

INTEGRATING THE “LANDS” OF ROMANIA IN THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT – Starting from the offer of the experience economy – *the experience* – we took into account *the hypothesis* that the “lands” of Romania hosted enough goods, products, and services that one might use in order to create experiences and tourism based on commercialising experiences. We concluded that, first of all, the experience economy offered the means for creating not only a touristic phenomenon, but also the entire development characterised by environmental, social (including cultural), and economic *sustainability*. In this context, integrating the “lands” in the practice of the experience economy could be done through promoting folkloric, architectural, historical, and cultural or ethnographic brands that people could capitalize. Secondly, *territorial cohesion, diminishing social and economic disparities and preventing further lagging behind* of the “land” type regions could be ensured only if the political and administrative factors perceived the opportunity offered by tourism correctly and in due time.

Keywords: experiences, brand, research, development through local initiative

INTRODUCTION AND FORMULATION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Territorial analyses are Regional Geography studies highly used in territorial planning in order to ensure a sustainable development of the analysed territorial entities. One may notice that all territorial planning and arrangement activities use the information that territorial analyses and syntheses offer about the main characteristics of areas. “Lands”, as ethnographical mental spaces, represent an often analysed concept in the regional taxonomy during the last 15 years in Romania. So that “lands” are *resilient*, in the context of the structural and functional changes of the contemporary period (globalisation and the technology of information and communication being the main factors inducing changes), and so that we prevent these “lands” to lag behind and thus enforce territorial inequalities in development, it is high time decision making factors promoted and implemented coherent economic reorientation.

At present, in Romania, towns, rural areas, and peripheral places in general face economic stagnation. This trend is not characteristic only of Romania, but, in general, in Europe, the following phenomena take place: traditional workplaces close; firms relocate to low wage countries; citizens move to bigger cities and growth is located within the metropolises (Lorenzen, 2007).

The question we asked us was if this trend could be turned if such regions as the “lands” could cope with these changes in order to ensure their future development. Ann Lorenzen (2007) asked a similar question in order to identify the factors promoting local development and in order to answer it she discussed three economic paradigms: *the industrial economy* which was material and labour intensive and focused in cities; *the knowledge economy* which was knowledge intensive and focused in metropolises and *the experience economy* which was consumption and mobility intensive and focused in cities and in towns, as well as in peripheral areas (Lorenzen, 2007).

Therefore, taking into account this new major discourse in urban planning, this new technologic-economic paradigm – the experience economy – as well as the role of the creative

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industries, A. Lorenzen (2007) considered that it offered all the necessary answers to create value in comparison to the old way.

Starting from the offer of the experience economy (according to the theory of B.J. Pine II and J.H. Gilmore from 1999) – *the experience* –, we took into account the *research hypothesis* that these “lands” hosted enough goods, products, and services that one might use in order to create experiences and tourism based on commercialising experiences. Economic actors offering touristic services on the private and public stage were the ones to transform these goods, products, and services in aggregates such as experiences that tourists who practice quality rural and cultural tourism would wish for and buy. Offering hard to forget touristic experiences is a necessary step that would ensure plus value to the touristic phenomenon and would make it different from that developed by similar (in what their touristic potential is concerned) spatial entities.

Considering experiences as new sources of economic value and events that get individuals involved in a personal way (Pine II, Gilmore, 1999), as well as the fact that any successful tourism promoter should focus on making a place a distinctive one, we posed the question *how many of the directions for developing tourism in the “lands” of Romania could we include in an experience economy* and we gave a series of answers, taking into account the fact in the cases of *these 18 “lands”* touristic development was not a good for all idea or solution, but the right and, in some cases, the only one.

