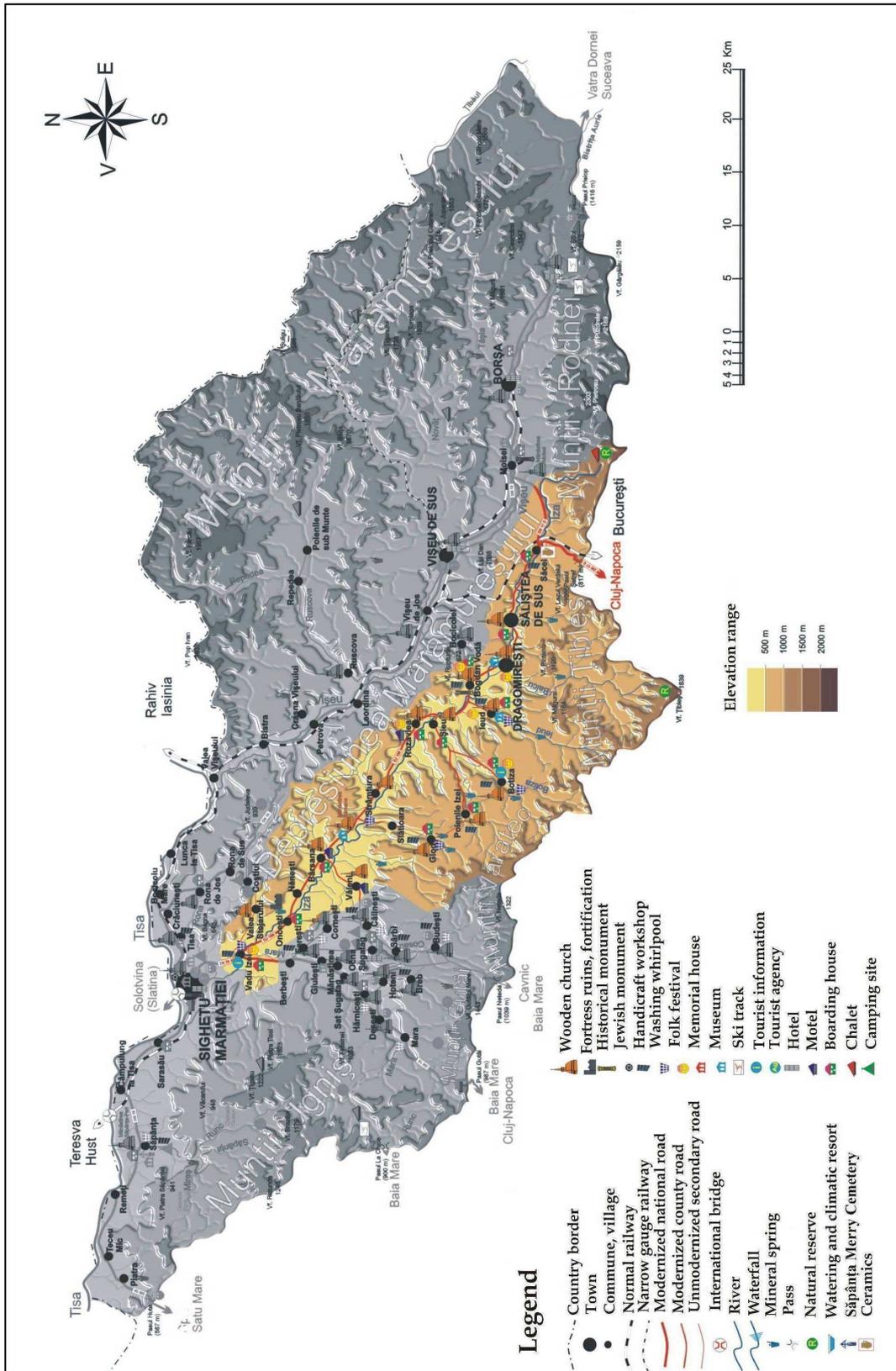


Figure 1. Position and touristic potential of Iza Valley Microregion
(Source: Map made by Petre Maran)

