

## **DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION'S (DMO'S) ROLES, STRUCTURES AND PERFORMANCE – COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

*Adina Letiția NEGRUȘA<sup>1</sup>*

*Nicolae LUPU<sup>2</sup>*

*Monica Maria COROȘ<sup>3</sup>*

*Cosmin Mihai MOCA<sup>4</sup>*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Destination success is a combination of tangible (product, location, and accessibility) and less tangible attributes (service and community experience). All of these factors determine the visitor's experience. While some of them are beyond the control of DMOs, for a large part, such organizations can assure their managerial process. Therefore, the managers of DMOs can have a strong influence upon destination success. The aim of this paper is to investigate how a DMO's activity can contribute to a destination's competitiveness and success. In an attempt to provide a holistic view of the DMO concept, the paper examines and reviews DMOs' roles and specific activities, as well as also the relationship between a DMO's success and a destination's success. By the means of the DMO's performance evaluation, one can identify areas for improvement in economy, efficiency, capacity and effectiveness of achieving strategic and operational results, which can increase a destination's competitiveness.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Destination Management Organization (DMO), performance, sustainability, tourism destination, comparative analysis.*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** *L83, Z32*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Tourism sector is considered an important driver for economic growth, accounting ten percent of the world GDP, and, in some countries, being the leading economic sector. Moreover, the globalization phenomenon, which influenced all economic and social areas, both demand and offer behaviours, with its associated trends, put pressures on tourism destinations to obtain better position in a highly competitive market, either by cost leadership or product differentiation (Baker & Cameron, 2008). As consequence the management of destination, Destination Management Organization (DMO) and the ways to improve their performances has become vital subjects especially for many mature European destinations.

Given its natural and cultural resources, Romania can be considered an attractive tourist destination, but despite its generous heritage its overall tourist performance is far from being satisfactory. Considering Romania's problems but also its tourist potential, Germany has been identified as an adequate destination to be used in a comparative case study analysis. (Both countries enjoy a rich and varied natural and cultural heritage, presenting evenly distributed landforms: plains, hills, plateaus, and mountains, rivers and lakes, the Danube, seashores, medieval

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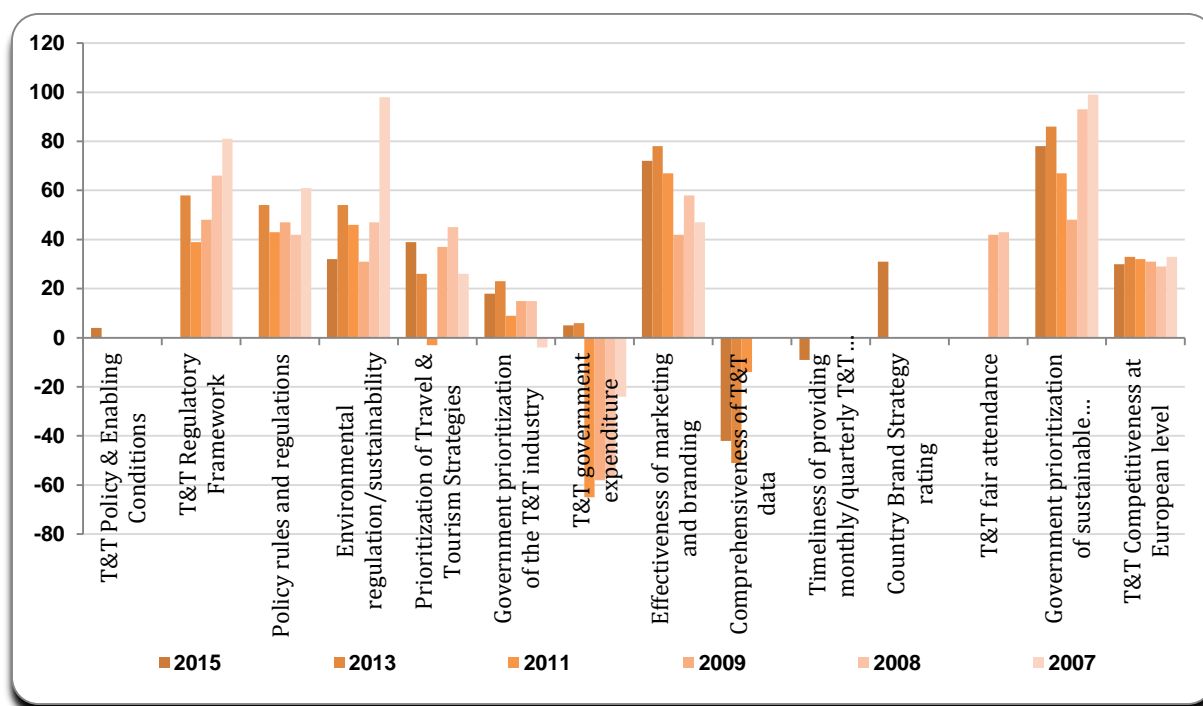
<sup>1</sup>Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania, adina.negrusa@tbs.ubbcluj.ro

