

# COMPARATIVE STUDY REGARDING EU URBAN AREAS TOURISM PROMOTION USING OFFICIAL WEBSITES – EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES FOR ROMANIA’S CAPITAL CITY\*

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## Abstract

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the importance of Internet has gained dimensions which cannot be ignored both in respect of the business environment, as well as in respect of recreational activities. As a result of technological development which made superior technology available for a large part of population, Internet has become one of the most employed marketing channels. In these conditions, the urban destinations for tourists, in order to face the fierce international competition, had to use as a solution the promotion over the Internet, which ultimately makes the difference between success and failure. The present study aims to research a series of practices for tourism promotion of leading cities of the EU (London, Paris and Rome) by the creation and use of official websites, in order to identify a set of best practices which will allow the know-how transfer for building a tourism website for the Romanian capital.

**Keywords:** urban areas, competition, urban tourism, Internet, website for tourism promotion.

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## 1. Introduction

In August 2011, the Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism (MDRT) has presented the guidelines for the tourism marketing plan of Bucharest, which once implemented will lead to (MDRT, 2011b): an increase in the average number of tourists by 4.8%; an increase in the annual average number of stays in the accommodation spaces in Bucharest by 6.8%; and an increase of Bucharest awareness by a minimum of 15%, on at least three of the main tourist markets.

The research conducted by Detente Consultants<sup>1</sup> has concluded that the development of Bucharest tourism needs to be focused on business tourism and city-break kind of tourism (which includes other tourism products as well, such as cultural tourism, well-being tourism, or the tourism generated by events) (MDRT, 2011a).

Taking into account that Bucharest is known as the capital with the best entertainment from South-East Europe, the marketing plan recommends to position Bucharest as a known destination among (1) young people, thanks to the night life, dance and free spirit, and (2) among all age categories which can be attracted through cultural events (for example, "George Enescu" Festival), patrimony (museums, old buildings, historic sites), tours in the city surroundings and even Spa tourism, Spa and wellness (by exploiting the thermal waters from the north of Bucharest).

Therefore, the main tourist categories for Bucharest are: business people, young people, city-breakers, senior groups and thematic-business audiences (consumers of medical and wellness tourism). These categories fall into the pattern of tourist-explorer who is willing to try and discover new destinations.

Detente Consultants has recommended several lines of tourism development in Bucharest (MDRT, 2011a): creating a travel office in Bucharest with a central role in implementing the strategy; support for business tourism; creation, support and promotion of large cultural events; creation of network partner cities; promotion of Bucharest in the online environment as tourist destination; developing information systems by using digital technologies.

These recommendations need to be put in practice by using marketing instruments, or in Romania, according to Țigănaș *et al.* (2011) public marketing is not yet significantly present in local public institutions. Nevertheless, there are several examples of progress in this respect, such as the creation of the city manager position within the local public administration or efforts aimed at stimulating strategic planning both at central and local levels (Hințea, 2011).

The present study comes to meet the solutions proposed by Detente Consultants to promote the capital as a tourist destination in the online environment, as it claimed that the existence of an effective promotion official site is a must which will make the difference between success and failure in tourism.

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1 At the beginning of June 2011 MDRT signed a 101.952 euro (including VAT) contract for Bucharest tourism marketing plan development (strategic and operational), for the 2011-2015 period, with the consortium Detente Consultants SAS/Detente Consultants SRL.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The city is one of the oldest tourist destinations and today it represents a flourishing tourism sector. Usually tourists choose the city either for its cultural, historic, artistic heritage and for its exceptional cultural creations, or as a business destination (for organizing conferences, exhibitions).

Urban tourism is one of the main factors of economic growth of cities (Metaxas, 2010), which has as a result the creation of wealth and of new jobs. In the globalization and industrial relocation context, cities with a high tourism potential rely on tourism to obtain a strategic and competitive position. Defined as an association of resources or tourist activities within the city, urban tourism represents a multifunctional and complex form of tourism. Its development demands the affirmation of the political will, and three essential actions: marketing, promotion and receptivity. It implies several phases (Profiroi, 1998, pp. 282-284):

