

WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY - THE NETHERLANDS  
WORLD INTERNATIONAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

# **Romania tourism destination image facing the Dutch market perception**

An assessment of the destination image of Romania  
in relation to ecotourism

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Pentru Mama, Lelia si Meme,  
Mereu alaturi de mine.

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## Abstract

The world of tourism industry is continuously increasing. This growth created a major challenge in tourism marketing, where there is a large need for effective positioning strategy of destinations, to be able to create and manage distinctive and attractive images, defined as “pulling” forces to the specific sites.

Ecotourism is considered a small niche market out of the overall tourism industry, but it is steadily growing. Among tourists, there is an increasing “pushing” force to choose ecotourism programmes. Therefore, the developing ecotourism market should represent a strong incentive for countries with natural potential and ground ecotourism initiatives, such as Romania to put more efforts in positioning their ecotourism image on the international market. Romania is a good example. It offers excellent ground for ecotourism development that needs to be reflected in the marketing perspective of the country.

Repositioning of Romania destination image is tested on the Dutch market using ecotourism as a key element. The research measures the perception of the Dutch market, as an important international supply of tourists all over the world, regarding the elements that can internationally position the image of Romania.

The research revealed that Romania has not yet acquired a definite destination image that can play as a “pulling” force for the international tourists. Although this is true for the large public, the tourism agents from the Netherlands were able to identify a larger potential under the current “look” of Romania, both in terms of promotion and developing new products such as ecotourism. According to the Dutch market, the combination *wilderness* and *romantic countryside* can build the general holistic image of Romania within a coherent positioning strategy, with big chances to overstate the old negative image regarding poverty, orphans, etc. The identified and proposed holistic elements need to be supported by clear attributes, in order to shape a coherent attraction and selling point within the general destination image of Romania.

In terms of image agents, the results show that the subjects that visited already Romania have a positive dominant image (organic agent). Promotion (induced agent) is hardly present in creating the general destination image that is still dominated by the image of the country itself (autonomous agent). Although overlooked by the negative elements, the autonomous image has a slightly improving tendency.

*Long distance travel* to Romania was identified as an important issue that needs to be addressed both in real terms facilitating access to Romania to particular destinations through the closest airports, such as: Budapest or Sibiu, and Timisoara and in terms of decreasing the virtual travel distance establishing a better information system outside and inside Romania, able to provide the needed key elements that stand for the “pulling” forces.

The research proves that the alternative tourism agencies are more adapted to the current Romanian situation being not disturbed in developing programmes in Romania by the *high bureaucracy*, *reliable partners*, *accommodation*, *safety*, and *cleanliness* as the main stream tour operators are. Therefore, Romania might be ready for promoting alternative tourism including ecotourism sooner than promoting the mainstream tourism.

Romania has a moderate image attraction compared with other Central and Eastern European countries, but has a larger potential to develop. “*Untouched*” *nature*, *Danube Delta*, *large carnivore population* and *unfragmented natural forest* together with *authenticity of traditions* and *hospitality* are recognised by the Dutch market as the core value of the ecotourism image elements and of the general image of Romania. The ecotourism elements together with the heritage culture features (e.g. painted churches, medieval cities, etc) can form an attractive alternative image essential to be geared in the general image of Romania targeting the main stream tourists (e.g. ski and seaside resorts, Bucharest, etc.).

Romania can be positioned on the international tourism market using the identified ecotourism and alternative tourism elements. According to the Dutch market, this can provide a unique position on the European level creating a unique selling point that needs to be carefully addressed as part of a national positioning strategy.

**“It is not enough that we have a good product in Romania,  
we need the Dutch market ready to buy it”**  
(Dutch tour-operator, April 2002)

## 1. Introduction

The world of tourism increased by 7.4% in 2000, reaching 698 millions international trips (WTO, 2001). This growth created a major challenge in tourism marketing. New destinations and new products are offered to the increasing public, in the same time the traditional destination choices are expanding and diversifying. Tourism marketers are striving for better marketplace for the promoted destinations. In this context, there is a large need for an effective positioning strategy of a particular destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). A central issue of this positioning process is to create and manage a distinctive and attractive image of the destination (Calantone et al., 1989). It is likely that destinations with strong and positive images are considered and chosen in the destination decision process (Goodrich, 1978; Woodsie and Lysonski, 1989, Echtner and Ritchie, 1991). Therefore, it is of tremendous importance that large and complex destination like countries have a coherent positioning marketing strategy.

For a better positioning, it is necessary to have an understanding and a feedback from the consumer side, too. The destination decision process consists of two main factors: “push” and “pull” (Gartner, 1993). The current research will focus on the “pull” factor of a specific destination (Romania) identifying the holistic and the attributes of the destination image, but the “push” factor also needs briefly discussing.

The “push” factor represents the motivation of the tourists to choose a specific destination and to travel to it. It can be explained on the psychological level as the motivation or escape from the physical home-environment that brings the psychological escape, too (Gartner, 1993). In the present modern and post-modern societies, the people are more and more under the pressure of the built environment, assimilating the daily stress but looking for temporary escape into natural and rural areas. This represents an important driving force of people, mainly from Western societies, to travel to natural or semi-natural area destinations. Furthermore, they have an increased leisure time, higher level of income and efficient transport network that strengthen the “pushing” force.

On the other hand, there is a growing trend among tourists to choose specific nature related destination and even more to look for ecotourism programmes. The overall motivation of tourists to choose nature or ecotourism programmes is supported by three factors:

- widespread change in environmental attitude (especially in the Western world) based on a more ecological perspective, understanding the finite character of Earth and innate value of all life,
- development of the environment education in the primary and secondary school,
- development of the environmental mass media (Eagles and Higgins, 1998).

All these factors contribute towards strengthening the “pushing” force of tourists towards nature destinations. This ‘pushing’ force actually creates a growing travelling demand towards nature and ecotourism related destinations.

### **The Ecotourism perspective**

There is a general agreement on ecotourism basic characteristics (UNEP, 2001, p 5):

- is nature-based (visitor are mainly interested in observing and appreciating nature and traditional culture in natural areas);
- contributes to biodiversity conservation;
- supports the well-being of local people;
- involves responsible action by both tourists and local people to minimize negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts;
- requires the lowest possible consumption of non-renewable resources;
- stresses local ownership, as well as business opportunities for locals (especially rural) people.

Ecotourism is considered a small niche market out of the overall tourism industry, but it is steadily growing. Some 6-10% of the tour-operators of some European countries (Austria, Germany, Spain, Italy, France and United Kingdom) specialise in ecotourism, according to a research performed by WTO (Denman et. al., 2001). On the other hand, the main attraction, *nature* is more and more present as an essential travelling motive, for example it has been recorded as a prime motive for around 40% of Germans tourists (Denman et. al., 2001). The most prominent countries supplying ecotourists, in order of the market size, are United State, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, France, Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, New Zealand, Norway and Denmark (Eagles and Higgins, 1998).

The importance of ecotourism is growing worldwide, being perceived by the international forums as a very important phenomenon. The United Nations has declared 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism. The World Tourism Organisation and the United Nations Environment Programme have taken the lead in organising activities for this Year at the international level. The UN declaration is a testimony of the growing importance of ecotourism, not only as a sector with a great potential for economic development – especially in remote areas where few other possibilities exist- but also as a powerful tool for conservation of the natural environment if it is properly planned, developed and managed.

Summarising the presented ideas, there is a growing “pushing” force among tourists to choose ecotourism programmes. At the international level the ecotourism is acknowledged as an important trend. Therefore, the growing ecotourism market should represent strong incentive for countries with natural potential and ground ecotourism initiatives to put more efforts in positioning their ecotourism image on the international market. Romania is a good example. It offers excellent ground for ecotourism development but it needs to be reflected in the marketing perspective of the country. Romania’s case is approached throughout this research.