<sup>2</sup>The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania, nicolae.lupu@com.ase.ro

<sup>3</sup>Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania, monica.coros@tbs.ubbcluj.ro

<sup>4</sup>Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania, cosmin.moca@gmail.com

towns, picturesque rural landscapes, natural and national parks, UNESCO World Heritage sites, etc.). In this context, relying on the data provided by the World Economic Forum (all issues of the *Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report*, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2015 volumes) an analysis concerning Romania's and Germany's tourist competitiveness has been undertaken. The two destinations' rankings are synthesized below, in Figure 1. While Germany ranks among the top 3 worldwide and European countries, Romanian tourism has an average global competitiveness but ranks among the last European countries. The question that arises is: *What makes the difference in terms of competitiveness?*



**Figure 1. Romania vs Germany, ranking differences; negative values are optimum (2007-2015)**

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the *Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report* (2007-2015) (Crotti and Misrahi, 2015; Blanke and Chiesa, 2013; Blanke and Chiesa, 2011; Blanke and Chiesa, 2009; Blanke and Chiesa, 2008; Blanke and Chiesa, 2007)

One may easily observe that Romania is by far outperformed by Germany for most pillars and indexes. Furthermore, as the previous analyses have revealed, Romania has proven to be inefficient and ineffective both in terms of using its marketing budget and in reaching its target market when promoting the country's tourism. Basically, most of Romania's international tourist arrivals are generated by its neighbours, namely: Bulgaria, Hungary, Ukraine and Moldova. In fact, since 1995, Romania has managed to attract very low percentage of the total international tourists from its target markets who have departed abroad. Except for Bulgaria (with around 20 % of the total international departures of Bulgarians abroad, attracted to Romania) and Hungary (with some 10 %), all other markets have generated low percentages: Italy, Israel and Austria (between 1 and 2 %), respectively Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, UK and USA (less than 1 %); moreover, Russia and Ukraine have registered a continuously declining trend (Coroş, 2015). When it comes to the usage of the marketing and promotion budgets, efficiency seems not to come in question: despite the fact that impressive financial resources have been dedicated to Romania's various and inconsistent branding attempts, their contribution to the country's budget are rather negligible (Coroş, 2015). Obviously, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) fit such a context perfectly, as:

- DMOs are very often partially or fully funded by the states;
- DMOs can even belong to the formal governmental structure (as state agencies);
- DMOs play a key role in bringing together other public agencies, tourism producers and even destination communities for purposes closely related to tourist destination development and/or marketing; and
- of course, DMOs do not own the tourist products they develop, promote and sell (Cooper & Hall, 2008).

Moreover, as Shkira and Qirici point out, over the past nearly 15 years, at destination/local level "tourism stakeholders have gradually shifted focus from the traditional marketing and promotional functions to the more coordinated strategic approach of destination management." (Shkira & Qirici, 2013).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW: DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION – A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

According to Minguzzi "destination management consists of the integrated management of those processes necessary in establishing an exchange between a destination and its visiting tourists. Therefore, on one hand, it involves the management of services offered and tourist attraction factors, while, on the other hand, managing demand, dependent on tourist flow and customer satisfaction"(Minguzzi, 2006). In a more integrated approach, Anderson defines the destination management process based on four key elements: the destination offering (visitor experience, destination image and attractiveness); the visitor mix (market research); marketing communications (awareness and promotion); and organisational responsibility (leadership and partnership)(Anderson, 2000).