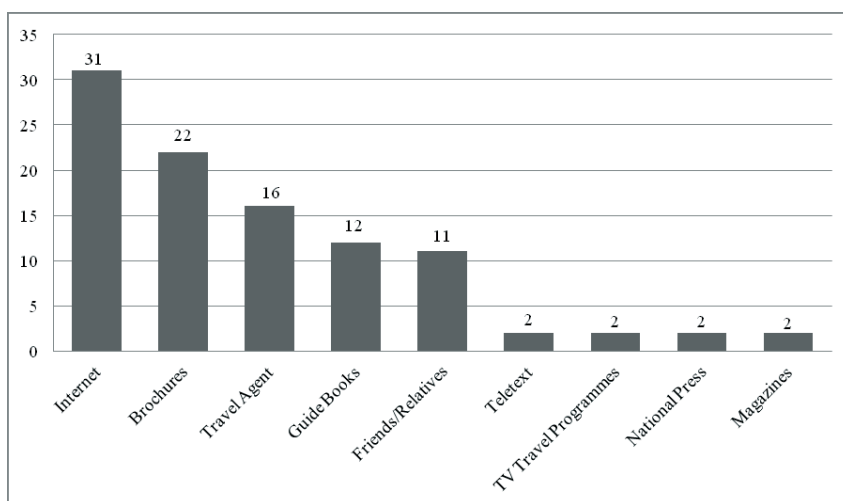
- Defining a strategy based on the identity of the city which must integrate the actions from different sectors taken into consideration. The economic reality shows that in the competitive game on the market has appeared a new player – the state. This can influence directly or indirectly numerous aspects of the structure of an activity area. The state can be a client (for example through its purchases regarding the national security) or a supplier (through the sales of raw materials which are exclusively under the state's control) in various areas, or it can influence the structural evolution of the area through various normalizations of some key variables, such as: entering a certain activity area, competitive practices or profitability (Cârstea and Corboş, 2010, p. 172);
- The development of a coherent offer in every domain, considering first of all what already exists and correlating this offer in the organization of the external expectations with the city (Boniface, 1995);
- Fostering the use of the city by every citizen (informing and signaling, transport and access);
- Initiating one or more urban events (holidays, festivals, congresses), which are an essential tool because they can bring together the economy and culture, the local and external actors, the citizens and visitors, the economic contribution and revival of the urban space; and
- Promoting the city.

In addition to that, urban tourism development is closely related to the challenges faced by the public sector, such as providing quality infrastructures and services using limited resources, which makes cities willing to get involved in public-private partnerships (PPPs) for financing and operating projects of urban tourism. In this sense, we can identify a tradition, as PPPs started their expansion in the '80s in the urban development field, as an instrument for urban projects that had common features both for the public and private sector (Mina, 2010, p. 329).

Internet is a fact of contemporary society that cannot and should not be ignored. It consists of an unlimited reservoir of information from all fields of life and its essential feature is that it offers the cheapest access to them. Internet was created in the beginning of the '70s as a strictly military purpose network and was liberalized after 20 years giving access to civil applications (Tiliuțe, 2004, p. 69). “Statistics show that in October 1994 the number of users capable to use all facilities provided by Internet was 13.5 million, while 27.5 million people were able to use the basic e-mail service to communicate. In just three years (1997) these figures had increased to 57 million Internet users and 71 million people with e-mail access. In January 2003 an Internet Domain Survey counted over 171 million active “hosts”, that is computers actively connected to the global network” (Aurigi, 2005, pp. 17-18).

Today, as a result of technological growth, which made a superior technology available for a large part of population, Internet has become one of the most employed marketing channels. The Internet tends to catch in a large proportion the attention of the organizations that provide services or goods, being considered a good element for development and unlimited expansion of any kind of businesses, due to globalization and very fast speed which characterizes information.

“The Internet and in particular World Wide Web (WWW) is currently one of the most significant technological developments pertaining to travel and tourism marketing. The future development of the Web goes from ‘information only’ to more interactive Web-presentations covering the whole spectrum from information, via inquiry service to booking and payment.” (Marcussen, 1997, p. 23). Nowadays companies which develop their activity in the tourism area, use Internet as an innovative marketing channel, mostly because users tend to prefer this source of information (for example, as you can see in Figure 1, about 31% of British citizens use Internet as an information source when they decide to plan a trip).



**Figure 1:** Sources for researching and planning travel – UK consumers

Source: WTO Business Council (2001, p. 9)

“Today, the information-intensive nature of the tourism industry highlights the important role Internet and Web technology play in marketing of destinations promotion.” (Doolin, Burgess and Cooper, p. 557). Internet has an important place in the competition between urban areas, and together with its development, it has recorded an important change in the internationalization of the tourism area. There is a trend of multiplication of web portals which provide pieces of information concerning certain cities, and also the opportunity to follow all the necessary steps when planning a trip, for pleasure or business purposes in a certain city. Local authorities have also begun to see Internet as an opportunity to become visible on the vast market of cities competing to attract tourists, with the final goal of gathering certain necessary funds for satisfying public interest.

### **3. Methodology**

This study had as a goal the research of a wide range of practices applied for building and using official websites for tourism promotion of important urban areas which can be regarded as examples of good practice for the city of Bucharest. There are several reasons why websites are a necessity according to John Simms (2005), Internet Marketer for Eiledon Solutions, a web design and website development company in Cape Town: (1) Websites are more efficient from the point of view of costs than the classical informative methods (brochures, folders, TV or radio commercials). (2) The expansion on various geographical markets can be made easily thanks to the fact that the potential client has unlimited access to the pieces of information which can determine the client to make a purchase decision. (3) Sites are the best approach to increase the sources of income through paid commercials by other companies which see a certain website as a marketing channel. (4) The potential client has access to information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. (5) Sites are a comfortable way of accessing, almost immediately, the information that consumers may need. (6) Improving the credibility by offering the customer the possibility to visually analyze what he is going to purchase (through photos or videos). (7) The possibility of timely feedback and (8) doing market researches with a minimum budget (from customer feedback review questionnaires) which will help improve performance and ensure adaptability to the clients' needs.

