

# CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN TOURISM IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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## Abstract

*Tourism is an important sector with an impact on the development of a country's economy. The main benefits of tourism are generation of income and creation of jobs. For many countries it is the most important source of well-being. The dizzyingly rapid spread of COVID-19 infections has caused Romania to face a crisis situation for the management of which it is striving to find solutions. The impact of the crisis is strongly felt both in terms of the capacity of economic agents to manage human resources, but also in terms of trade relations with business partners. The situation we are in, but especially the one we want to reach, requires urgent and radical measures. The main objectives of the managers must be: removing tourism from its critical state and resetting the entire hospitality industry, positioning itself on other coordinates, taking into account global trends in the field and considering the successful international models and local specificities. One of the unexpected effects of this pandemic is that organizations have acknowledged the benefits of digital transformation. Given the long-term coexistence with some restrictions, companies are more inclined to analyze their processes and procedures and rethink their operations, so that remote work becomes the new mode of operation.*

**Key words:** management, digitalization, innovation in tourism, digital transformation

## INTRODUCTION

Travel and tourism are currently a huge global market, where there is consumer demand for a huge variety of products and services. Not only have its size and growth rates made this market very attractive, but also its future potential.

Romania has a fantastic potential with all the necessary resources to perform in tourism, the hospitality industry in Romania has become what it is now exclusively through the passion of some people, the risk taken by entrepreneurs, the dedication to a profession that is, in fact, an accumulation of passions and concerns from a wide range of activities. It is not just a profession, but it is gradually becoming a way of life.

The situation we are in, but especially the situation we want to reach, requires urgent and radical measures. The main objectives of Romanian tourism are the following: removing tourism from the current critical

state, i.e. the crisis caused by the coronavirus epidemic and resetting the entire hospitality industry, positioning on other coordinates, which take into consideration the global trends in the field, the successful international models but also the local specificities.

Tourism is a major job creator and a lifeline for many economic sectors. Tourism has recovered from many crises and, given its proven importance at every level of society, needs to be supported in order to sustain and increase jobs again.

One of the unexpected effects of this pandemic is that organizations have acknowledged the benefits of digital transformation. Given that there are discussions on long-term coexistence with some restrictions, companies are more inclined to analyze their processes and procedures and rethink their operations, so that remote work becomes the new mode of operation [2].

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

The innovation processes, as well as the digital ones, offer the opportunity to improve financial inclusion at the level of companies in the tourism industry, but also to develop the

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entrepreneurial skills of the local community. All these aspects are an integral part of the processes leading to a durable and sustainable development of the tourism industry.

The strategic alignment with the direction of the International Tourism Organization will allow us a rapid, vertical integration at the level of other similar initiatives around the world, correlating Romania's national strategy with others, but differentiating us by the specificity and uniqueness of the local market.

In order to highlight the urgent need to increase performance in the direction of Innovation, at country's level, we took into account the analysis prepared by the European Commission, which shows a level of performance in 2018, below 50% compared to the EU average in Romania in 2011 vs 2017 and the Report for 2019 where the European Commission presents in the Integration of Digital Technology, the Digital Economy Index (DESI2) at the level of European countries and where Romania registers one of the lowest values (surpassing only Bulgaria).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Innovation in tourism - should be seen as a collaborative action between governments, academia environment, corporations, micro, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), startups, investors, accelerators, incubators and other stakeholders. Promoting a successful tourism innovation and an entrepreneurial ecosystem requires

connecting all stakeholders in collaboration opportunities and prioritizing capacity building in tourism and technology"[10].

Digital transformation - considers the concept of "smart destinations" which will certainly improve the sustainability, accessibility, governance and quality of destinations through the use of new technologies and innovations (e.g. implementation of a digital platform)" [9].