If at the beginning only marketing activities for increasing the success and attractiveness of a tourism destination were considered, later on the role of the DMO goes beyond these, and, today, other management activities are considered specific for DMOs (Presenz et al., 2005). Although, DMOs have undertaken many marketing activities but their role is, in fact, much larger: to become strategic leaders in destination development (UNWTO, 2007). The subject determines a strong dynamic of the specialized literature in the field of tourism destination management. In this respect, the analysis conducted by Morrison has been updated, as observed in Table 1 (Morrison, 2013). Thus, nearly 98 % of the papers covering *destination management* have been written over the past fifteen and a half years, with some 69 % of the literature dedicated to this subject being produced beginning with 2010. Further, concerning *destination marketing*, almost 97 % of the literature was generated since 2000, while around 67 % of the papers have resulted since 2010. *Destination branding* is a somewhat newer subject, thus enjoying a lower representation; a significant percentage of the literature on this topic (99.6 %) has been produced between 2000 and 2016, with nearly 77 % in the time-span of 2010 and 2016. Even newer is the subject of *Destination Management Organisation/Organization* (DMO); both spellings have been considered for accuracy reasons. Obviously, the specialized literature has developed especially beginning with the year of 2000, with about 99.5 % of the papers being produced in this time-frame. Like in all other cases, most of the contributions were elaborated between 2010 and 2016 (around 77 %).

Given that more and more researchers(Morrison, 2013)(Anderson, 2000)(Minguzzi, 2006) argue the importance of relations between the different actors of the tourism destination, Minguzzi, Volgger and Pechlaner, showed that the success of a tourist destination strategy lies in the power of creating a strong network of stakeholders, which include the citizens, entrepreneurs, leaders and community (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014)(Pearce, 2015). Thus, the critical role played by the DMO is to enhance the coordination and integration of all of the elements of the destination mix based on a coherent tourism strategy(Minguzzi, 2006)(Morrison, 2013)(UNWTO, 2007).

**Table 1. Literature on Destination Management, Destination Marketing, Destination Branding, and Destination Management Organisation/Organization: 1970-2016**

<b>Time Period</b>	<b><i>Destination Management</i></b>	<b><i>Destination Marketing</i></b>	<b><i>Destination Branding</i></b>	<b><i>Destination Management Organisation/Organization</i></b>
1970-1979	0	12	1	0
1980-1989	12	60	6	1
1990-1999	285	491	18	3 + 6
2000-2009	3,970	5,140	1,480	156 + 290
2010-2016*	9,260	11,700	5,000	478 + 1,080
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,527</b>	<b>17,403</b>	<b>6,505</b>	<b>2,014</b>
2000-2016 (%)	98 %	97 %	99.6 %	99.5 %
2010-2016 (%)	69 %	67 %	77 %	77 %

\* To the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2016

Source: (Morrison, 2013) based on Google Scholar (excluding citations and patents).

Wray et al. characterize effective DMOs pointing out that these should have: a long-term vision of destination development; the capacity to clearly designate responsibilities to stakeholders and to develop appropriate operational structures; and a transparent and responsible decision-making process, which involves all stakeholders (Wray et al., 2010). The UNWTO describes how destination governance can take place:

- within a department of a single public authority;
- as a public authorities' partnership, serviced by partners;
- as a public authorities' partnership, serviced by a joint management team;
- public authority/authorities' outsourcing delivery to private companies;
- public-private partnership (often as) a non-profit organization; or
- association/company established by a private-public partnership and/or trading, exactly for specific purposes.

An increasing number of DMOs, have nowadays become more complex structures, re-joining numerous public and private sector stakeholders (UNWTO, 2007): national/regional/local governmental/public authorities; agencies established for economic development; town centre management organizations; national park management; providers of transport services; tourist attractions, events and cultural organizations; providers of hospitality services (accommodation, restoration, leisure and retail operations); intermediaries (tour operators, travel agencies, organisers of events, cultural organizations, etc.); agencies representing the destination; media; local/regional tourism consortia and partnerships; agencies encouraging and supporting business development; organizations focusing on developing skills.