#### ***3.1. Preselection criteria for urban areas***

For obvious reasons the entire suite of European cities which use online marketing tools for promotion at a tourist level could not be analyzed. Therefore, in order to gather the multitude of urban areas subject to the filtering methodology three preselection criteria of urban areas were used: (1) the city must be located in a European Union member country; (2) the urban area must have, preferably, the status of a capital; and (3) the city population must exceed 1,500,000 inhabitants.

After researching more official reports of field organizations and of specialized websites, eleven cities which matched the criteria presented above were selected: Athens

(3,265,000), Barcelona (4,210,000), Berlin (3,450,000), Brussels (1,900,000), Lisbon (3,035,000), London (8,585,000), Paris (10,485,000), Rome (2,715,000), Rotterdam (2,105,000), Warsaw (1,710,000) and Vienna (1,715,000). All data have been taken from the document World Urban Areas (Demographia, 2011).

### **3.2. Selection methodology of cities**

The constructed methodology for selecting the cities comprised six criteria (see Table 1):

1. The existence of an official website for city tourism promotion (this was an elimination criterion).
2. City branding/prestige (for this criterion, the City Brands Index 2011 was used as scoring methodology, the ranking made by Simon Anholt in collaboration with GfK Roper, which takes into consideration six elements for measuring the urban brands: presence, potential, pulse, location, people and basic necessities. Other important rankings were also taken into consideration (Mercer's Quality of Living, The European City Brand Barometer created by the British consultancy company Saffron in 2008, Global Power City Index, Global Urban Competitiveness Index Rankings, European Competitiveness Index, and European Cities Monitor).
3. Number of stays: in order to not advantage any of the cities which have been analyzed, an arithmetical average of the number of stays was made. This was 20,951,737, which means that the cities which have surpassed this threshold have received 20 points, while the rest 10 points.
4. Cultural tourism: this started from the idea that culture is becoming more and more important for the image of a country (Corboş, 2011, p. 347), and therefore for a city. The indicators were: European Cultural Capital status (cities with this status have obtained the maximum score); cultural objectives of great importance (for example, the presence of symbol-museums in the cities); the existence of cultural or historic sites in the city, or in its area of influence, which are on the UNESCO World Heritage list; important annual festivals and events (maximum score was given to a city if it hosted at least one important festival or event).
5. Specific tourist infrastructure (for example, special transportation lines for tourists, facilities for business tourism, accommodation capacity, diversified leisure opportunities etc.).
6. The importance given to e-administration by city's public institutions (for this criterion the number of public institutions which use electronic means for assuring the transparency and for informing the citizens was taken into consideration).

**Table 1:** The basic methodology used for review

Criteria	Observations	Granted score (minimum-maximum)
<b>1. City branding/city prestige</b>		<b>0-30</b>
<i>a) The City Brands Index 2011 (Anholt-GfK Roper, 2011)</i>	Place 1-10	15
<i>b) The presence in other rankings, on top positions</i>	Mercer's Quality of Living, The European City Brand Barometer, Global Power City Index, Global Urban Competitiveness Index Rankings, European Competitiveness Index, European Cities Monitor	15
<b>2. Number of stays</b>	<b>Arithmetical average of the number of stays for eleven cities</b>	<b>10-20</b>
	Over 20,951,737 accommodation nights	20
	Under 20,951,737 accommodation nights	10
<b>3. Cultural tourism</b>		<b>0-30</b>
<i>a) European Cultural Capital status</i>	Maximum score to cities with this status	10
	Cities with no status	0
<i>b) Cultural objectives of great importance</i>	Cultural objectives of great importance are present	10
	Cultural objectives of great importance are non-existent	0
<i>c) Cultural or historic sites within the city, or in its area of influence, included on the UNESCO World Heritage list</i>	The city has cultural or historic sites which are included on the UNESCO World Heritage list	5
	The city doesn't have cultural or historic sites which are included on the UNESCO World Heritage list	0
<i>d) Important annual festivals and events</i>	Maximum score if the city organizes at least one major festival or event	5
	No any major festival or event	0
<b>4. Specific tourist infrastructure</b>		<b>0-15</b>
<i>a) Special urban transportation lines for tourists</i>		0-3
<i>b) Facilities for business tourism (for example, designated spaces for organizing events/reunions/conferences)</i>		0-4
<i>c) Accommodation capacity</i>		0-4
<i>d) Diversified leisure opportunities (green spaces, restaurants, bars, coffee shops, clubs etc.)</i>		0-4
<b>5. The importance given to e-administration by the city's public institutions</b>		<b>0-5</b>

Source: Authors' calculations

### 3.3. Review of cities according to the methodology

1. The existence of an official website for promoting the city from a tourist point of view. Our research revealed the presence of these cities in the online environment and that they are all promoted via Internet, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** The list of official websites for promoting the reviewed cities from a touristic point of view