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The Iza Valley is the most well-known tourist route in Maramureș, laying on approximately 50 km, along the Iza River and its tributaries (Slatioara, Botiza, Ieud). In this place there is an abundance of symbols of the Maramureș culture which have become brands: rural household, the Maramureș gate, wooden churches (3 churches in the UNESCO patrimony), traditional occupations, technical rural equipment, rural outfit, and customs. The diverse natural and anthropogenic potential have determined the development of rural tourism in the villages situated in this valley, the main attraction of the Land of Maramureș. These ancient settlements, dating back from the 14th – 16th centuries, are guardians of ancient traditions. In these households, people still produce by their own means the products they need for the daily life. By its functional and natural characteristics, the rural space has a remarkable tourist potential.

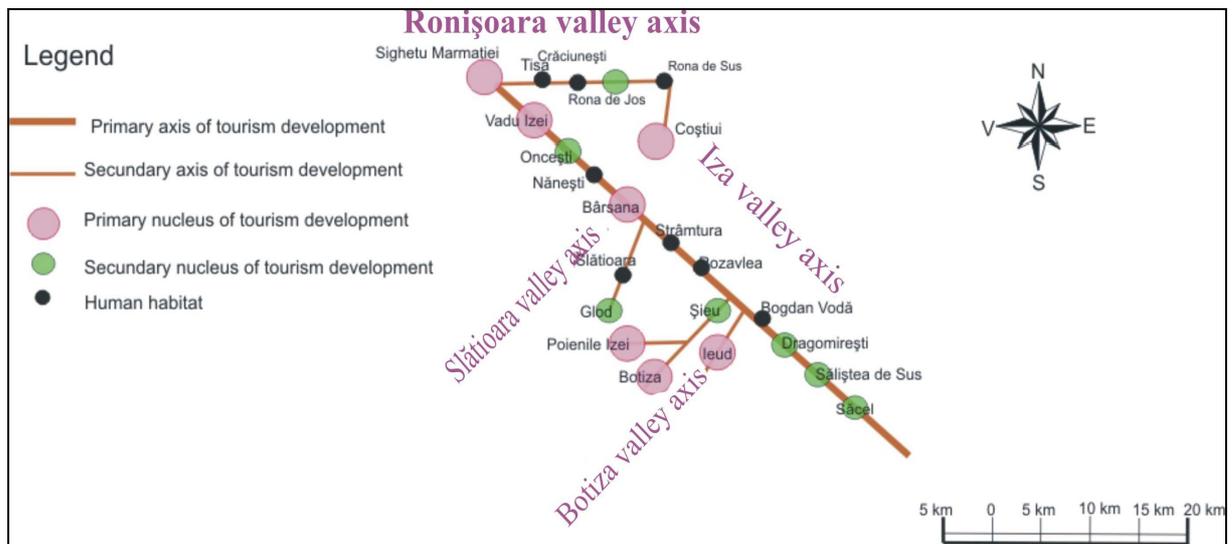


Figure 2. Tourist axes of the Iza Valley

The pensions and private lodgings in the Iza Valley Microregion offer high quality services for tourists, with an intimacy and authenticity note. The local gastronomy, the unique environment for recreational activities, the initiation of tourists in the rhythm of the local daily life- all of these have a favour of originality for the tourists that come from urban areas.

The communication means used by the lodging units must suggest speed and efficiency for their services, a high degree of comfort, and the images they use must render the inner and outer aspect of the unit. Promoting tourism means making a series of communication strategies that aim at a permanent transmission of pieces of information for both current and potential customers, through different channels. This information refers to the characteristics of the product and services in order to strengthen a positive image and to build a positive attitude toward that region. This means to cause convenient changes in the mentality and habits of the tourists for the social and economic development of the region.

The promotion of tourist products and services can be done in different ways. The most efficient promotion strategies are chosen according to the chosen target market. The inconsistency between the way of promotion and the target market can lead to disturbances /misunderstandings of the chosen message, thus creating an unfavourable image of the tourist products and services in the tourist's mind. Most of the times, the promotion channels, chosen for the tourist products and services, are made of a longer or shorter line of intermediaries. The choice of intermediaries and distribution channels can have a decisive influence in the promotion of the tourist products. That is why the persons who offer tourist products and services in the rural environment should know all the promotion strategies and chose the most efficient ones.