Because destination management and governance can hardly be controlled hierarchically, like it is in the case of private companies or in public organizations (Laws et al., 2011) DMOs have to enhance stakeholders' collaboration towards joint strategies and actions. They are expected to "bring together resources and expertise and a degree of independence and objectivity to lead the way forward"(UNWTO, 2007). Therefore, DMOs have to be able to: identify and articulate collective interests, establish links, motivate stakeholders willing to work together, coordinate negotiations (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). Numerous papers (Jamal & Getz, 1995); (Beritelli & Laeser, 2011); (Ford et al., 2012) consider that DMOs' success in achieving effectively their objectives depends on the stakeholder's acceptance degree for DMO's authority and legitimate power. This power provides a solid basis for future strategic actions and can be obtained based on reputation, social recognition or acceptance. Consequently, they "must develop a high level of skill in developing and managing partnerships" (UNWTO, 2007) as they have the overall responsibility for the coordination and integration of the destination mix elements (physical products: attractions,

facilities, transportation, and general infrastructure; people: guests and hosts; packages: organised by tour-operators, travel agencies and others; and programs: events, festivals, activities, etc.).

Although DMOs have begun to be theorized only during the past 15 years, Morrison explains that they have in fact existed all-over the globe, in various forms for more than a century (either as governmental departments, or as quasi-departmental structures)(Morrison, 2013). Anderson considers that a *destination management organization* (DMO) can be any entity mandated to undertake the process of tourism destination management, either a convention and visitor bureau, a national/regional tourism office or a national tourist organization/administration(Anderson, 2000).

Basically DMOs can function at any of the following levels:

- at *national* level, as NTAs (National Tourism Authorities), as NTOs (National Tourism Organizations) or as NTBs (National Tourist Boards), having responsibilities related to the management and marketing of national tourism;
- at *regional/provincial/state/county* level, as DMOs or RTOs, being in charge of the management and marketing of tourism in specific geographic/historic areas, defined for that purpose; the area may, not must, be an administrative/local government region (e.g. county, state/land or province);
- at *local* level, contributing to the development and promotion of tourism in areas limited to a city/town/village.

Most commonly, DMOs get involved in: tourism product development activities, providing services related to the development of physical resources; human resource development and vocational training; assistance and advice for hospitality and tourism businesses; regulating of the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2007). A more synthetic view of the specific activities and roles of DMO developed by Ritchie and Crouch, 2003 and (Presenza et al., 2005), as listed in the Table 2, brings up three main categories and also potential functions in the organization structure of a DMO:

**Table 2. The Roles and Specific Activities of DMOs**

<i>Role</i>	<i>Specific Activities</i>
<b><i>External Destination Marketing (EDM)</i></b>	DMOs manage the selling of destinations and of their tourist products, carrying out activities such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- web-marketing;</li> <li>- advertising, both classic and based on new media;</li> <li>- familiarisation tours;</li> <li>- sales blitzes;</li> <li>- direct sales;</li> <li>- direct mail;</li> <li>- cooperative programs;</li> <li>- events, festivals, conferences, fairs, etc.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Internal Development Role (IDD)</i></b>	DMOs undertake all other types of activities for the maintenance and development of the destination, except for marketing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- visitor services, including visitor management;</li> <li>- measuring and evaluating visitor satisfaction;</li> <li>- information and market research, with the purpose of helping stakeholders better understand: market demands, industry supply, and the existing gaps between the two parts;</li> <li>- ensure high-quality development of human resources;</li> <li>- resource stewardship for sustainable destination management and development;</li> <li>- contribute to the attraction and raising of financial resources, including venture capital;</li> </ul>
<b><i>Overall Destination Management (ODM)</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- coordination of stakeholders;</li> <li>- management of crises.</li> </ul>

Source: (Presenza et al., 2005).



In the process of performing efficiently DMO's functions and activities an important role will be played on one hand by the DMO's networking capability to transform its social acceptance into authority at the community level (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014), and on the other hand by organizational structure (Longjit & Pearce, 2013).

The chosen way of organizing activities should fit with the particular contexts of the DMOs. Consistent with the destination's core competencies, DMOs can apply differentiated goals or objectives and outperformed specialization tasks that request flexible structures. According to Pearce (1992), some of the organizations are mono-functional, focusing on a single function such as marketing, visitor management or destination planning, while others develop a multi-functional approach. Those which specialize in one or few specific functions tend to be more efficient, due to a very clear and simple set of objectives, high productivity and specialized staff, less complexity of the collaborative networks and a very precise budgetary control.