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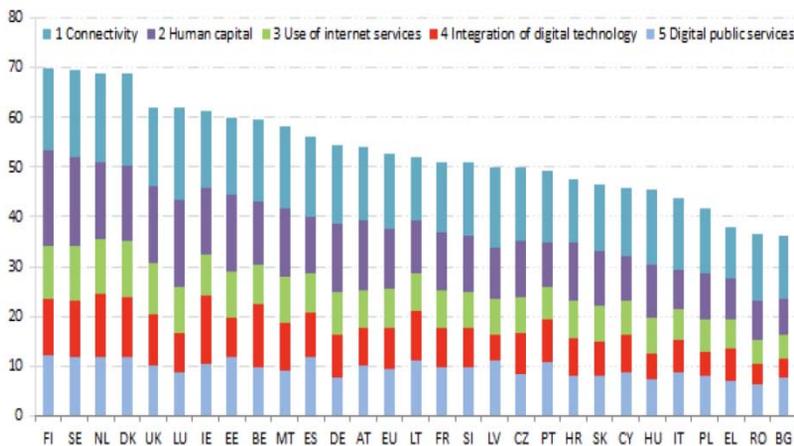


Figure 1 Digital Economy and Society Index 2019 ranking Europe  
Source: [6]

In addition, in the 2019 Report, the European Commission presents the Integration of Digital Technology, the Digital Economy Index (DESI2) at the level of European countries, where Romania registers one of the lowest values, surpassing only Bulgaria (fig. 1) [7].

**Benefits**

- Medium and long term strategic development of the tourism industry;
- Transforming the tourism industry from “late adopters” to “early innovators”;
- Increasing the notoriety and attractiveness of the tourism industry;
- Aligning the national tourism strategy with the strategy of the International Tourism Organization.

**Digital Platform for Promoting Romanian Tourism**

A national digital platform (site) that will increase the degree of international competitiveness, of the destination Romania having three target groups: tourists (Romanian and international), destinations

and industry. According to the World Bank Group, such platforms offer new business opportunities (especially in rural areas), offering to local entrepreneurs the opportunity to improve access to markets and especially financial inclusion [1].

For such a digital platform to bring real benefits, the keyword is the collaboration between all markets players, which is why its addressability goes on the 3 major categories mentioned above. Tourists will have the most up-to-date and reliable source of information, destinations through MDGs will have the obligation to upload / provide updated data and the industry can have a working interface with the authority, the relevant ministry (authorization, classification, data reporting, etc.).

**Purpose**

- Promoting tourist destinations and services with holiday suggestions in Romania and destinations in Romania;

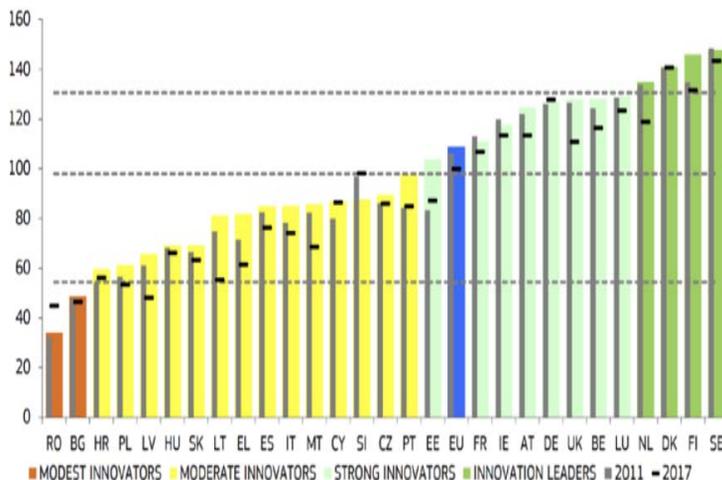


Figure 2 Europe Digital Economy Index  
Source: [7]

- Direct contact of service providers with consumers (reservations, requests for quotation, information)
- Integrated platform for tourists and tour operators

- Increasing the visibility of the domestic offer, increasing the collaboration between market players, consumers' access to a wider market, correct consumer information
- Digitization of all tourist promotion materials of the destination Romania and

reduction, as much as possible, of printing costs - reducing the number of pages by indicating the site as a source for detailed information and even eliminating some of the printed materials [3].