No.	City	Official website for tourism promotion
1.	Athena	<a href="http://www.breathtakingathens.com/">http://www.breathtakingathens.com/</a>
2.	Barcelona	<a href="http://www.barcelonaturisme.com/">http://www.barcelonaturisme.com/</a>
3.	Berlin	<a href="http://www.visitberlin.de/en">http://www.visitberlin.de/en</a>
4.	Brussels	<a href="http://visitbrussels.be">http://visitbrussels.be</a>
5.	Lisbon	<a href="http://www.visitlisboa.com">http://www.visitlisboa.com</a>
6.	London	<a href="http://www.visitlondon.com/">http://www.visitlondon.com/</a>
7.	Paris	<a href="http://en.parisinfo.com/">http://en.parisinfo.com/</a>
8.	Rome	<a href="http://en.turismoroma.it/">http://en.turismoroma.it/</a>
9.	Rotterdam	<a href="http://www.rotterdam.info">http://www.rotterdam.info</a>
10.	Warsaw	<a href="http://www.um.warszawa.pl/en">http://www.um.warszawa.pl/en</a>
11.	Vienna	<a href="http://www.wien.info/en">http://www.wien.info/en</a>

2. City branding/City prestige. Regarding the city brand, there are four European cities which stand out (Table 3), more exactly: Paris, London, Rome and Vienna. These cities are among the world leaders and their reputation could influence tourist decisions in a crucial way, determining possible tourists to choose them as holiday destinations.

**Table 3:** 2011 Anholt-GfK Roper City Brands Index<sup>SM</sup>.  
Overall Brand Ranking

City	Rank 2011
Paris	1
London	2
Sydney	3
New York	4
Los Angeles	5
Rome	6
Washington DC	7
Melbourne	8
Vienna	9
Tokyo	10

Source: Anholt-GfK Roper (2011)

3. The number of stays. As a result of the review, the most visited cities, which obtained a maximum score, were the following: *London* was visited by 14,706,000 foreign tourists (90,318,000 stays), according to the Office for National Statistics (2011); *Paris* was visited by 8,119,317 French tourists and 7,064,542 foreign tourists (a total of 15,183,859 tourists) who stayed 35,789,878 nights in hotels, according to Office du Tourisme et des Congres (2011, p. 18); *Rome* has registered a number of 25,752,139 stays, according to the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (2011); and *Berlin* was visited by 9,051,430 tourists who stayed here 20,795,643 nights (10.2% more than in 2009), according to Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg (2011).



These cities have been followed by *Barcelona* which was visited by 7,133,524 tourists who stayed there 14,047,396 nights, according to Turisme de Barcelona (2011, p. 7); and *Vienna* was visited by 4,878,654 tourists who spent 10,860,126 nights, according to Vienna Tourist Board (2011), by 10.3% more than in 2009.

As it can be noticed, three out of four cities with the strongest brand (London, Paris and Rome) succeeded to attract an impressive number of tourists who stayed a considerable number of nights, above the average of the eleven urban areas.

4. Cultural tourism has taken into consideration, within this methodology, more indicators: *The status of European Capital* (Brussels, Paris, Berlin, Athena, Rotterdam and Lisbon); *The most important cultural objectives* (London, Paris, Rome, Vienna, Brussels, Berlin, Athena and Barcelona); *Cultural or historic sites in the city, or within its area of influence, included in the UNESCO World Heritage*<sup>2</sup>, in this section only Rotterdam was not scored; and *Important, annual festivals/events* (each urban area which was reviewed hosts a series of annual events/festivals which attract many visitors and due to that at this point all cities obtained a maximum score.)

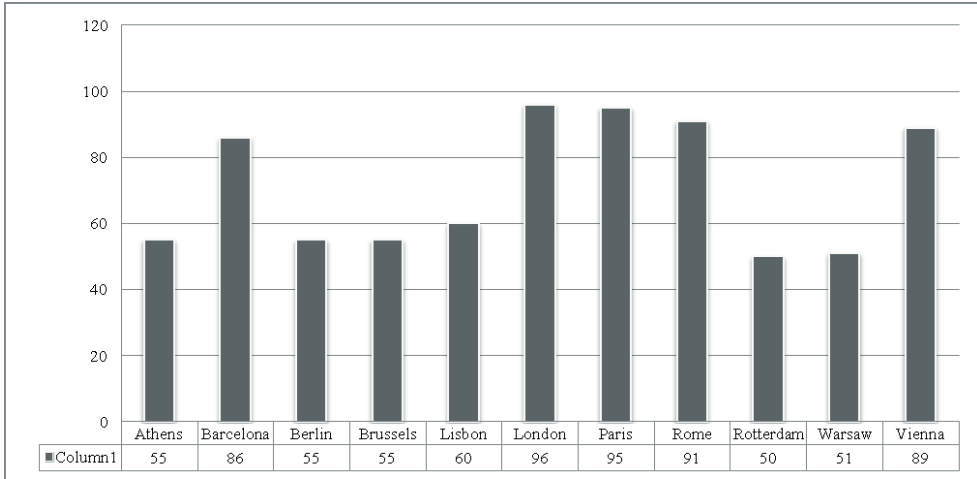
5. The infrastructure designated for tourism criterion has included: the existence of *transportation lines* specially designated for tourists (only the city of Rotterdam did not get points here, due to the lack of such means of transportation); *facilities for business tourism* (Vienna, London, Paris, Brussels, Berlin have excelled in this area); *accommodation capacity* (in this section, all cities have obtained maximum score); and *the diversity of the leisure facilities* (in this section, all cities have obtained a maximum score).