Eighteen researchers have already realised an analysis of the social and economic issues of the “lands” of transition Romania, that is 18 cases of regional identity dissolution and revival necessity. The studies realised so far as PhD theses (Boțan, 2010; David, 2010; Dezsi, 2006; Ianăș, 2011; Ilieș, Gabriela, 2007; Ilieș, M., 2006b; Ilovan, 2009; Josan, 2009; Pavel, 2012; Pop, 2011; Pușcaș, 2007; Vîlcea, 2012) already analysed the “lands” as ethnographical mental spaces and fragments of the national archetypal mental space (Cocean, 2004-2005; 2008; 2010) and gave solutions for how to prevent the dissolution of traditional communities (see also Cocean, 2007) starting from what created and kept their territorial and spiritual integrity. Their research focuses on the *evolution/involution of these “lands” before and after 1989*. They identified the *features of the development of these “lands”* as mainly rural regions and they also discussed how their identity fragmented and could be rebuilt, while most of them proposed *tourism* (especially rural and cultural tourism) and *space-related identity as the two interlinked driving forces for regional development*. Starting from these studies, we proposed a model for analysing the Romanian “lands” that facilitated their integrating in an experience economy capitalising brands. Such a trend is already exploited in similar Romanian and European communities defined mainly by cultural traits.

Therefore, we considered that one should take into account the following three dimensions in order to build and use brands for economic development: (1) *their past* (“lands” as ethnographical mental spaces and fragments of the national archetypal mental space; their genesis and development according to several explanatory theories and concepts developed by the geographer Pompei Cocean and by the historian Sorin Mitu), (2) *their present* (“lands” as regional “imagined communities” and how to prevent the dissolution of traditional communities starting from what created and kept their territorial and spiritual integrity – drawing on the theories of Pompei Cocean; also interesting and useful identity studies are those of Benedict Anderson, 1991, and of Sorin Mitu, 1997, 2006), and (3) *their future* (development solution: integrating “lands” in the experience economy: definitions, concepts, relevance; resources and imaginations to be exploited for the experience economy in the Romanian “lands”; strategies for future development).

The research results published by P. Cocean (2011), by B.J. Pine II and by J.H. Gilmore (1999) represented the theoretical framework of our paper. Moreover, the promotion of brands as a solution for developing tourism in these regions (Cocean, 2011; Ilieș, 2006a), together with a recent paper (Cocean, Filimon, 2012) focusing on the potential of “lands” to be project territories, gave enough arguments for “lands” to be taken into account by local and regional public authorities and entrepreneurs in the process of creating appropriate local and regional development plans.

In addition, we proposed a discussion on the importance of the experience economy paradigm as the development solution based mainly on tourism (the most frequent solution identified by

previous researchers of the Romanian “lands”; moreover, tourism could be successfully integrated into projects both by local and regional authorities and by academia).

THE OFFER OF THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY: THE EXPERIENCES

To the question of what an experience is, there are a series of answers (experiences are built for costumers): a memorable event (based on interaction between product and consumer); a part of the process of individual identity creation (based on consumer’s involvement who creates his or her identity); it can be told (e.g. a narrative, sharing with other people and thus one creates images) and an experience product (if somebody wants to pay for an experience) (Lorenzen, 2007).

While previous economic offerings – commodities, goods, and services – are external to the buyer, *experiences are inherently personal*, existing only in the individual’s mind who, while consuming an experience, has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level and thus no two people can have the same experience (***, 1998, p. 99). Experiences are events that engage individuals in a personal way and make a plain space a distinctive place (Pine II, Gilmore, 1999, p. 12, p. 42)

The elements necessary for experiences are design, marketing, delivery, ingenuity and innovation, as experiences are at the heart of entertainment business (***, 1998, p. 101).

The steps in designing a memorable experience are the following: theming the experience (giving it a name); harmonising impressions with positive cues (e.g. “your adventure is about to begin”) (the cues make the impressions creating the experience in the customer’s mind; eliminating negative cues is crucial); mixing in memorabilia or physical reminders of an experience with the value that the buyer attaches to remember the experience; engaging all five senses (the rule is that the more senses an experience engages, the more effective and memorable the respective experience can be) (1998, pp. 102-104).