**Features**

Platform containing booking functionalities (accommodation / museum accesses / shows / guides / entrances to different objectives / various local tourist services / restaurants / etc.), information for any tourist who wants to travel or find out about a certain area / destination / Town.

Rating system given by the customer for all services on the platform. The rating system can contribute to the award of ratings given by the legal rules (e.g. stars, daisies, or a new system recognized by the authorities based on several criteria, including that given by the end customer)

**Benefits**

- Promoting the destination Romania;
- The platform has an educational role.

**The Digital Platform in Relation to the Authorities**

A national digital platform that brings real benefits, a fast communication between

authorities and tour operators, and the key word is the collaboration between all market players: local businesses, local and national authorities and international organizations. According to the European Commission, the degree of digitalization in Romania is very low in the public sector, much lower than other European countries (fig. 2) [8].

**Purpose**

- Streamlining communication between authorities and tour operators;
- Debureaucratization, automation and simplification of processes.

**Features**

Registration and classification of all tourism operators, exclusively online. The classification is intended to be carried out in accordance with the rules adopted at European Union level

Obtaining approvals/ certifications / authorizations online without files submitted at various counters. The platform can also provide the online interface between authorities and tour operators in order to obtain the necessary documents for operation.

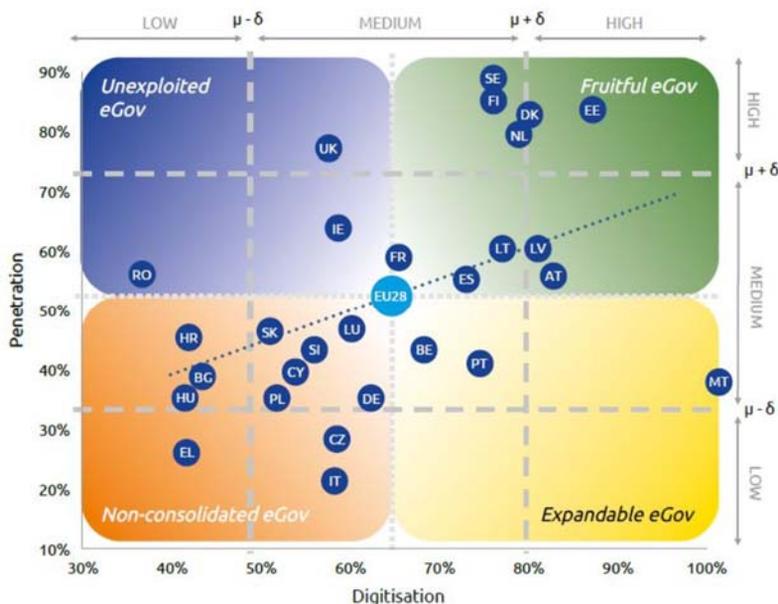


Figure 3. Digitization in EU countries  
Source: [8]

Free application for hoteliers / restaurant operators / other operators to be informed in real time about the hygiene and safety rules and measures they have to implement in their units, with confirmation on their own responsibility that the measures have been taken. Based on the confirmations, they can receive a COVID-19 quality and safety certificate. Thus, the units can be subsequently controlled by the DSP or Consumer Protection. This application must be mandatory for all market players.

#### ***Benefits***

- Significant reduction of time for registration and classification of tourism operators;
- Debureaucratization and simplification of processes;
- Digital archiving and accessing of all documents
- The authorities will benefit from real-time information on the size of the Romanian tourism market;
- The platform can be a very fast channel of communication and action between authorities and operators.