### **International perspective on Romania**

Light and Dumbraveanu (1999) claimed in an extensive article “*Romanian tourism in the post-communist period*” that South Eastern European countries including Romania have been neglected within the English-language academic literature. Citing Light and Dumbraveanu (1999), there are few studies focused on specific subjects from Romania, such as: overview up to early 1990 and tourism development in the Carpathians (Turnock 1973, 1990, and 1991), tourism and nature conservation in Danube Delta (Hall 1993), Romanian spa resorts (Cooper at al., 1995), education and training need for personnel (Burns, 1995), relation between tourism, conservation and agriculture (Ploaie, 1996), geographical changes in the nature of domestic and international demand (Light and Andone, 1996), and relation between tourism and identity building in a post socialist environment (Light, 2001). Within Romanian academic literature, most of the attention has been paid to identify and evaluate the country’s tourism potential with sporadic interest in the latest development (Light and Dumbraveanu, 1999).

Destination image insights were performed by Light and Dumbraveanu (1999) and more extensively by Light (2001) in a post-socialism identity building approach. Not specifically focused on destination positioning issue, the studies provide clear highlights into Romanian tourism destination image.

“Romania is still the last among the Central and Eastern European countries in terms of attracting foreign tourists”, a sad but rather true remark by Light and Dumbraveanu (1999, pp. 905) that identified the country’s post-communist image as fundamental problem. The revealed reasons for the negative image pictured in 1999 by Light and Dumbraveanu are well-known and bitterly borne by Romania: synonymous with orphans and poverty, political and economic uncertainty, well organised street crime. Apart from the general socio-political image elements, the destination image is influenced by the direct tourism related attributes: poor service delivery associated with little awareness of the expectation of Western tourists (Light and Dumbraveanu, 1999).

Facing the image and service problems, Romania attempts to “rebrand as a tourism destination” (Light, 2001, pp. 1059) and to diversify and reposition its tourism products (Light and Dumbraveanu, 1999). Rural tourism, heritage tourism and even ecotourism were identified as part of the new “alternative” forms of tourism developed for high spending niche markets. Light and Dumbraveanu (1999) conclude that redefinition of the

Romanian tourism product is more the result of largely uncoordinated private sector, than of a formal policy of Ministry of Tourism.

Through the present research, repositioning of Romania destination image is tested on the Dutch market using ecotourism as a key element. The study is looking beyond the previous statements and is revealing the perception of different tourism agents from the Netherlands regarding Romania as an ecotourism destination and how this new dimension can be integrated within the general image of Romania.

### **Natural potential and ecotourism development in Romania**

Romania is in the process of developing new tourism products that requires formation of a new dimension of the general destination image. Different Romanian tourism related initiatives are targeting in attracting part of the international ecotourism market.

In terms of nature attractions, Romania holds some of the largest highlights of natural features from the whole of Europe: more than a third of the European large carnivore populations (wolves, bears and lynx), large and unfragmented natural forests, one of the largest bird sanctuary of Europe – Danube Delta, more than 12,000 caves (some unique in the world), all these combined with traditional human activities.

The importance of nature in Romania was internationally recognised, the proof being the large international conservation and developing projects, such as: Management of the Biodiversity Conservation Project supported by the Global Environmental Fund administered through the World Bank, Carpathian Large Carnivore Project having as its main partner the World Wide Fund for Nature, World Bank Project in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, etc. All these conservation projects have a definite ecotourism component.

In December 2001, the Initiative Group for Ecotourism (IGE) was formed bringing together for the first time diverse actors, such as: conservation and development projects run by non-governmental sector, protected areas, National State Forest Administration, private sector represented by Romanian tour operators, one County Council and the Tourism Ministry. In the first phase, the role of IGE was to lobby within the Tourism Ministry for a better understanding and acceptability of the ecotourism concept that need to be reflected in the overall national tourism strategy. IGE is in the initial phase of developing the network concept in an attempt to bridge different governmental and non-governmental sectors to develop ecotourism and nature conservation in Romania.

The current research is framed in the overall activities of IGE, on the one hand to provide insights into the perception of Romania by the Western market for a better decision making process and on the other hand to use the outcome of the research as a tool for further lobbying campaign to the Tourism Ministry.

## **2. Aim of the research**

The research aims to bring insights into the positioning of Romania on the international tourism destination market. Since Romania is an emerging ecotourism destination, it is very likely that the tourism destination image should require new dimensions. The outcome of the research should bring support to the process of strategic decision-making regarding promotion and service development in Romania.

Therefore, besides the pure academic results, the research is offering a tool to the Initiative Group for Ecotourism or any other interested party in targeting tourism decision making bodies from Romania, in the attempt for a better positioning of Romania on the international destination market.

### 3. Research question

**What elements can position the image of Romania on the international destination market related to the development directions in the field of ecotourism, as perceived by the Dutch market?**

#### Research sub-questions

##### 1. What is the current tourism destination image of Romania, as perceived by the Dutch market?

- 1.1. What is the Dutch market perception on the current image of Romania?

This question is assessing how Romania is positioned now on the international market, including the assumption that there is a link between the country tourism image and its national image (WTO, 1980; Kotler, 1987; Echtner and Ritchie, 1991).

- 1.2. What are the perceived problems related to the tourism development in Romania?

The question intends to reveal how different problems are perceived to affect the tourism development in Romania.

- 1.3. Position of Romania with respect to other Central and Eastern European countries, perceived by Dutch tour-operators.

##### 2. What is the potential tourism destination image of Romania related with ecotourism, as perceived by the Dutch market?

- 2.1. What are the main elements of the ecotourism destination image of Romania?

The question is testing a predefined set of elements in order to select the elements of the “pulling” force to the country.

- 2.2. What are the main elements of the general tourism destination image of Romania?

The question is designed to delineate and assess the importance of different attributes of the general tourism destination image in the way they are perceived by the Dutch market.

- 2.3. How the ecotourism can be integrated in the general image of Romania?

The question is testing how ecotourism elements can be integrated in the general image of Romania.

- 2.4. What are the prospects of the ecotourism development in Romania, as perceived by the Dutch market?

The question is designed to obtain a deeper insight into the perception by the Dutch market of the ecotourism development in Romania.