In this case it is difficult to create an overall vision for the entire destination and to identify new opportunities in the market. These are outperformed by the multi-functional structures (Pearce, 2015).

### **3. METHOD**

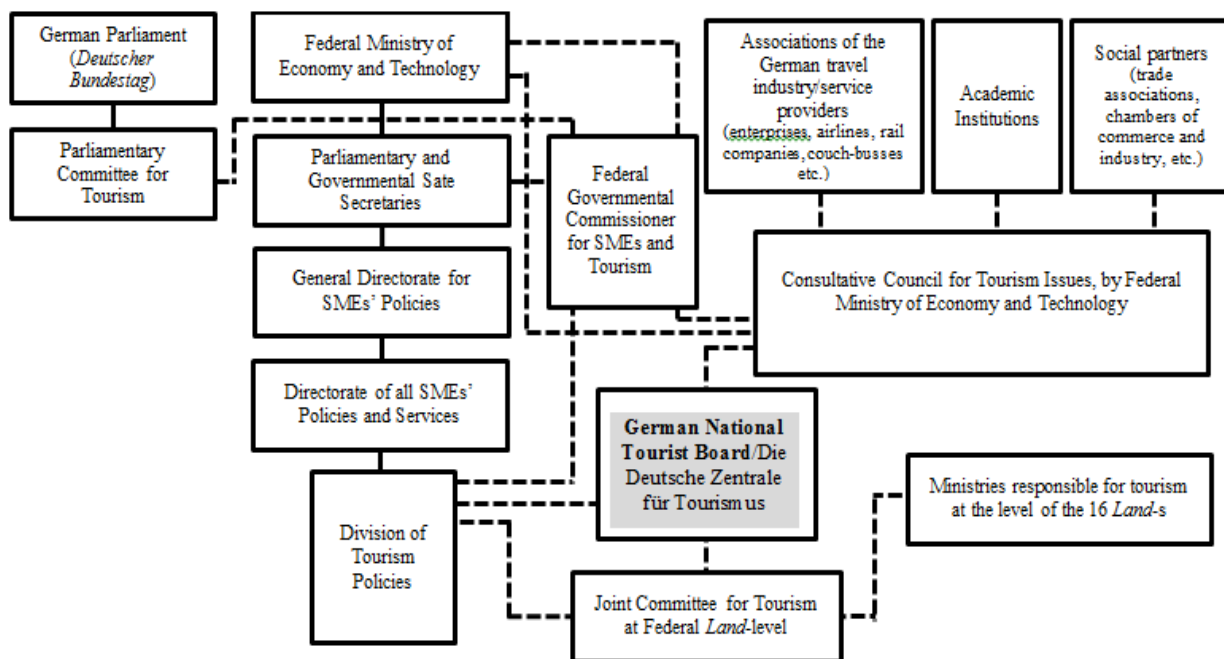
Starting from the theoretical aspects discussed above and bearing in mind Romania's rather poor performance in terms of tourism competitiveness and marketing effectiveness, a comparative analysis has been undertaken. The case study method has been considered the most appropriate for the current paper, as it enables the authors to identify, reveal, and discuss various (quite heterogeneous) aspects related to the structure, roles, and performance of DMOs.

### **4. RESULTS AND MAIN CONCLUSIONS**

Given the performance gap between Romania's and Germany's tourism, a brief analysis concerning the two destinations' NTOs is further carried out. Figure 2 illustrates the complex structure of Germany's National Tourist Board (further referred to as GNTB), while Figure 3 reveals the structure of Romania's NTO (currently subordinated to The National Authority for Tourism, NAT). German tourism is managed by a complex and highly efficient structure. The general policy-framework is elaborated at national level through the cooperation of all 16 Land-Ministries, under the coordination of the Federal Ministry of Economy and Technology, which facilitates the communication among tourism business associations and various providers of hospitality services. Moreover, they all cooperate for the development and implementation of projects that would eventually lead to higher competitiveness and innovation among tourism-related SMEs. Nearly 40 large actors cooperate within the Joint Committee; from among these, some of the most important ones are: the Federal Association of the German Tourism Industry, an umbrella association for the German tourism industry (BTW), the German Hotel and Restaurant Association (DEHOGA or IHA), a huge business association with more than 75,000 members; the German Automobile Club (ADAC); the German Travel Association (DRV), a German leading lobby group that supports the interests of travel agencies and tour-operators.