6. Regarding the *importance given to e-administration by the city's local authorities*, it is obvious that each city placed under review, complies with this criterion, and has obtained a maximum score.

Therefore, as a result of the review of the eleven cities a ranking has been made (see Figure 2), which allowed the continuation of the next phase of the study. Based on these results, the cities which obtained more than 90 points in the methodological review were selected – London, Paris and Rome – and their official websites for tourism promotion was reviewed in the following section with the purpose of identifying a set of best practices (which will allow the know-how transfer in order to build a site for tourism promotion for the capital of Romania).

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2 London (Westminster Palace and Westminster Abbey, Church St. Margaret, Tower of London, Greenwich, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew), Paris (Banks of the Seine, Versailles Palace, Fontainebleau Castle), Rome (historic center, Vatican City State), Vienna (historic center and Schönbrunn Palace), Brussels (Central Square, Stoclet Palace), Berlin (The Palaces and Parks of Potsdam and Berlin, Museum Island, Siedlungen der Berliner Moderne), Athens (Acropolis), Barcelona (Güell Park, Milà House, The Palau de la Música Catalana and Hospital de Sant Pau), Warsaw (historic center), Lisbon (Jerónimos Mnastery and Belém Tour)



**Figure 2:** The total sum of scores obtained by each reviewed city

Source: Authors' calculations

### 3.4. The review of official websites for cities tourism promotion

#### 3.4.1. Review plan of the cities

1. *The logo used for tourism promotion website.* Practically, this is a recognizable graphical element, which often includes a name, a symbol which represents the organization or the product. In general, the logo is crucial for making the difference between products, services or companies. When used correctly, the logo confers a competitive advantage over other players on the market when commercial supremacy is disputed. Furthermore, an outstanding logo can contribute to brand recognition, as it helps customers to remember it every time they pass by the respective retail store (Nistorescu and Barbu, 2008, p. 14). Therefore, it becomes an important element, and in the case of promoting a city for tourist purposes it is necessary to be creative when selecting a logo and to display it continuously in order for the urban area to be promoted correctly.

2. *The image used on the website.* Our research revealed that more urban areas use as an attraction point a representative image, providing in this way extra promotional information in order to attract a larger number of visitors.

3. *The name of the website.* The first contact of a user with the tourism promotion website is the actual name of the website – the unique web address on which this is hosted. This indicates the phrase used by the authorities in collaboration with web designers and marketing companies in order to stimulate the attention of possible visitors. The domain name chosen for hosting the websites is also important (for instance, .com, .info or other variations of the country name: .de, .it).

4. *The possibility to select another language for the website.*

5. *The possibility to access the website on any electronic platform which has Internet connection*<sup>3</sup>.

6. *The theme used when creating the website*, which represents the subject, structure and “soul” of the virtual presentation page. This has to identify itself with the site content, in this way helping to create a user-friendly design which will attract visitors through an appropriate palette of colors for the idea of the website, and also through different ways of arranging the buttons and pages on the website. Hence, a theme can become the central attraction point for a user who will be influenced at an emotional level to buy whatever is sold on that web address.

7. *Navigation strategy of the website*. This indicates the way in which website’s pages have been arranged in such a way that the information can be accessed easily by the users. This criterion has followed the logical sequencing of information in order to identify the strong points of each unit which has been reviewed. The position of the navigation elements cannot be made randomly, because the possibility of using the site depends on this. In theory, there are five areas for the navigation elements position: position on top of the screen, on the bottom, on the left side, on the right side, in the middle (Onete and Bucur, 2008, p. 115).

8. *The content and degree of interactivity with the user*. The interactive content takes into account the pieces of information through which the user is advised to create a strong connection with the city. More exactly, the data which influence the purchasing of a stay in that city: sights, free guides, festivals, events, travel tips, online club or forum, interactive gallery (video, photo), the possibility to get discount cards or coupons for the entire stay, the possibility to purchase various tickets and online services with the help of the debit or credit card. Besides that, the comments about the support given to users, and the contact data of the authorities which take care of the site’s maintenance were included in this category.

9. *The presence of connections to social sites* (Twitter, Facebook), *YouTube*, these are established ways of attracting an important number of customers.



### **3.4.2. The actual review of the selected websites**

In Table 4, we presented the comparative synthesis of this review.

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3 Taking into account that the number of users which access websites via their mobile phones has grown by 74%, summarizing a total of 13 million visits in 2010 (Tode, 2011), some simplified versions of websites, have been developed for mobile phones or applications made for tablets.