#### 4. Conceptual framework

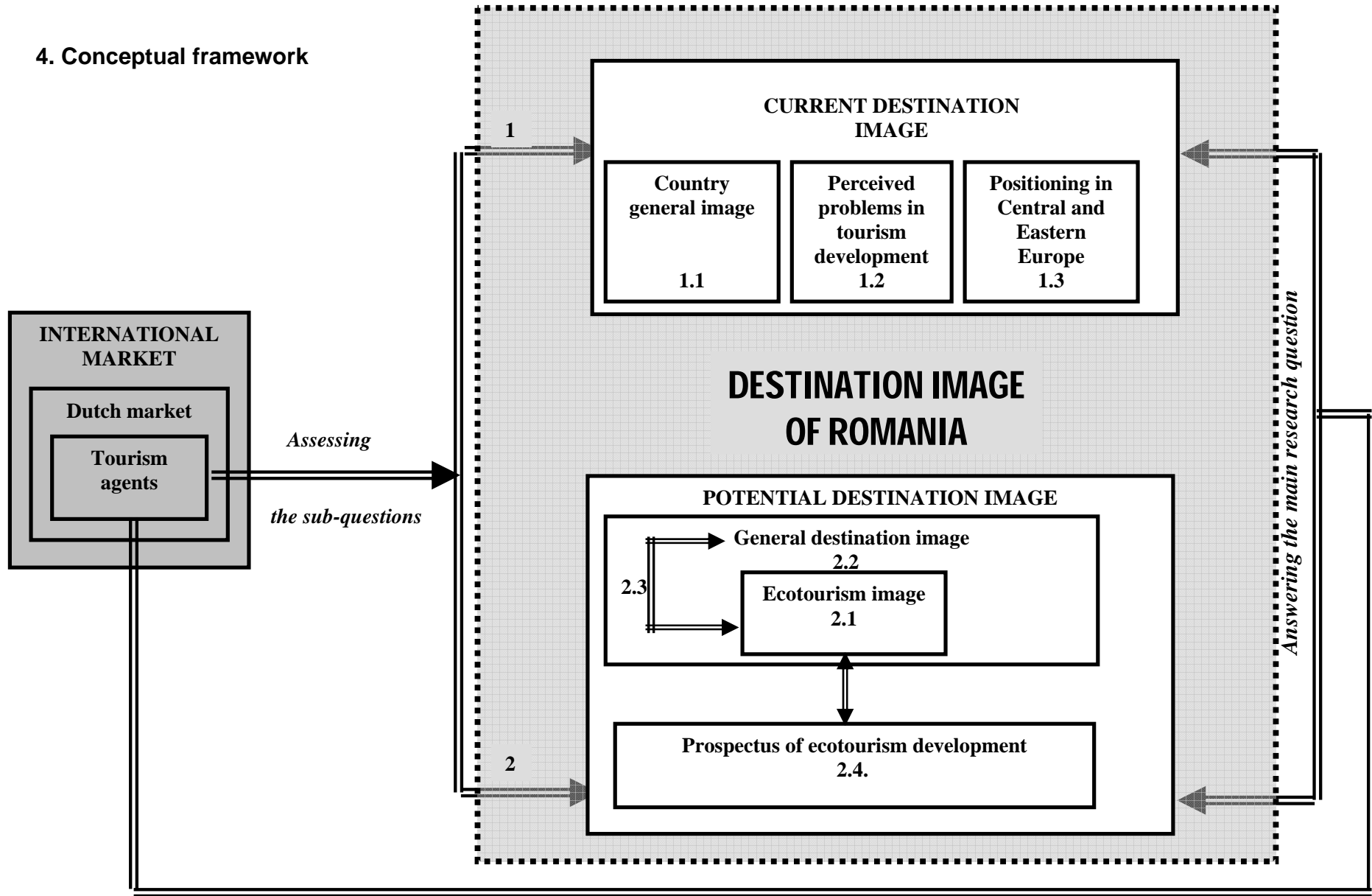


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework

The research is designed to assess the perception of one of the Western European market regarding the tourism destination image of Romania. The Dutch market was selected<sup>1</sup> to be researched, being one of the traditional international tourist supplies (Mr. Eugenio Yunis, World Tourism Organisation, April 19, 2002, Oradea, Romania<sup>2</sup>). The Dutch market is assessed through a set of key interface actors in the tourism marketing system: the tourism agents. The present research enlarged the meaning of tourism agents including governmental and non-governmental institutions together with business sector under the generic umbrella of tourism agents.

Through the tourism agents on the Dutch market, the research is assessing what are the current and the potential image of Romania as a tourism destination. Under the current image, three problems are researched: the present international country image (sub-question 1.1), the perceived problems in tourism development (sub-question 1.2) and the positioning of Romania within the other Central and Eastern European countries as a tourism destination (sub-question 1.3).

The potential destination image building is assessed in terms of ecotourism elements (sub-question 2.1), perception of general image elements (sub-question 2.2), matching among ecotourism and general image attributes (sub-question 2.3) and the overall perception of the prospectus of ecotourism development in Romania (sub-question 2.4).

The current and the potential image are interpreted to answer the main research question what can position the image of Romania on the international destination market including ecotourism, as perceived by the Dutch market.

## 5. Theoretical framework

### Effective destination positioning strategy

“Perceptions, rather than reality are what motivate consumers to act or not to act” (Guthrie and Gale, 1991, p 555). Images and the perception of them are of large importance in bringing tourists into a destination. It does not mean that the tourist destination marketers should overstate the importance of the services sector into the destination area, or that the services should be neglected in favour of marketing. Always the promoted image should be in a fine-tuning with the services developed into the destination. But when it is about attracting tourists, images are very often more important to attract tourists into a destination than tangible resources or services. Therefore, a large challenge for a destination is to find, promote and manage a unique and attracting image that can provide a good position on the international market. Under these circumstances, destinations need an effective positioning strategy (Echtner and Ritchie, 1990).

Positioning is more than just image creation. It is a form of marketing communication that helps to distinguish tourism destinations from similar tourism destinations, so that customers can choose the one that is more attractive (Chacko, 1997). To be able to position a destination on the market as part of an effective destination positioning strategy, nine steps are identified to be considered, such as:

1. Assessing the current perception of the destination (if any) by the market where the destination will be marketed;
2. Identifying and defining the highlight elements that the particular destination can promote;
3. Selecting a set of highlight elements that match the demand of the market and bring differentiation to other destinations. These elements need to be transformed into “pulling” factors;
4. Combining the selected “pulling” factors to form a coherent tourism destination image;

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<sup>1</sup> The availability of the logistical support of the Wageningen University and the grant from the Dutch Government created the frame to perform the research in The Netherlands.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Eugenio Yunis is the Chief of the Sustainable Development of Tourism Department of the World Tourism Organisation. He was interviewed by the researcher on his visit to Romania during the National Ecotourism Conference, April 19, 2002, Oradea, Romania.

5. Integrating the formed tourism destination image into the general destination image;
6. Promoting the tourism destination image on the market using the best available methods;
7. Monitoring the satisfaction level of the tourists attracted by the promoted image;
8. Monitoring the evolution of the promoted image and its efficacy in attracting tourists;
9. Adjusting the image according to the market evolution.

The above mentioned steps could represent a theoretical starting point for developing an effective destination positioning strategy, but real world often brings more complexity to the issue. Therefore, a couple of challenges need to be addressed for a better positioning approach:

- Image formation of a destination is not easy to be controlled by the marketer. Often, the marketer is facing an already created image that represents a real challenge to adjust, improve or change;
- Selected attractions are not easy to be transformed into real “pulling” factors that trigger the motivation of tourists to “buy” the destination;
- Living in a world full of images and promotion, customers are better trained to search and define image destinations that match their wishes and needs. Therefore, to reach successful positioning fine tuned marketing skills are demanded;
- Positioning involves much more than marketing. Positioning need to be supported by the whole policies, service sector and the myriad of other elements that make the tourism experience.

The present research is addressing only part of the effective destination positioning for Romania as related with ecotourism development. There is no intention that the present research will resolve the general problem of positioning strategy of Romania on the international market, but the research provides insights into first steps related with positioning and it can become a starting point for a larger strategy.

The first three stages of the effective positioning strategy for Romania are researched, assessing the current image, identifying the highlights and defining the “pulling” forces, and it provides insights into stages 4 and 5, the ecotourism image formation and how to integrate it in the general image.

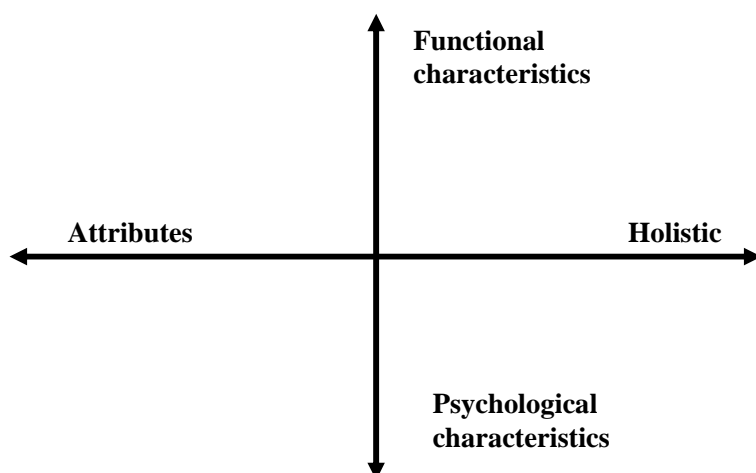
### **Tourism destination image**

The theoretical framework needs to acquire some specific elements that provide means to assess tourism destination image. A destination image posses a multiple nature character, that lies in two factors: the first correspond to its nature (attribute-based and holistic) and the second to its formation process (organic-induced components) (Gallarza et al., 2001).

The Echtner and Ritchie model (1993) was used to approach the tourism destination image of this research. The model is briefly described below. The tourism destination image is perceived both in terms of pieces of information on individual attributes and in terms of more holistic, impressions (MacInnis and Price, 1987, Echtner, Ritchie, 1993). In other words, destination images should be composed of the individual features (e.g. accommodation, roads, friendliness of the people) and more holistic impressions (e.g. mental pictures or imagery). The image definition can be drawn encompassing the above characteristics: “an image is not only individual traits or qualities but also the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others” (Echtner et al. 1991 adapted after Dichter, 1985).