The key element of the structure is the German National Tourist Board (GNTB). Its responsibilities are mainly related to international marketing activities, aiming at increasing the awareness and attractiveness of German tourism and destinations on the 30 international key source-markets; the brand's core elements are: destination for holidays, business travel and visits to friends and family. Obviously, the federal state assumes most of the expenses, providing most of the financial resources, currently amounting nearly 30 Million Euros. The GNTB carries out activities focusing on two distinctive directions: international marketing activities and the development and implementation of projects aiming to enhance the performance of tourism SMEs. The GNTB presents 30 offices abroad but also cooperates closely with the 16 tourism marketing organizations

developed at the level of each Land. The success of Germany's tourism promotion is also due to the cooperation of the GNTB with other associations, too, such as: the German investment promotion agency GTAI (Germany Trade & Invest) and AUMA, the Association of the German Trade Fair Industry, respectively with marketing organizations developed at regional and/or local levels and integrated in the German Tourism Association (Deutscher Tourismusverband e.V. or DTV), which assumes coordination and counselling roles (German Government, 2016) and (OECD 1, 2014).

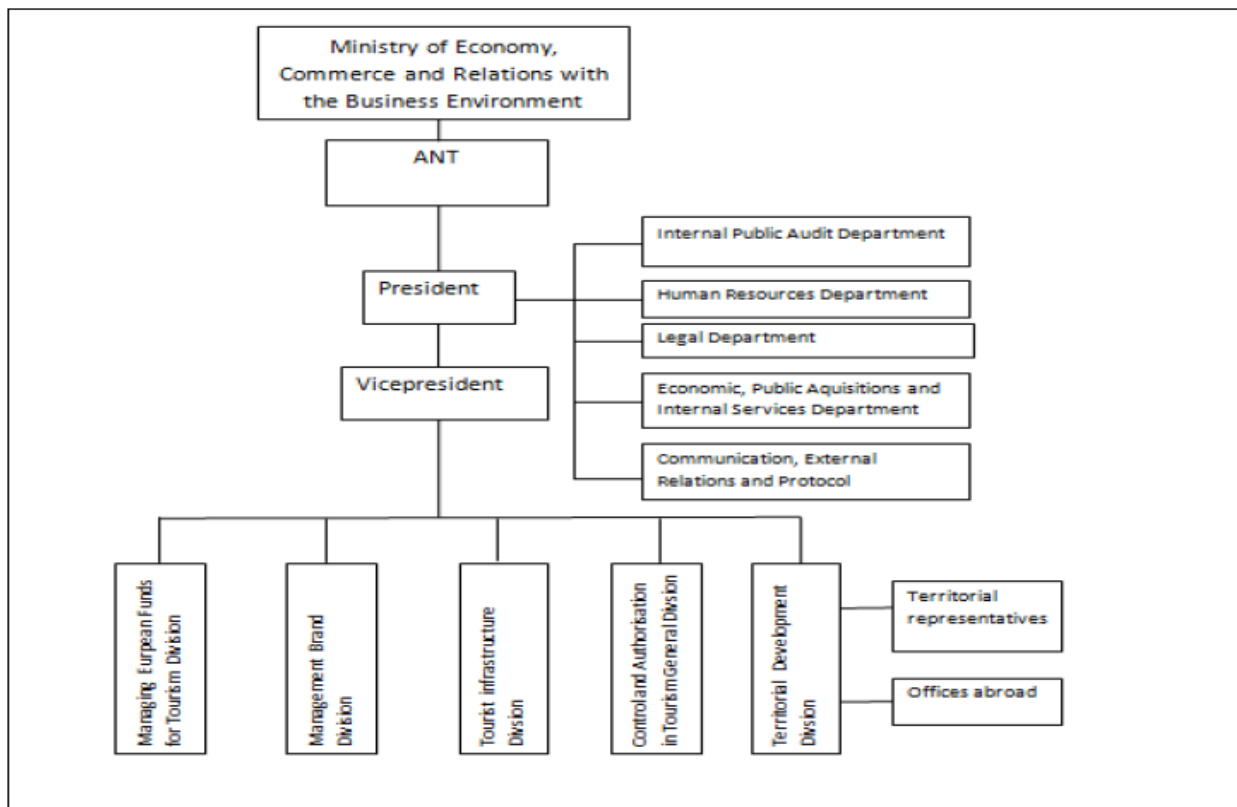


**Figure 2. Institutions involved in Germany's tourist activity management**

Source: (German Government, 2016).