**Table 4:** The comparative synthesis of the tourism promotion websites of the cities: London, Paris and Rome

INDICATOR	LONDON	PARIS	ROME
LOGO			
IMAGE	<p>The website does not use any image in the upper area of the header, but employs a dynamic field of images derived from the content area (comprising articles).</p>  	<p>The website focuses on dynamic images by employing photos: (1) does not indicate a sole location (there is a set of photos which allows displaying a new image with each refresh) and (2) is not static, performing a transition from one side of the photo to the central point of interest. This feature makes the site one of the best made in terms of dynamism, which ensures an advantage over other similar functionalities which do not use such a concept.</p>   	<p>Similar to the London website, the site does not use any image in the upper area of the header, but employs a dynamic field of images derived from the content area.</p>  
NAME	<p>Advantage: no matter the language chosen for visualization, the web address remains unchanged.</p> <p><a href="http://www.visitlondon.com">www.visitlondon.com</a></p>	<p>The website wants to be a true source of relevant information which will determine the user to take the decision to visit the city. It must be said that the web address changes every time a new language is</p> <p><a href="http://www.parisinfo.com">www.parisinfo.com</a></p>	<p>The phrase indicates that the public authorities want to promote the city by using its national language, being favored by the fact that they are a Latin nation of which words resonate in more languages (English – tourism).</p> <p><a href="http://www.turismoroma.it">www.turismoroma.it</a></p>

		<p>chosen, and its sub-domain changes from <a href="http://www">www</a> into the abbreviation of the country which language is chosen. Thereby, the users from the same areas will be pleasantly surprised by the complete linguistic support provided for them. This feature can be also seen in the sub-domain, while the attractiveness and the option to buy tourist packages increases exponentially.</p>	<p>French – tourisme, Spanish – turismo). Therefore, it keeps a lot from its national identity, succeeding in the same time to make the first contact of the user with the site a nice moment, favoring the need to book a stay in Rome.</p>
<p>The possibility to select other foreign languages for the website</p>	<p>8 (except English): French, Italian, Spanish, German, Dutch, Russian, Chinese and Japanese.</p>	<p>12 (except French): English, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, Russian, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Thai and Arabic.</p>	<p>4 (except Italian): English, German, French and Spanish.</p>
<p>Access on any electronic platform which has Internet access</p>	<p>The website can be accessed on mobile platforms.</p>	<p>It does not have a system which allows a simplified view.</p>	<p>The site can be accessed on mobile platforms only in Italian. The web address of this version is "mobile.turismoroma.it".</p>
<p>Theme used when creating the website</p>	<p>The color palette used is a combination of white-blue-black, which denotes specific Londoner reliability. The most valuable pieces of information (articles and events) are framed elegantly in a black background, which highlights more even the photos. It must be added that if another image than the main image is chosen, the blue color of the theme will change according to the chosen image in: red, green, indigo.</p>	<p>The theme is simple with classical lines, placed on a white, grey and small blue insertions background (cool soothing tone). Similar to London's website, if another image than the main one is chosen, the blue color of the theme will change according to the chosen image in: gamet, purple, different shades of green etc.</p>	<p>The theme is simple, relying on a chromatic tone and an increased brightness (the website is built on a combination of white, strong red and orange).</p>