Furthermore, the characteristics of an image can be defined between functional and psychological components: functional characteristics can be directly observable and measurable (prices, climate) since psychological characteristics can not be directly measured (hospitality, atmosphere) (Echtner, Ritchie, 1991).

The last dimension of the proposed model lies in the common-unique characteristic. This includes what MacCannell (1989) called ‘marker’ and must-see sights and Pearce (1988) defines as the symbols as part of the destination image.



**Fig. 2: Echter and Ritchie model of the destination image components**

The present model is used as a framework for assessing the components of the tourism destination image that Romania has and might acquire in the future.

In the attempt to discuss the positioning of Romania destination image, there is a need to further clarify a few concepts related to the image formation process. Gartner (1993) is suggesting that images are formed throughout a continuum of stages that proceed from induced to organic agents.

The **induced** agents in the image formation consist of the information from the destination promoter, such as: advertising (overt induced I), information received from tour operators (overt induced II), messages sent by a recognisable spokesperson (cover induced I) or articles, reports, stories of travel writers (covert induced II). All these type of agents have a common feature: the initial sender of information alias the destination promoter is always behind the sent information with a clear interest in the outcome of the image formation. The destination promoter is exerting a different degree of control over the released information.

Comparing with induced agents, the **autonomous** image formation agents consist of independently produced reports, documentaries, movies, and news articles. The destination promoters have hardly any control over this type of agent comparing with the induced agent.

The **organic** agents represent the information gathered either indirectly from individuals that visited the area (with no interest in promoting a specific image, e.g. friends) or directly as a consequence of a visit to the destination. The organic agents are basically influenced only by the direct experience of individual visitors that actually depends to a large extent on the quality of the experience within the visited destination.

These categories of image formation agents will be used in the following analysis of the Romanian image destination.

## 6. Methodology

The research is based on the affirmation of Klenosky and Gitelsen (1998) that the tourism agents represent a key interface in the tourism marketing system. They are “information brokers” towards the public with a good credibility of their opinion and recommendations (Jacoby and Hoyer 1981, in Klenosky and Gitelsen, 1998) and on the other hand, they are information receptors from the destination. Since they have to sell or promote a destination in a specific country, they should and need to be very sensitive in relation with the country

destination image. Therefore, the present research is using the tourism agents as “spokespersons” on behalf of the tourism market.

The meaning of the tourism agents has been enlarged in this research, such that it includes travel agencies, a governmental tourism office and a non-governmental rural and agro-tourism organisation as well as a car service-travelling organisation. The research is testing the image perception of Romania on the Dutch market interviewing a specialised group of tourism agents that includes:

- Four nature-culture outdoor oriented travel agencies;
- One culture-nature oriented travel agency;
- One main stream oriented travel agency (TUI);
- One travel agency specialised in Eastern Europe;
- Romanian Tourism Office from the Netherlands;
- The largest car travelling organisation (3.5 mill members);
- European ecological and agro-tourism organisation

The selection of the sample has been performed by screening all the tourism agents that provide or promote products in exotic destination (CBI, 2001). The selection has been based on the availability of the tourism agents to promote tourism products in Romania now or being likely to sell tourism products based in Romania in the future. Special attention was paid to include the travel agencies that are selling nature and/or (rural) culture and/or active outdoor tourism products in Romania. Among the ten interviewees, five are exclusively selling or promoting nature, rural or culture tourism products.

A limitation of the present research generated by the sample selection is that it is slightly weighted towards the “alternative” tourism sector. Only two interviewed agencies are not promoted “alternative” tourism as main products and two others are on the border line between alternative and main stream tourism products. This fact does not affect the results since the ecotourism is part of the alternative tourism and the assess ecotourism image is integrated within the general image of Romania.

Interviews were performed with directors or managers of the agencies (offices) or with the person in charge of developing products that cover Romania. Interviews with TUI were conducted with the director of the Sustainable Tourism Department. The respondents were asked to provide the answers as representatives of the institutions and not as individuals.

The methods used belong to the qualitative and quantitative research, using a semi-structured, in-depth type of interview including open questions as well as elements of quantitative evaluation but adapted to the qualitative research (for an interview questionnaire see Appendix 1). When the interviewed person was asked to use quantitative elements such as ranking (e.g. importance of different attributes in the general image of Romania), (s)he provided oral comments and justifications that were included in the data collection by the interviewer. The question “why” was constantly posed to the interviewed person. In this way, most of the ranking, although performed using a quantitative evaluation schema, is supported by qualitative data.

The next table (Table 1) shows the interview methods that were used for each research topic that was approached.

Research topics	Interview methods
1.1. What is the Dutch market perception on the current image of Romania?	In-depth unstructured interview (open questions)
1.2. What are the perceived problems related to the tourism development in Romania?	Structured interview (mainly ranking system)
1.3. Positioning of Romania with respect to other EEC	Structured interview (mainly ranking system)
2.1. What are the main attributes of the ecotourism destination image of Romania?	Structured interview (mainly ranking system)
2.2. What are the main attributes of the general tourism destination image of Romania?	Structured interview (mainly ranking system)
2.3. How the ecotourism attributes relate with the general image of Romania?	Semi-structured (open questions and correlation between 2.1 and 2.2)
2.4. What are the prospects of the ecotourism development in Romania, as perceived by the Dutch market?	Semi-structured, (using analysis of opportunities and threats)

**Table 1: The interview method used for each research topic**

The interviews focus partly on ecotourism both in terms of image or development. Since ecotourism is a term with broad meanings, at a certain moment during interview discussion the ecotourism concept was stated by the interviewer.

## 7. Research results

### 7.1. The current tourism destination image of Romania, as perceived by the Dutch market

This sub-question was researched covering three aspects:

- Perception of the current **general image of Romania**;
- Assessing the **perceived problems** for developing tourism programmes in Romania;
- **Positioning** of Romania with respect to the other countries from **Central and Eastern Europe**.

#### 7.1.1. Perception of the general image of Romania by the Dutch tour-operators

The perception of general image of Romania was addressed mainly through two questions:

- What are the topics that you relate the image of Romania with (not necessary from the tourism perspective; it could be positive as well as negative)?**
- Mention the most negative elements about Romania.**

The first question assessed the general-holistic image that the respondents had about Romania. The second question was addressed for a better perspective upon the negative side of the image. Usually, the respondents try to please the interviewer and tell mainly the pleasant side of their perception. The negative elements resulting from the second question were integrated under the general image.

The results were interpreted identifying the main ideas in the respondents discourse, writing them down and later on clustering them under different headings. In this way, were defined nine main image clusters, presented in the next table (Table 2). An extra column was introduced in the table to have an understanding of the positive or negative connotation of each specific element.