When it comes to Romania's organization of tourism-related governance, things become rather unclear, the organizational structure seeming to lack coherence. As previously shown (Coroş, 2015), the lack of a stable political and legal framework, together with a poor management of the destination's development, are closely related to Romania's hospitality industry poor performance. The continuously changing statute of the highest authority of Romanian tourism which from time to time becomes either the National Authority for Tourism and is integrated in all sorts of ministries or is a ministry itself cannot but contribute to the sector's problems. Currently, the central administrative authority of tourism (the National Authority for Tourism) functions under the Ministry of Economy, Commerce and Relations with the Business Environment. Its responsibilities cover issues such as:

- the draw-up and the implementation of national tourism strategies (unfortunately, just as unstable as the political structure itself),
- ensuring Romania's promotion as a tourist destination (especially internationally but also at national level),
- developing destinations and tourist products,
- contributing and coordinating the development of the tourist infrastructure,
- authorizing and ranking, monitoring and controlling all providers of hospitality services (lodging facilities, food-serving units, travel agents and tour operators, tourist guides and providers of leisure services, beaches, etc.);
- coordinating the absorption and implementation of EU projects and evaluating their impact.



**Figure 3. Institutions involved in Romanian's tourist activity management**

*Source:* (Romanian Government, 2016).

Analysing the areas of responsibilities used in the organization structure results that the main objective for the Romanian NAT is to develop a large and wide-ranging tourism infrastructure. This is supported by a special attention toward obtaining financing through European funds. Strategic planning remains in the top, usually done by international expert consultant companies, but without the direct implication of the tourism stakeholders, like associations of tourism industry providers. More centralized than the German national Tourist Board, and state-controlled rather than public-private based, the Romanian National Authority for Tourism consists of: 13 representatives established at regional level (having primarily administrative and legal roles but, at declarative level, also meant to collaborate with the local public administrations, private sector and tourism NGOs for implementing the national tourism policy) and of 11 offices abroad responsible for Romania's promotion as an international tourist destination (NTO), on the country's main target-markets, in the following cities: Rome, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Madrid, London, Warsaw, Moscow, New York, Beijing, and Tel Aviv. A number of 8 priority markets have been identified: Germany, Italy, France, Great Britain, Austria, Russia, USA, and Hungary, which are completed by 11 opportunity markets: the Netherlands, Spain, Poland, Belgium, Sweden, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Serbia, Republic of Moldova, China, and Japan.

Further on, again, rather at a declarative level, than from a practical perspective, there are supposed to function 41 bodies at county, supported by at least the same number of city-based structures and continuing with city/town-located (314 units) and village-based offices (in some 2,852 local councils, which, in reality, do not function, or even, exist in many cases). Some of the most important responsibilities at local level include, according to Article 20 (Romanian Government, 1998) county-bodies have responsibilities, in the field of tourism, such as: making inventories of the main tourist resources; the management of the local registers of tourism heritage; establishing the priorities for the multi-annual marketing and program development programs; officially ranking ski-slopes; contributing to the improvement of quality in tourist services; granting equal access to



resources. Even more, tourist departments can be established by and within public administrative bodies at the local level. (Romanian Government, 2016) and (OECD 2, 2014). Consequently their role is limited to implement some central programs, established for the entire country, to control the services provided by private agents and to promote potential programs in order to attract members for them. In comparison with which are supposed to be the DMO's roles, established in table 2, can be concluded that these regional offices are very limited involved in the tourism development of destinations.

In conclusion in order to implement efficiently and more productively the tourism master plan it is requested to create decentralized regional divisions, with the direct involvement in decision process of the other stakeholders from the destination and to create customized programs and actions for that region. Therefore, an organic organizational structure, characterized by an extremely flat reporting structure within the National Authority for Tourism, but with more interactions among the stakeholders identified at the local/regional level, could be a feasible solution. Because in this circumstances the interactions among employees tend to be horizontally across the organization rather than vertically, decisions are more likely to be made by consensus among groups of employees and stakeholders, a larger amount of information is shared among employees and thus results better cooperation between divisions.

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