For the lodging units in the rural tourism, *advertising, publications, public relations, local markets* and *internet* are the most important means to communicate with the market and to determine the growth of sales in the region. Thus, communication acquires a special relevance in the tourist area because it creates a certain image for the product and this image will be offered to the client.

1. Advertising contains all the actions that aim at an indirect (non-personal) presentation, either oral or visual, of a message in connection with a product or service.

It is very efficient to reach a certain number of beneficiaries through advertising. The product is known as long as it is presented through different means. The disadvantage is that it needs high expenses. Some of the pension owners do not want to make these expenses because they are afraid they might suffer losses.

Rural tourism in the Iza Valley has the following advertising means, some of them being only in prospect:

- oral communication;
- leaflets and catalogues;
- public relations;
- enterpriser associations;
- internet.

Advertising can also be done at the selling points through leaflets, posters and electronic messages. Posters can be used to decorate the welcoming lounge for the tourists and they can also be offered as gifts to the clients.

2. Publications represent a special kind of printing that includes: editing catalogues, leaflets, brochures, wall planners, tourist guides, service guides, maps, tourist routes, and plans. All these are usually done at county level by the main national tourist organisations or by the people who feel strong about rural tourism.

Tourist and service guides represent the best-known material which inform and make popular the tourist resources in the area. These suggest interesting things to do or to see for the tourist, offering, in the same time, information about how to reach them. The guides need to be made after a segmentation of the targeted markets so that they address to specific market segments (e.g. gastronomic guides for chefs). They can be made either by print or electronically.

Maps, tourist routes and plans must include necessary information for orientation and the main attractions in the area. Unlike maps, plans present larger details and hold information about the local history and art, the main interest points, craft services, gastronomy, and lodging. The routes must contain the area and access possibilities for short visits.

Another way to produce publications is specialized magazines that are really valuable due to their constant monthly up-dates. Their content has up-to-date information which comes to complete the offer of the guides and leaflets. The value of the information offered by specialised magazines lies between information and advertising.

Leaflets act as substitutes for the product, making it possible for the consumer of tourist services to know the product precisely and in detail. They replace advertising, acting as a means of promoting and popularising the tourist area. Leaflets have a strengthening role for purchasing because they are read several times before the decision to purchase. Most leaflets must contain information on booking possibilities and product purchase. They can be offered to the tourists when they are at the site, or during exhibitions, in order to attract potential clients, or at pensions in order to get to know the services and the special offers. It is essential for the client that the leaflets contain a map, so that it is easier for him/her to find the advertised location. Besides the informational value they have, leaflets have an educational role as well, as they make tourists aware of the importance of environment protection. This is the most common way of tourist advertisement in the Iza Valley.

Due to the development and spreading of the electronic communication system, electronic leaflets are available for those who visit the websites.

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3. Public relations are meant to facilitate the process of getting to know the product, to create a better image of the area and of the promoted services, to create a favourable attitude towards it. These can be made during a work session with the staff, during a gastronomic session or during tourist performances. The most common types of public relations are press conferences, official meals and cocktails, leaflet and enterprise journal editing, public performances (e.g. sessions, prelims, seminars), participation in different social and public activities, offering the public direct telephone lines in order to present news and information about the lodging units and their offer, etc.

Those responsible for public relations constantly offer the intermediaries, tourists and press information in order to get a positive image and a favourable attitude for rural tourism.

4. Tourism fairs are cultural events with an important role in the promotion and commercialization of tourism. This is a display and selling form for tourism products, with a periodic and short-term frequency. These fairs can be organised at home or abroad, determining the domestic tourist to discover his/her own country, and the foreign tourist to discover the cultural values of our country. This type of events has come to be a form of promoting the region. It is widely desired to create a brand through which the area becomes well known.

5. Internet has implied a revolution in the field of advertising and tourist distribution. This method offers the client the possibility to choose the area and lodging unit in which to spend his/her holiday, and the enterpriser the advantage to sell the product directly to the client.