Image cluster	Elements (mentioned by respondents)	No. of respondents under the cluster	Connotation	Comments
<b>Nature</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Forest</li> <li>▪ Mountains</li> <li>▪ Large carnivores</li> <li>▪ Wild nature</li> <li>▪ Wild landscape</li> <li>▪ Danube Delta</li> </ul>	8	Positive	Danube Delta can be considered part of <i>Nature</i> cluster but it has a powerful image by itself being identified by four respondents
<b>Rural culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Romantic traditional countryside</li> <li>▪ Horse carts –low mechanisation;</li> <li>▪ Hospitality, kind people;</li> <li>▪ Fertile soil;</li> <li>▪ Traditional cuisine;</li> <li>▪ Wooden churches;</li> <li>▪ Folk music.</li> </ul>	7	Positive	Two respondents created a common element between nature and rural culture
<b>Heritage culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Part of European culture;</li> <li>▪ Hungarians culture;</li> <li>▪ Saxons (Germans) culture;</li> <li>▪ Latin island;</li> <li>▪ Fantastic history.</li> </ul>	4	Positive	Two respondents mentioned Latin character of Romanian culture as an attraction.
<b>Dracula</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dracula myth;</li> <li>▪ Related with Transylvania</li> </ul>	3		
<b>Ceausescu communism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ceausescu's Palace (People's House);</li> <li>▪ Dictatorship;</li> <li>▪ Destroying churches;</li> <li>▪ Ugly architecture;</li> <li>▪ Bad time;</li> <li>▪ Coastal resorts.</li> </ul>	6	Negative/ Positive	With an apparent negative connotation, still poses tourism attraction force
<b>Poverty – unsafety – corruption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Poverty;</li> <li>▪ Poor country;</li> <li>▪ Corruption;</li> <li>▪ Bureaucracy;</li> <li>▪ Orphans, gypsies.</li> </ul>	10	Negative	All the respondents identified at least one negative element under this cluster
<b>Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Bad roads;</li> <li>▪ Accommodations;</li> <li>▪ Access to train stations</li> </ul>	5	Negative	
<b>Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No client oriented;</li> <li>▪ Reliable partners;</li> <li>▪ Language communication</li> </ul>	3	Negative	<i>No client oriented</i> services creates a general very bad image
<b>Political issue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Political instability;</li> <li>▪ Violence related with politics</li> </ul>	3	Negative	
<b>'Too far away'</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Too far away by car;</li> <li>▪ Long way from Bucharest to North of Romania;</li> <li>▪ Poor access from Budapest</li> </ul>	2	Negative	
<b>Pollution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Litter everywhere</li> </ul>	2	Negative	

<b>Unclustered images</b>	▪ Not the '1 <sup>st</sup> tourism choice' destination	1	Negative	
	▪ Part of the European culture	1	Positive	
	▪ Business opportunity;	1	Positive	
	▪ National football team, Hagi, Steaua	1	Positive	

**Table 2: Elements clusters of the general image of Romania**

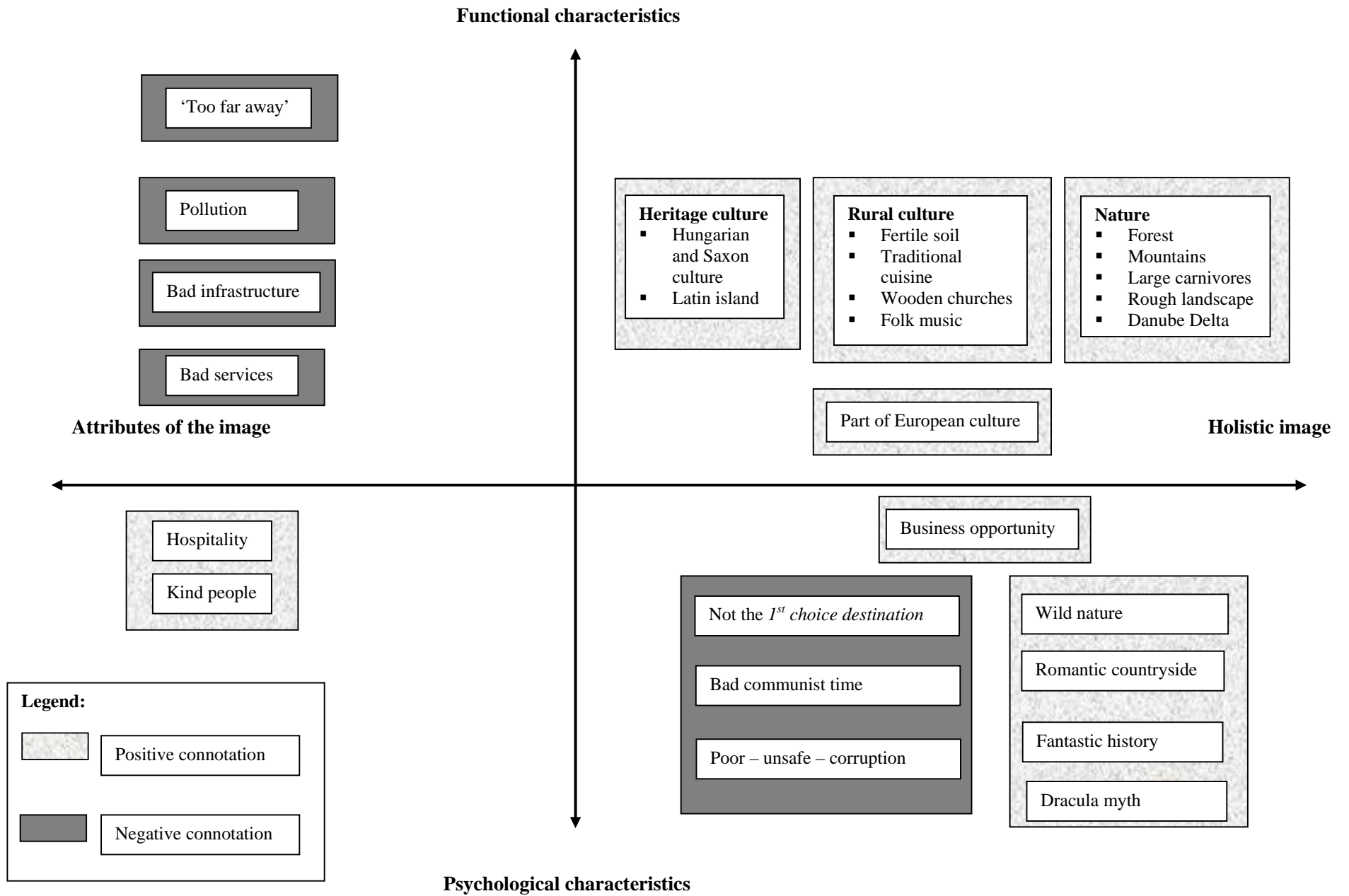
Generally speaking, there are two powerful positive images generated by the *Nature* and *Rural culture* clusters mentioned by eight respectively seven respondents and a strong negative image generated by the *Poverty-unsafe-corruption* cluster. The other clusters: *Heritage culture* and *Dracula* are forming a relatively weaker image, but still mentioned by four respectively three respondents.

There are nine respondents that identified elements of *Nature* and *Rural culture* clusters. The mainstream travel agency (TUI) was the only one that did not include any element of nature and culture to the Romanian image. This fact was not because the respondent (representative of TUI) did not know about Romania but from the TUI perspective Romania is missing the identity picture: neither nature nor rural or heritage culture has yet a powerful picture to create an identity for Romania as a tourism destination.

An interesting cluster is represented by *Communism and Ceausescu*: apparently negative, it actually positions Romania through its history, defining a unique potentially attractive character that might trigger the curiosity of tourists, therefore overall positive in terms of destination image.

Five respondents created the *Infrastructure and Service* cluster that brings a defined and clear negative image. There are two other clusters under the negative image side having a weaker character: *Political issue* and 'To far away' created by three respectively two respondents.

The main formed clusters together with their elements were positioned in the Echtner and Ritchie model (1993). Holistic and attribute elements were identified function of functional and psychological characteristics. The results are presented in the following figure (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3: Applied Echtner and Ritchie model to the identified image elements of Romania**

The main holistic elements were positioned into the functional-psychological co-ordinates into the Echtner and Ritchie model. It can be debated if some elements belong to holistic or to the attribute image (e.g. wooden churches or folk music), but since the answers expressed a general view about Romania, they were considered holistic. The main clusters: *nature*, *rural culture*, and *heritage culture* were identified under functional characteristics of the holistic image. Although under each cluster there are elements apparently closer to attributes than to holistic side, the research revealed through open questions that actually there is not yet a clear representation of the identified cluster on the attributes image side.

The general picture is balanced between negative and positive elements. Under the holistic – psychological characteristics, there are two strong positive and negative holistic images: on the one hand **wild nature / romantic countryside/ fantastic history/ Dracula myth** and on the other hand **poor – unsafe – corruption/ bad communist time/ not the 1<sup>st</sup> choice destination**. On the functional characteristic side, there is a positive and negative conflict image generated by: **nature/rural culture/ heritage culture** (positive) and **bad infrastructure and services, pollution** and **‘too far away a destination’** (negative).