INDICATOR	LONDON	PARIS	ROME
<p><b>Website navigation strategy</b></p>	<p>The navigation on the site is divided into images and a separate menu with information only for tourists. Regarding the pages, these are placed in the upper part of the screen as follows: Visitors (this is the main page of the site which includes all the necessary elements for informing about all the necessary activities for organizing a stay); Mobile (the mobile version of the website); Event Organizers; Media; Partners; Travel Trade.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The site's main menu includes the following items: the Home</li> <li>Button (which allows a fast comeback to the first page, avoiding this way the inconveniences caused by a possible wandering of the user in the online environment); Accommodation (accommodation units); Places to go (Attractions, Eating Out, Shopping, Pubs and Bars, Parks and Gardens); What's on; London 2012 (this part provides information about the Olympic Games which will be hosted in London); London Areas; Travel Information; Maps &amp; Guides; Special Offers; Blog.</li> </ol>	<p>The essential information is arranged in a logical order – the site contains 7 main pages: Press room, Paris professionals, Event organizers, Our welcome centers, Key figures, Photo gallery, Book online.</p> <p>Another way of arranging the information on the site is using the navigation menu with 9 sections, each with its own sub-menu: Hotels &amp; Accommodation, Restaurants &amp; Cafés, Museums &amp; Monuments, Maps &amp; Transport, What's on, Shopping &amp; Fashion, Trips &amp; Tours, Practical Paris and Sustainable Tourism.</p> <p>The navigation buttons are placed in the upper part of the screen. Advantage: when uploading a web page, the menus and buttons will be visible first. Disadvantage: these will disappear from the visual range once the user will see lower part of the website.</p>	<p>The site has the menu bar in the upper part of the screen, as follows: Itineraries, About Rome, Travel Info, What to do, To visit, Free/low-cost, Where to sleep, Events, Rome for you.</p> <p>After these menu items there is information regarding: community, press, news, useful links, and contact. Other pages with additional information can be found: (1) right of the screen: Golfe in Rome, Il Secondo Polo Turistico (page available only in Italian), Piccoli Turisti Curiosi (page available only in Italian), RomaPass and (2) down the screen: Rome for you which provides information about: book a hotel, receive all useful information for your stay, figure out how to get around the city and help to improve the reception. As it can be noticed, the navigation in the site becomes slow due to the irrational scattering of link buttons towards different pages of the website, fact which becomes upsetting for a user without experience.</p>
<p><b>The functional content and the interactivity degree with users</b></p>	<p>Regarding the site's dynamics and the interaction capabilities with the users, on this site the following elements can be found:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The possibility to become a member of the site free of charge, by following a series of registration steps.</li> <li>Advantages: access to theatre tickets at half the price, the possibility to take part in various competitions organized by the site, obtain invitations to events, receive newsletters and SMS notifications.</li> <li>The possibility to search for free rooms in the desired hotel by indicating the name of the hotel, the number of rooms, the arrival date, the number of nights, and the number of persons.</li> </ul>	<p>The website has a highly interactive content accessible through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A page which allows to identify the best hotels which match the customer's desires and to book online the rooms. This action is made easier thanks to a series of search filters which provide the most suitable results (depending on the arrival date, number of nights and persons, available currency, and also Parisian district where the accommodation is wanted);</li> <li>The possibility to purchase online tickets to festivals, events or museums;</li> <li>A calendar, so called "The Cultural Agenda" which allows for all important events which take place in Paris to be displayed;</li> </ul>	<p>The virtual presentation of Rome contains a series of interactive elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A map for tourists which can be checked only online (this includes (including names) 64 important buildings from Italy's capital);</li> <li>The possibility to subscribe to a newsletter;</li> <li>The citizens of Italy have the possibility to calculate the shortest route to Rome;</li> <li>A mini-guide which can be downloaded from the site, called EasyRome, and which includes useful information for tourists;</li> <li>Tourists have the possibility to buy a discount card (RomaPass) for 25 Euros, which offers discounts for museums (the first two visits are free), health services, and free public transportation;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The possibility to reserve and buy tickets to different shows, transportation tickets, tickets for cruises on Thames, tickets for museums, gardens and other tourist attractions.</li> <li>- The possibility to purchase a card (LondonPass) only for tourists with the help of which they will benefit from various discounts or will enter free of charge to museums, and will have discounts to restaurants, pubs and bars. The price of the card varies according to the number of days, between 40 and 60 pounds;</li> <li>- The site includes a link towards a website which sells online maps, tourist guides, t-shirts, mugs, posters etc. which have inscriptions with the symbols of London;</li> <li>- The site facilitates the possibility of renting cars for the stay;</li> <li>- The section "London TV" contains short presentation videos of the shows that take place in the city, making easy for the interested tourists to find a theatre or the desired movie;</li> <li>- There is a small widget which indicates the weather forecast for three days, and there is also the possibility to access a page with the weather forecast for a week;</li> <li>- The section called "Useful Stuff" includes links towards TripAdvisor.com (a site with tourist reviews), YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, special offers, and London for the ones with disabilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Interactive guide which includes information, videos, photos and different locations and events;</li> <li>- Sweepstakes which have as prize tickets to various important shows in Paris;</li> <li>- The possibility to buy online different tours offered by the tourism operators depending on the tourists' preferences (night tour, organizing a romantic dinner, classical tours etc.);</li> <li>- The section which provides information for persons with disabilities – "Paris, an accessible city. A practical guide for disabled people"; and</li> <li>- The possibility to download free of charge different guides or maps of the city, and which are available in English, German, Spanish and French.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tourists can practice golf, and for more details they can access the link to the partner website <a href="http://www.golfaroma.it">www.golfaroma.it</a>;</li> <li>- The page "Piccoli Turisti Curiosi" (available only in Italian) is dedicated to children;</li> <li>- The website includes a widget which presents the weather forecast;</li> <li>- The section "Rome for you" offers tourists the possibility to make a reservation in a partner hotel.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Connections with YouTube and social sites</b></p>	<p>The site has connections to Twitter and Facebook.</p>		<p>The site has connections to Facebook and YouTube.</p>

#### 4. Recommendation for building a tourism promotion website for Bucharest

Starting from the nine criteria used to characterize the websites of the cities of London, Paris and Rome, at the end of this study we will make a few proposals regarding the design, as well as structure, content, and the way in which the website for tourism promotion of Bucharest city should look like (see Table 5).