The network allows the combination between images, text and sound, offering the possibility of a profound knowledge of the clients' needs by offering them some means of response.

Internet eliminates many of the barriers that existed in the transmission of information to the tourist, especially geographical barriers.

The costs of using the internet are low in comparison with the traditional means of promotion and distribution. Many of the existing web pages contain information about:

- up-to-date information;
- photos of the area or lodging unit (inner and outer ones);
- information about prices;
- the possibility to analyse the information in a foreign language;
- the possibility for on-line reservations;
- the possibility of on-line communication with the clients.

Internet is the most modern method of promotion and the most frequently used for the presentation of the region and its sites.

Table 1. *Types of tourism promotion strategies on Valea Izei*

Type of advertising	Advantages	Disadvantages
Commercials broadcasted on TV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - visual and sound impact - wide audience - existence of specialised channels - existence of special shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high cost according to the length of the commercial, the broadcast hour, the TV channel - could be "missed" by potential tourists - no target market
Commercials broadcasted on the radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sound impact - widespread - low costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - little information - low chances of reception at the moment of broadcasting - no target market

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Catalogues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - expressive images - have periodicity - can be stored in a collection - target market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rather high costs
Brochures and leaflets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have visual images and informative texts - most of the times they have a map of the region with the tourist sights - are small and can be carried in the pocket, especially the ones containing maps - have low costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no target market
Posters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have visual images of different sizes and shapes - have attractive colours - may present the tourist area or the accommodation unit - may be used at the accommodation unit, at travel agencies, at fairs and exhibits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high costs - no target market - little information
Advertising materials sent by mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - target market - present clear information with the possibility of replying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rather high costs
Advertising materials on vehicles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on common transportation vehicles in the country and on the vehicles of travel agencies - quick spread of messages through images with little text - low costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no target market - little information
Banners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - large visual images placed at crossroads or along the roads to indicate locations with tourist sights - during the night they can be illuminated by special systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high costs - no target market - little information
Internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - presents images, texts, short films - offers the visitor of the web page the possibility to interact and also the possibility to get acquainted with his needs - low costs 	
Audio – visual materials (CD, cassettes, films)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - present complex information - visual and sound impact - may be also used as souvenirs - may be followed at the travel agencies, accommodation units, fairs or exhibits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high costs - less used - viewed in groups of tourists

CONCLUSIONS

Promoting tourism in a certain area actually means promoting sales in that area. Thus, we understand that promoting tourism represents the action taken to stimulate it through a variety of means which contribute to the growth of sale in tourism. So, this is mainly about activities that push the product towards the tourist clients (Stăncioiu, 2000).

As the tourist products are not tangible and cannot be transported to the consumer, different promotion strategies are the means for informing future consumers/tourists. The launch and promotion of a tourist product or service is based on selecting the segments of the target market for that product. Regardless of the promotion strategy chosen by the persons who offer rural tourist products and services, the most efficient is the quality which influences the tourist consumption and the tourist development of the rural villages.

When we talk about promotion, especially in tourism, we cannot say that one strategy alone is enough. On the contrary, promotion involves the combination of multiple strategies such as *advertising*, *public relations*, *sales promotion*. Of these, *advertising* and *sales promotion* adapted to the microregion are combined with strategies belonging to non-governmental organisations and small enterprisers.

The increased awareness of clients during the promotional process can be achieved by different means: *advertising based on a brand image*, *advertising based on low costs*, *advertising aimed at specific clients*, etc. Therefore, the promotional policy cannot be done without knowing well the targeted clients and their preferences. Thus, the *target market* the small enterprisers in the Iza Valley Microregion hint at *the young and the adult population*, willing to practise cultural and recreational tourism in a well-preserved space in comparison with the accelerated rhythm of the present society. This market can be either from outside the country or from inside, since services are the same for everybody. At the market level, some services might be distinguished, so that certain markets can be examined during different seasons. Therefore, different activities specific to a certain area can be organised for foreign tourists. For domestic tourists, who know these activities, some thematic tours and routes or activities could be organized that would greatly involve the tourist.

An efficient promotion leads to the transformation of the representative images and ideas into advertising symbols.

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