An important comment under the positive images is provided by the way that these images were formed. All the respondents, except one that provided ‘positive image’ elements, had either visited Romania or had good information from their company staff. Therefore, the positive image is formed by the organic agents, which means that it is built based on a physical contact with the destination, since the negative image is built mainly by induced and autonomous agents. There is hardly any element that is provided by an induced factor under the positive image. In other words, the tourism agents were little influenced by any (induced) promotion of Romania. In the same time, the negative image has a large proportion of elements that are supplied by the induced combined with autonomous agents.

The fact that there is a positive-romantic image supported by the organic agents in parallel with a negative one partially fed by the induced agents, reveals the need and the opportunity to support the positive image through a promotion strategy where induced agents promoting a positive image could play a central role.

Under the holistic/psychological characteristic, there are options to improve the general image of Romania through image formation techniques: bringing a more powerful positive image constructing through induced agents that can support the positive image and overwhelm the negative induced one. Not the same technique can be applied under the attributes/ functional characteristics. The attributes supplied by autonomous and organic agents have deeper roots and are linked with the ground reality. They are not just image problem: in Romania the services and the infrastructure are often of a poor quality, there is pollution and geographically, Romania is situated relatively far away from the Western European countries. Excepting the geographical position, the other elements should be firstly resolved in real terms to be able later on to improve the general image of Romania.

Therefore, the identified image elements are split in two categories:

- “reality” – elements that are based on real facts (e.g. poor infrastructure, geographically far away destination);
- “just image” – elements that are mainly perceived as a consequence of negative induced agents (e.g. poor, unsafe). Always behind a “just image” element, there is a real fact but usually the induced factors overwhelm the reality creating just an image.

In terms of negative images, most of the “reality” elements are situated on the attributes/ functional characteristics and the “just image” elements are classified mainly under holistic/ psychological characteristics.

### 7.1.2. Assessing the perceived problems for developing tourism programmes in Romania, by the Dutch tour-operators

Under this aspect, the negative elements of the image of Romania were evaluated through an indirect question related with the perception of the problems in developing tourism programmes in Romania addressed to each respondent. A ranking method was performed: the interviewed persons were asked to rank from 1 (the minimum) up to 10 (maximum) the magnitude of each problem. An open list of pre-defined set of problems was presented for evaluation (written on card to be visualised by the respondent). The list of elements was designed by the researcher adding his identified elements to the appropriate attributes summarised by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) for measurement of the destination image. The results are presented in the next table (Table 3) in terms of mean score and standard deviation.

No	Element	Mean score Ranking from [0 to 10], Max=10	Standard deviation
1	Poor general image – difficult to sell as a destination	7.2	1.93
2	Accessibility (distance to travel to Romania)	6.3	2.54
3	Transport infrastructure	6.1	2.60
4	Cleanliness	5.5	2.62
5	Access to tourism info	5.2	2.78
6	Personal safety	5.1	3.00
7	Poor accommodation	5.1	2.73
8	Political stability	5.0	1.33
9	Poor financial system	4.8	1.99
10	Bureaucracy	4.8	3.08
11	Lack of ground initiatives – ground-handling operators, local guides, etc	4.6	3.03
12	Reliable partners	4.1	2.92
13	Transport system	4.1	1.36
14	Communication	3.4	1.96
15	Cost/ prices level	3.4	2.77
16	Culture differences	3.2	2.97
17	Different cuisine/ food and drink	2.5	2.42
18	Sport and health facilities	2.2	1.67

**Table 3: Perceived problems in developing tourism programmes in Romania**

Two respondents identified two other problems that were not initially included on the list: personal health (ranked with 4) and language communication (ranked with 6)<sup>3</sup>.

The maximum mean score was obtained by the 'poor general image – difficult to sell as destination' with a mean score of 7.2 and a standard deviation of 1.93. The standard deviation is relatively low that means there is a general agreement among respondents about the scoring that is revealed in the mean value. Although, there is an interesting fact to be acknowledged: one travel agent (the largest in providing alternative tourism products in the Netherlands) marked with 3 this element, which increased the standard deviation from almost the minimum value (standard deviation increased from 1.33 to 1.93). Only for this travel agency, the image of Romania is not so important in developing tourism products because the company has its own loyal clients and the tour are usually promoted through their catalogues issued four time per year and targeting directly the clients. For this company is more important *reliable partners* (scored with 9), *personal safety* and *accommodation* (each of them scored with 8), than the general image Romania (scored with 3).

<sup>3</sup> *Personal health* and *language communication* were not included in the evaluation since they were not ranked by all the respondents.

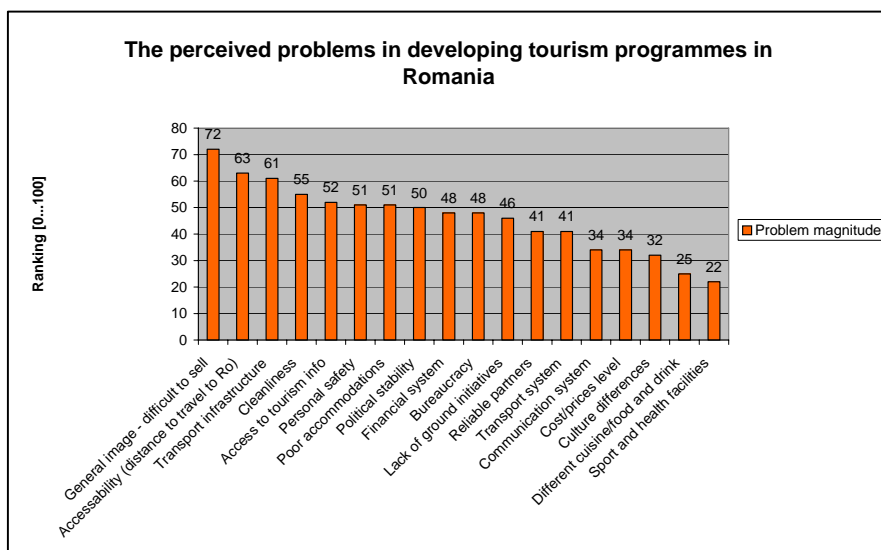
*Accessibility* defined as *distance to travel to Romania* was highly ranked (second as importance: mean score 6.3, standard deviation 2.54) by eight respondents. Two respondents, however, marked the element with a 1 and a 3. One of the exceptions was brought by a travel agency that made its own arrangements to drive tourists from Budapest directly to Transylvania, therefore the access was not mentioned as a problem. The other exception was made by a specialised hiking agency that sends tourists to difficult accessible places, therefore the clients targeted are used to travel more until they reach the destination. The other eight respondents agreed that coming by car and by train is far from the Netherlands and by plane it is difficult to reach destinations in the north of the country or in the mountains from the main airport (Bucharest).

For the *transport infrastructure* (third as importance: 6.1 the mean score and 2.60 the standard deviation) only the mainstream agency high marked it with a nine. The rest of the respondents provided relatively average marks, even very low marks for those agencies selling a very specific product that has less to do with transportation such as: hiking in the mountains or a fine mixture between rural and heritage culture and nature.

The highest standard deviation elements are *bureaucracy* (3.08), *lack of ground initiatives* (3.03), *reliable partners* (2.92). The high standard deviation proves a general disagreement of respondents on the evaluated problems: some of them consider important problems and some not. Having an insight into the respondents that high scored these elements, it can be identified that the mainstream tour operator and the car travel agency scored them high since the alternative tour operators do not consider them a problem. It is interesting to correlate this remark with the fact that these two agencies have to deal either with public Romanian institutions or with large tourism companies (that are still partially state owned). Therefore, for them bureaucracy, lack of ground initiative and reliable partners are important problems to be resolved since for the alternative tour operators these issues are not directly relevant.

Generally, the travel agencies that are targeting the main stream tourists have the largest overall score if all the problem elements are summed up: the main stream agency scores an overall 139 points and the car travel agency scored 97, since the other alternative travel agencies have a total score for all problems going down up to 38. Interpreting the results, there is clear evidence that the main stream travel agencies are more demanding in terms of problems that need to be resolved, such as: bureaucracy, reliable partners, accommodation, safety, cleanliness, etc. since the alternative agencies are much more flexible and ready to adjust to the current situation.