A memorable experience has four dimensions or features that should be included in the design of any experience by the ones that promote and sell them. The first dimension refers to the fact that experiences offer their consumers the possibility to escape. This supposes that “escapist experiences are not just done embarking *from* but voyaging *to*” (Pine II, Gilmore, 1999, p. 34) and the *escapist* aspect of an experience has the function to “immerse” consumers/costumers into activities (e.g. touristic activities). Entrepreneurs in the tourism sector should focus on encouraging their costumers “to do” if they are to become active participants in their experience (Pine II, Gilmore, 1999, p. 40).

The *educational* aspect of an experience is essentially active (like the escapist). Experiences suppose also learning and, as it is now understood, the process of learning requires learner’s full participation. The questions that entrepreneurs should answer is what do they want their costumers “to learn” from the experiences they buy? More exactly, what is the information and which are the activities that will help costumers to engage in the exploration of knowledge and skills? (Pine II, Gilmore, 1999, p. 40).

Entertainment and *aesthetics* are passive dimensions of experiences. When costumers are entertained, they are only responding to (enjoying, laughing at) the experience. The questions is what can entrepreneurs do by way of entertainment (how to make the experience more fun and enjoyable) to get their costumers “to stay”? (Pine II, Gilmore, 1999, p. 40).

The richest and memorable experiences encompass all the four above-mentioned dimensions (Pine II, Gilmore, 1999, p. 40). In conclusion, *the characteristics of experiences* refer to customers’ participation (passive or active) and to their connection to the respective experience (absorption, immersion, e.g. escapist experiences) (***, 1998, p. 101).

PLANNING FOR THE EXPERIENCE “LAND”

In the process of planning for *the experience “land”*, the first component to be assessed is represented by *the resources of the respective “land” for the experience economy*. In the experience economy people capitalise on *places*, they obtain profit more exactly derived the role of places (places seen as a resource in economy). All these help people develop identity and one may promote places through exploiting their authenticity and through development policies: identity creation; built and

natural environment; historical and new places; streets, malls, squares, parks, woods, beach; castles; museums; theatres; cities, etc. (Lorenzen, 2007). The more place-bound the products are, the more value they have (for instance, a traditional/historic shop has high experience value), the more experiences for identity building and image creation (this is important for local and regional development) (Lorenzen, 2007).

The atmosphere created is very important that is why *beside places there are also other resources to use in order to create experiences*: events (concerts, festivals, sport and culture events); activities (hiking, sport, arts and crafts, shopping); services (restaurants, cafés, galleries, wellness), and symbols (used for re-imaging, branding, identity creation, consolidating, and advertising/promoting) (Lorenzen, 2007).

The resources offered by “lands” for the experience economy are the following: collective memory; history (historical events, personalities); ethnographic identity, know-how, traditions; traditional activities; traditional housing and genuine rural patrimony; monuments and archaeological findings.

Planning for the experience “land” supposes integrating experience in development and strategic planning (Lorenzen, 2007) and implicitly in the products that entrepreneurs sell. In order to develop “lands” according to the experience economy paradigm, public and private actors should create and implement key projects, use and/or develop resources and competences, create or use local and global networks, and get involved into processes of re-imaging, reinventing and regenerating settlements (Lorenzen, 2007).

Planning for the experience “land” supposes (Lorenzen, 2007): focusing on identity matters (the experience economy focuses on identity; for instance, using history for creating events means branding), that is a feeling of belonging and, in this case, identity is a resource for any kind of development; finding your own profile on the market; creating a sustainable region through local partnerships and through a bottom-up approach; the local and global entrepreneurs should be able to create convincing experiences; creating models or ways for collective action, the solution consisting of locality or place-based approach.

The resources for the experience economy in the Romanian “lands” and the strategies for future development could be promoted and based on the building or *using of brands* (Cocean, 2011) *for local and regional development*.