#### **Digitization of Hotel Operational Processes**

Reducing bureaucracy by digitizing hotel business processes, for example online check-in (as with airlines), which cannot be done due to current legislative limitations (e.g. self-check-in & check-out, opening the doors to the room with the help of the mobile phone, digitization of the customer card).

Considering the implementation of the norms of social / physical distance, it is necessary to reduce the physical contact points in the tourist reception structures with accommodation functions, by digitizing the various operational processes from check-in to check-out [5]. This requires, in the first phase, the digitization of the customer card, which is now completed at the reception of tourist reception structures with accommodation functions (and which is currently subject to outdated legislation, which involves the use of pre-printed forms from the Official Monitor).

The form that customers fill in at the reception could carry viruses and could infect the reception staff. Therefore, we recommend the digitization of this file, which should be used in all accommodation units in Romania. Signing it should be similar to signing the declaration on your own responsibility through the fingerprint sensor on your mobile phone.

#### ***Purpose***

- Streamlining processes by digitizing the customer file;
- Better control of the number of accommodations in the country;
- Elimination of evasion in accommodation units;
- Efficient analysis of data / tourists in Romania.

#### ***Benefits and results***

- Employee and customer protection;
- Facilitating epidemiological investigations;
- Debureaucratization;
- Increased guest satisfaction;
- Efficient management of tourists;
- Optimization, efficiency of hotel operational processes.

#### ***Features***

- Creation of a platform of guest arrivals in tourist reception structures with accommodation functions at national level, with access to all classified accommodation units

#### **Technological Solutions for Accommodation Units**

If for January 2020 the National Institute of Statistics announced an increase in arrivals in tourist reception facilities by 5% and a 12.7% increase in arrivals of foreign tourists in Romania compared to the same month in 2019, in mid-March 2020 hoteliers recorded decreases of up to 44% in accommodation income, and for the beginning of April they are estimated up to 75%. Undoubtedly, together with the travel agencies, the accommodation units are the most impacted by the measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Going over the immediate measures to be taken in the midst of the pandemic, they must make new working procedures for the period following the end of the state of emergency and reduce the spread of the virus, but also to analyze their clientele in the last 2-3 years and anticipate which customer segments will continue to frequent the hotels [8]. Both internationally recognized and local specialists place great emphasis on the development of local tourism. Therefore, those who relied heavily on incoming must re-profile themselves on domestic tourism.

Multi-room accommodation structures will certainly suffer from operating restrictions on the maximum number of people that can be accommodated in the same place, maybe even in the same room. PMSs will have to be adapted in such a way that they know how to make automatic check-ins, directly from customers' phones, to provide access to rooms based on access codes also generated from customers' phones, to make plans for the types included in the accommodation package, for access to the spa and gyms within the accommodation units, so as to respect a maximum capacity agreed by the authorities, etc. [6]

Maybe now the idea of being listed in the offers of online travel agencies is not so bad.

The accommodation structures such as apartment, villa, boarding house, guest houses will benefit. That's if you're wondering why platforms like TravLocals are pushing hard to promote in the midst of a pandemic. From which we can deduce that the catalogs with accommodation units will be in great demand again, but also the booking sites that focus on accommodation units that cannot accommodate more than 4-5 people (e.g. Airbnb) [4].

Personally, I believe that they will have a lot to gain, including the campsites. As a result of isolation at home, people will feel the need to escape into nature. Maybe even the area of caravans and motorhomes will experience a spike in the next period, although the customers will be those in the category with above average income.

And most importantly, any reservation must be possible with payment by card,

online or at POS at the reception of the accommodation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The adoption of technology and the digitization of operational processes have been on the radar of companies for some time, but were considered rather a desideratum and postponed for later, often hitting a resistance to change.

Against the background of the crisis caused by the pandemic and, respectively, of the rules of imposed social distance, the companies were in the position of forced relocation of operations in the digital environment and / or temporary suspension of activity insofar as its nature did not allow remote work.

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