The perception of the magnitude of each problem was identified by summing up the scores provided by interviewed persons. The results are presented in the next graph (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4: Perceived problems in developing tourism programmes in Romania**

*General image – difficult to sell Romania* is the overall highest ranked problem with a score of 72. The second identified problem is the perception of Romania as not being accessible from the Netherlands in terms of distance (63 points). There is a cluster of medium identified problems, such that: *transport infrastructure, cleanliness, access to tourism information, personal safety, poor accommodations*. The lowest marked elements are forming a set that is not perceived as problematic for Romania as a destination, such that: *communication system, culture differences, different cuisine or sport facilities*.

### 7.1.3. Positioning of Romania with respect to the other countries from Central and Eastern Europe, as perceived by Dutch tour-operators

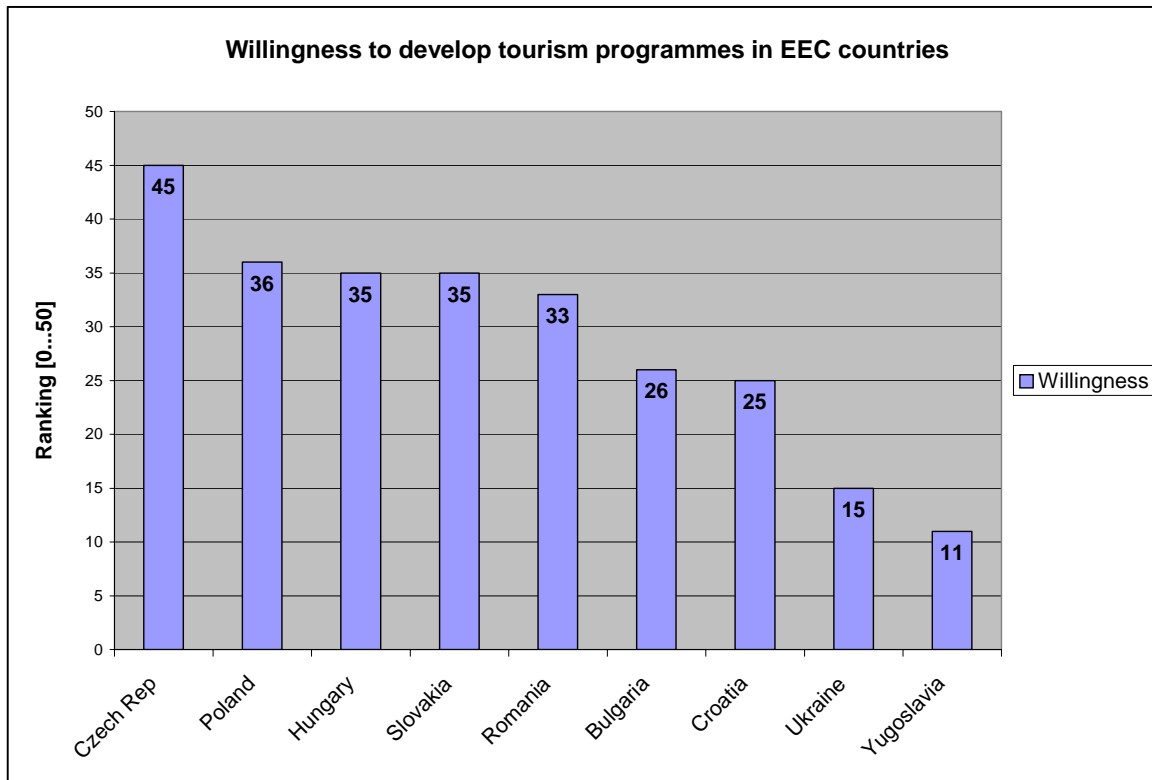
This aspect was approached testing the willingness of Dutch tour-operators to develop tourism programmes in different countries from Central and Eastern Europe. A ranking method was used asking the respondents to rank from 1 (the minimum) up to 5 (maximum) their willingness to develop programmes in the mentioned countries. The results are presented in the next figure (Table 4) in terms of mean score and standard deviation.

No	Element	Mean score Ranking from [0 to 5], Max=5	Standard deviation
1	Czech Republic	4.3	1.25
2	Poland	3.6	1.51
3	Slovakia	3.3	1.16
4	Hungary	3.3	1.49
5	Romania	3.1	0.99
6	Bulgaria	2.6	2.01
7	Croatia	2.5	1.58
8	Ukraine	1.5	1.08
9	Yugoslavia	1.1	0.57

**Table 4: Willingness to develop programmes in EEC Countries**

The highest mean scores were obtained by Czech Republic and Poland (4.5 respectively 3.6) with a relatively low – medium standard deviation (1.25 respectively 1.51). There is a general agreed low willingness to develop tourism programmes in Yugoslavia (mean score: 1.1, standard deviation: 0.57) and Ukraine (mean score: 1.5, standard deviation: 1.08). Romania is located on a medium position (mean score: 3.1) and confirmed by all the respondents (standard deviation: 0.99).

To identify the position of Romania among the other CEE countries, the score attributed to each country in terms of willingness of interviewed Dutch tour-operators to develop programmes was added up. The results are provided in the next graph (Fig 5).



**Fig. 5: Willingness to develop programmes in EEC Countries**

Romania has a moderate position regarding the willingness of Dutch travel agency to develop tourism programmes. It positioned after Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia and relatively better than Bulgaria, Croatia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia.

However, the graph should be careful interpreted in terms of *willingness* to develop programmes and not the current involvement of the interviewed agency into each questioned country. For example, according to the respondents, Bulgaria is exceeding Romania in terms of the present travel agencies that are developing programmes in each country.

## **7.2. How ecotourism can be integrated and promoted in the general image of Romania, as perceived by the Dutch market?**

This sub-question was researched covering four aspects:

- What are the main attributes of the ecotourism destination image of Romania?
- What are the main attributes of the general tourism destination image of Romania?
- How the ecotourism attributes relate with the general image of Romania?
- What are the prospects of the ecotourism development in Romania, as perceived by the Dutch market?

### **7.2.1. The main elements of the ecotourism destination image of Romania**

The question is testing a predefined set of elements in order to define specific ecotourism “pulling” forces to the country. The elements were identified within a participatory workshop by the actors initially involved in Initiative Group for Ecotourism. A ranking method was performed: the interviewed persons were asked to rank from 1 (the minimum) up to 10 (maximum) the attractiveness of each element. The open list of pre-defined set of

elements was presented for evaluation, written on a card to be visualised by the respondent. The results are presented in the next table (Table 5) in terms of mean score and standard deviation.

No	Element	Mean score Ranking from [0 to 10], Max=10	Standard deviation
1	“Untouched” nature	9.2	1.03
2	Authenticity of the traditions	8.4	1.17
3	30% of the European large carnivore population	8.3	1.70
4	Danube Delta	8.2	1.23
5	Unfragmented natural forests	8.2	0.92
6	Hospitality	8.1	1.20
7	Diverse and striking landscape	7.9	1.29
8	Human-nature relation – traditions	7.8	1.55
9	Large biodiversity	7.7	1.34
10	12,000 caves (some unique in the world)	7.2	1.67
11	Traditional food made of natural products	6.8	1.48
12	Mystery	5.8	2.49
13	Old Christianity traditions	5.6	1.78
14	Healing herbs	5.1	1.52
15	World unique salt relief	4.8	2.35