In an advocacy for the Romanian “lands” as project territories, Pompei Cocean and Luminița Filimon (2012) considered that these genuine geographical regions researched by geographers, based on authenticity and territorial coherence (and so opposed to territories artificially called regions) should be taken into account by practitioners and the results of geographers’ research applied in territorial development. Practitioners should develop projects of sustainable local development based on governance and preservation, while following a bottom-up logic of integrated development strategies in the context of the European regional policy for 2014-2020, which legitimates local communities as actors in their own development (p. 65). At present, these ideas are part of the New Regionalism paradigm (Benedek, 2009; Scott, 2009; Sagan, 2009).

P. Cocean offered optimistic answers for the uncertain future of the “land” type regions (2011, pp. 209-220). In this process, of planning their future, his argumentation based on the significance of the following two syntagms he considered: *polyvalent brand* and *territorial cohesion*. He demonstrated their relevance for maintaining territorial development and for revitalising some of these ethnographical mental spaces. Considering “lands” as models of territorial cohesion and perfect containers of a diverse tourism phenomenon (2011, pp. 209-214), as well as brands (folkloric, architectural, symbolist or historical, cultural or ethnographical brands) (2011, pp. 215-220) (Figure 1), P. Cocean predicted for them a future development where their features were capitalised (in order to maintain their territorial identity and the welfare of their inhabitants) only if political and administrative factors perceived them correctly and in due time and capitalised their resources in a sustainable way.

“Embedding goods in an experiential brand” and “creating a brand image emphasizing the experience customers can have surrounding the purchase, use, or ownership of a good” are essential in the experience economy (Pine II, Gilmore, 1999, p. 17).

The elements used in creating a tourism destination brand are the identifying elements (e.g. symbols) and the touristic motivation elements (e.g. the main service provided, landscape, touristic activities), with information built for the five senses: visual, acoustic, olfactory, gustative, and tactile. The image of a tourism destination brand is a result (is built) of the five senses (Ilieş, 2006a, pp. 257-258, p. 273). The process of creating the tourism destination image consists of creating a mental image for potential tourists (Ilieş, 2006a, p. 279). Therefore, “[a] brand destination is a collection of perceptions and experiences that clients posses and associate to a certain place” (Ilieş, 2006a, p. 274, *apud* www.travelukon.ca).



Figure 1. The “Lands” of Romania (Cocean, P., 2011, p. 228)

I. The Land of Oaș; II. The Land of Maramureș; III. The Land of Chioar; IV. The Land of Lăpuș; V. The Land of Năsăud; VI. The Land of Dorna; VII. The Land of Silvania; VIII. The Land of Beiuș; IX. The Land of Zarand; X. The Land of the Moți; XI. The Land of Hațeg; XII. The Land of Amlaș; XIII. The Land of Făgăraș; XIV. The Land of Bârsa; XV. The Land of Vrancea; XVI. The Land of Loviște; XVII. The Land of Almăj; XVIII. The Land of Severin

There are two factors that work for building the identification image of a tourism destination brand: the promotion channels and the tourists (who could be themselves promotion channels) that have a contact with the touristic product within the consume area (Ilieş, 2006a, p. 274).

Branding supposes assuming an identity by the respective region, an identity that the region promotes in the form of an image which includes the representative elements of the respective area (symbols, myths, places where events take place). Promoting this image may be realised directly by the region itself or through the one of the territorial unit the respective region is part of (Ilieş, 2006a, p. 251). Promoting a tourism destination is the second step after the creation of the tourism destination brand. In this procees, the following two dimensions are important: (a) permanent efforts in the fields of facilities, services, management and advertising and (b) the history of the respective image or the manner in which people perceived the respective region as a tourism destination (Ilieş, 2006a, p. 250).