**Table 5:** Proposals for creating the tourism promotion website of Bucharest

INDICATOR	BUCHAREST
LOGO	The same basic idea as for the three analyzed cities which has included a creation item (the logo, seen as an artistic element) should be used and also the usage of the actual name of the city which will perfect the image of Bucharest that the user has at the first contact with this design element.
IMAGE	The technique employed by the tourism promotion website for Paris, which has used a set of representatives images implemented in a Flash program which allowed them to be more dynamic can be used successfully. For this we propose to use at least 10 dynamic images which are representative for the capital (for example, Palace of the Parliament, Romanian Athenaeum, University Square, Victoriei Square, Triumphal Arch, The National Opera House from Bucharest, "I.L.Caragiale" National Theatre, Free Press Square, Herastrau Park, "Dimitrie Gusti" National Village Museum, Lipscani pedestrian area etc. The images will be placed in the upper part of the screen, and together with the logo, will be the website's point of interest, while the sensation given by the moving images (made with Flash) will make the user more interested. Even more, he would be able to admire some of the capital's tourist objectives immediately after opening the website in the browser, not needing to access the existing photo gallery in the beginning of the navigation session.
NAME	<b>www.bucharestcity.info</b> Thanks to the ".info" domain the user will know from the beginning that on this site he will find valuable tourist information.
The possibility to select other foreign languages for the website	6 (apart from Romanian): English, German, French, Spanish, Italian and Russian
Access on any electronic platform which has Internet access	In order to satisfy this criterion a simplified web platform for access via mobile phones or Smartphones, which should be available in English, as a minimum should be implemented.
The theme used when creating the website	The theme used must identify itself with the presented information, helping this way to create a friendly design which will attract users through the proper color palette, as well as different ways of arranging the buttons and the pages on the site. When creating <b>www.bucharestcity.info</b> the same color palette as in the case of the logo should be used (this is the starting point for the design of the entire site). In theory, there have been established a series of principles for using colors (Onete and Bucur, 2008, p. 138): never use more than 3 colors; the colors from the center of the image should be combined with the ones from the site's visual margins; do not use shade of colors located at the extremes of the spectrum; the color must be consistent with the meaning (this results from the logo specially created for the website); the same color for similar elements on the site should be used; and the shades of colors should be used to point out the information. The promotion sites of London and Paris could be regarded as good starting points.



INDICATOR	BUCHAREST
<p><b>Website navigation strategy</b></p>	<p>The site must be structured in such a way in order to be easy to understand and use, the final objective being to avoid the frustrations of the user regarding the site's navigation and the extra time spent on the site due to that. From this point of view, the London site could be regarded as a successful model concerning the pages, while Paris website regarding the main menu. Both menu lists will be placed horizontally, in the upper part of the website, in order to be clearly visible from the first moments when the site is accessed. We propose a number of <i>5 pages (sections):</i> <i>Visitors</i> – the main attraction point is usually the page users enter from the searching engines (it is the same as the first page of the BucharestCity website). This section represents in fact the entire site dedicated to visitors; <i>The mobile version of the website</i> – a simplified version of the site which can be accessed from various mobile devices. This is specially meant for the phones with weak performances and for the persons who want to limit the expenses of the Internet services for mobiles; <i>Organizing events</i> – this will be a section exclusively addressed to the business segment; <i>Media</i> – inside this section, there will be found the latest press releases, as well as news regarding the city from the written and audio-visual press; and <i>Partners</i> – will be the official promotional agency for Bucharest attracting and delivering value to businesses, students and visitors. Regarding the <i>main menu</i>, we suggest <i>10 sections</i>: Hotels Accommodation: information about accommodation units; Restaurants &amp; cafés: a guide of the restaurants and coffee shops, sorted according to their specific; Monuments &amp; museums: information about the cultural establishments of the city; Maps &amp; transportation; What's on: the calendar of events and festivals which take place in Bucharest; Fashion &amp; shopping: a list of the shopping centers, luxury stores etc.; Trips &amp; Tours: guided tours, trip ideas and a list of the city's points of interest; Practical Bucharest – information guide about the daily life, prices, religion, health and legal holidays; Entertainment (focusing on night life, clubs); and Medical &amp; Wellness tourism.</p>
<p><b>The functional content and the interactivity degree with users</b></p>	<p>Regarding the site's dynamics and its capacity to interact with the users, we suggest:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A cultural agenda which will present the events which take place in Bucharest (idea taken from the promotion site of the city of Paris);</li> <li>– The route planner (idea taken from the promotion site of the city of Rome) will help foreign tourists know where they are within the city boundaries of Bucharest;</li> <li>– The maps section will provide the download, print and visualizing on portable electronic devices of tourist maps of the city, as well as transportation maps (Metrorex, RATB);</li> <li>– A small widget will indicate the weather forecast for three days, and also there will be the possibility to access a page with the weather forecast for a week;</li> <li>– The possibility to purchase a card (BucharestPass) from the site. This card will offer tourists (for three consecutive days) discounts for important tourist objectives, restaurants, coffee shops and clubs. Also, tourists will be able to use for free and unlimited time the public transportation system;</li> <li>– An electronic collection of guides for getting to know better the city of Bucharest;</li> <li>– The possibility to purchase tours offered by different tour operators from Bucharest and promoted by the site BucharestCity; and</li> <li>– The page "Accessible Bucharest" will include information which could help persons with disabilities to have a pleasant experience in Romania's capital.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Connections with YouTube and social sites</b></p>	<p>The Twitter, Facebook and YouTube buttons will be integrated into a bar placed at the base of the screen, which all the time will remain visible for users.</p>

## 5. Conclusions

Today, “a critical prerequisite for formulating effective travel marketing strategies must include the understanding of the influence exerted through Internet. The increasing presence of Internet as an instrument for advertising travel destinations and travel-related services highlights its importance as a factor in travelers’ decision-making processes” (Bonn, Furr and Susskind, 1998, p. 303). In conclusion, we can

say that “Internet with current and emerging multimedia features provides strong opportunities, particularly useful in dealing with the intangible nature of service, making marketing mix variables capitalize the informational and transactional potential of Internet in order to gain competitive advantages” (Baloglu and Pekcan, 2006, p. 171).

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