Those in charge with development projects should achieve the following *objectives for creating and capitalising the tourism destination image*: “knowing the necessary methods in order to build the image for identifying a tourism destination brand; analysing the elements that generate motivation when selecting a tourism destination; obtaining ideas and information in order to approach the tourism destination according to the human five senses; achieving knowledge and methods necessary in order to realise the pieces used for advertising materials about the tourism destination brand; noticing differences between pieces, support and channels in the communication process of the tourism destination image” (Ilieş, 2006a, p. 243).

Among the most significant elements that generate *touristic motivation* when selecting a tourism destination, M. Ilieş identified the following (2006a, p. 253): “gastronomy, landscape, atmosphere, rare features, spectacular features, ethnography, inhabitants’ life style, spirituality, inhabitants’ features, hospitality, touristic objectives, rest + relaxation, active rest, treatment, entertainment, recreation, comfort, accessibility, touristic infrastructure, climate + weather, quality of services, touristic animation, prices, wilderness, etc.” Gastronomy includes healthy food, traditional specialties, well-known chefs, gastronomic variety, quality products (Ilieş, 2006a, p. 253). He also defined atmosphere as made of “diverse mixtures of the above-mentioned elements, so that tourists may achieve certain satisfaction levels” (Ilieş, 2006a, p. 256). In addition, the landscape of the traditional village generates touristic motivation (Ilieş, 2006a, p. 254) in the case of “land” type regions.

IMPACT OF THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

Whether a “land” has become or not an experience “land” is reflected in *soft and hard indicators of its development trend*. For instance, in the case of the soft indicators, one could assess them using qualitative methods (e.g. questionnaire surveys, focus groups). Such soft indicators are: the atmosphere (pride, fun, creativity); exposure in the media; the degree of civic participation as compared to the period before; people’s creativity; symbols of urban and rural regeneration; new or stronger tourist attractions as a result of projects focused on creating experiences (Lorenzen, 2007).

Among the hard indicators of development, the following two appear most often: unemployment decrease and new jobs. In the case of the implementation of experience economy activities, these new jobs mainly appear in services and manufacturing (Lorenzen, 2007).

The impact of the experience economy may be identified while analysing the capitalisation of patrimony resources (in a broad sense, so both material and spiritual). This capitalisation of patrimony resources has impact on several sectors: tourism, building and construction, high-quality traditional products, handicraft and other traditional knowledge, culture, environment and life quality connected employment (see also Salvador, Lúcio, Fernandes, 2007). To understand the impact of the experience economy one should be aware that tourism is only a part of experience economy, but it is not the core, as beside tourism the experience economy includes also the creative industry and the cultural industry (Lorenzen, 2007; Sparre-Ulrich, 2007).

We conclude that the poles of the experience economy are supported by resources, by public and private actors, by activities, by products, by experiences and by employing territorial marketing as nowadays an enlarged and integrated vision is demanded and this may be implemented by means of projects that surpass the category of nostalgic and past speeches about patrimony (Salvador, Lúcio, Fernandes, 2007). This is done through accessing European Union programmes and through marketing places, through renovation processes, while it is strongly recommended that a set of case studies should be launched in order to test their viability (Salvador, Lúcio, Fernandes, 2007, p. 15).

CONCLUSION

We concluded that, first of all, the experience economy offered the means for creating a tourism phenomenon and regional development characterised by environmental, social (including cultural), and economic *sustainability*. In this context, integrating the “lands” in the economic practices of the experience economy could be done through promoting folkloric, architectural, historical, and cultural or ethnographic brands that people could capitalize. Secondly, *territorial*

cohesion, diminishing social and economic disparities and preventing their further lagging behind could be ensured (a) by *reviving territorial development* in these mainly rural regions in order to maintain both territorial identity and to create better living standards for the respective communities and (b) *only if the political and administrative factors perceived the opportunity offered by tourism correctly and in due time*. Thirdly, territorial identity is a development engine (economic and social at the regional scale). Finally, universities could create relevant development strategies in territorial planning, including the concepts of the experience economy for the revival of the Romanian “lands”.

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