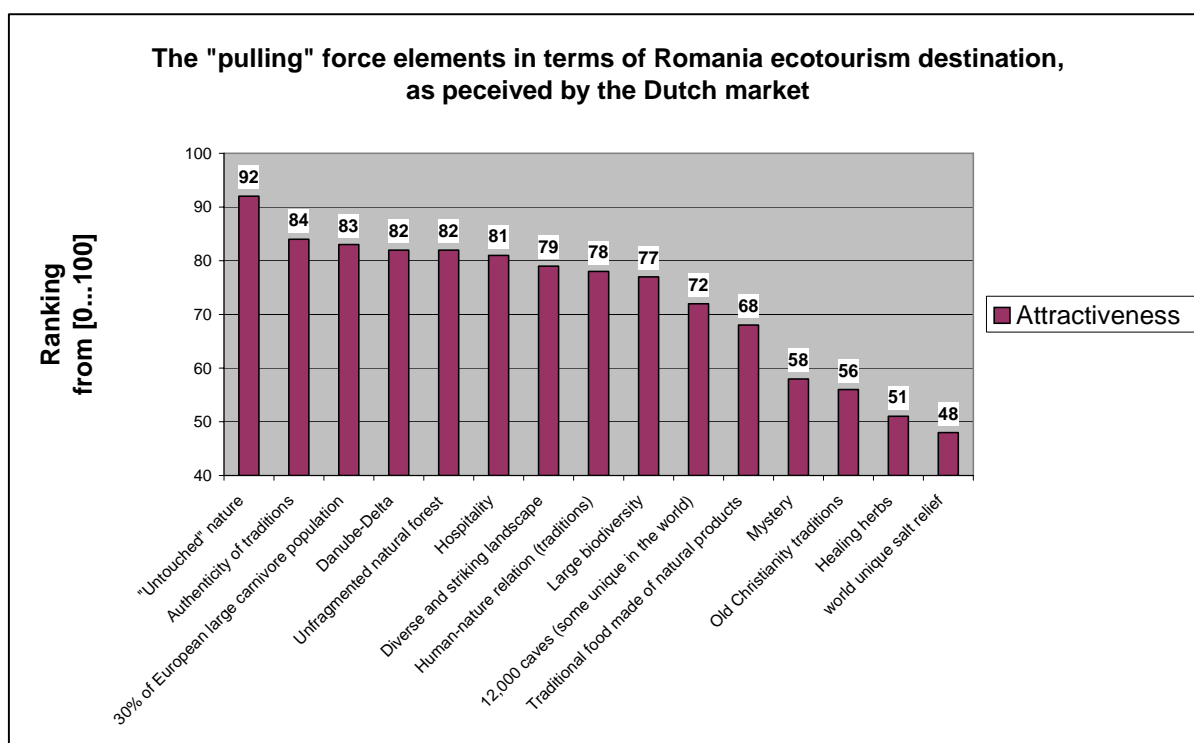
**Table 5: The “pulling” force elements in terms of ecotourism destination, as perceived by the Dutch market**

There is a high undoubted general agreement proved by the lowest standard deviation values that “*Untouched*” nature (mean score: 9.2, standard deviation: 1.03) and *unfragmented natural forest* (mean score: 8.2, standard deviation: 0.92) represent an important “pulling” force to Romania as an ecotourism destination. *Hospitality* is another important high ranked attractive element (mean score: 8.1), generally agreed by the respondents (standard deviation: 1.20).

A more controversial issue is *mystery* that has a relatively low mean score (5.8) but a high standard deviation (2.49). Therefore, a definite conclusion about the importance of *mystery* cannot be drawn based only on this question.

In a particular case, a respondent had a strongly influenced answer by two induced images about large carnivores and Danube Delta. Both images were defined by two different presentations: the carnivore presentation was a success and the Danube Delta presentation was a failure. Therefore, he marked Danube Delta with six points since the carnivore image scored the maximum ten points. It should be introduced later on

The perception of the importance of each element was identified by summing up the scores provided by interviewed persons. The results are presented in the next graph (Fig. 6).



**Fig. 6: The “pulling” force elements in terms of ecotourism destination, as perceived by the Dutch market**

There is a general high score for the attractiveness of the assessed elements. More than 67% of the elements are ranked with an overall score higher than 70 that confirm their importance in image formation process. There is a set of nine elements (*authenticity, Danube-Delta, large carnivore population, unfragmented natural forest, hospitality, diverse landscape, humane-nature traditions, large biodiversity and unique caves*) that form a cluster of “pulling” forces. On top there is the “*untouched*” nature element that has an outstanding position.

### 7.2.2. The main elements of the general tourism destination image of Romania

The question is designed to define and assess the importance of different elements of the general tourism destination image in the way they are perceived by the Dutch market. The attributes were selected through a content analysis of the Romanian promotion materials, to which some additional elements were included from the ecotourism element set. The same ranking method was performed: the interviewed persons were asked to rank from 1 (the minimum) up to 10 (maximum) the attractiveness of each element. The open list of pre-defined set of elements was presented for evaluation, written in a chart to be visualised by the respondent. The results are presented in the next table (Table 6) in terms of mean score and standard deviation.

No	Element	Mean score Ranking from [0 to 10], Max=10	Standard deviation
1	Pristine nature	8.7	1.16
2	Carpathian Mountains	7.9	1.73
3	Rural areas	7.7	1.06
4	Medieval cities	7.6	0.97
5	Danube Delta	7.4	1.90
6	Fortified churches	7.1	0.74
7	Painted churches	6.4	2.07
8	Ethnical mixture (Romanians, Hungarians,	5.6	2.32

	Germans, Turks, Tatars, Gypsies, Jewish, etc)		
9	Dracula myth related with Dracula phenomena	5.5	2.37
10	Bucharest	4.8	2.10
11	Winter ski resorts	4.0	1.94
12	Seaside resorts, beaches	3.9	2.02

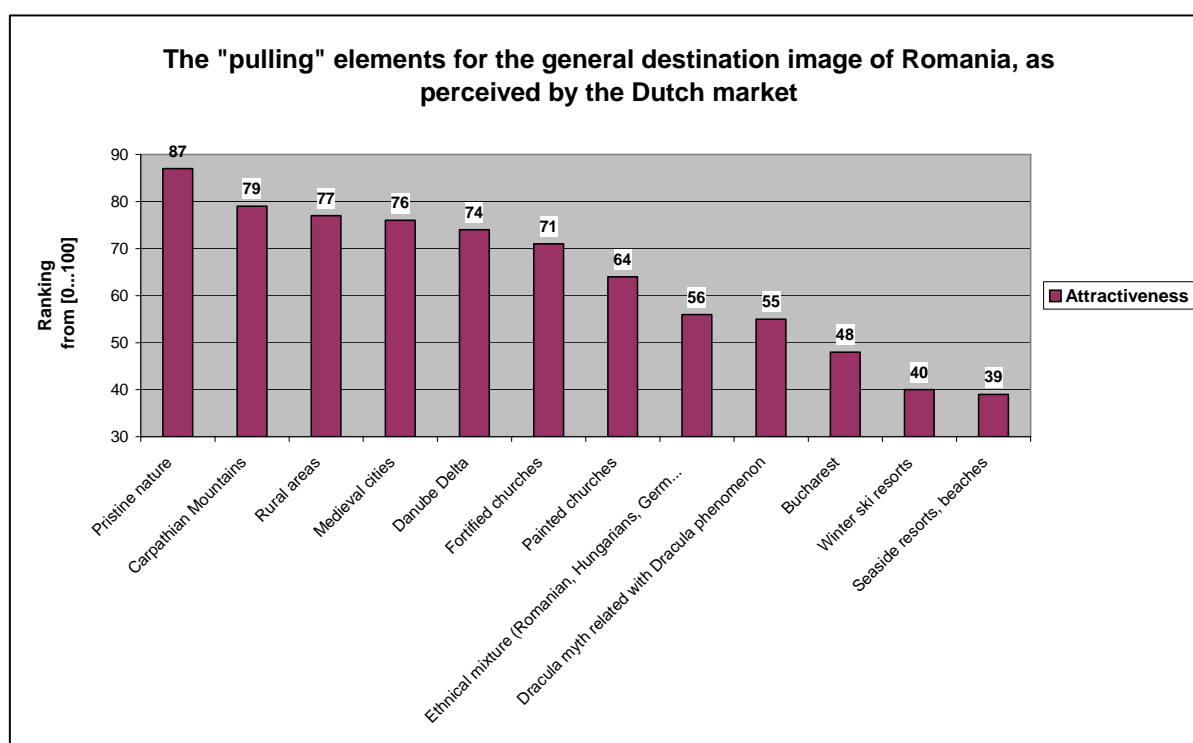
**Table 6: The “pulling“elements for the general image of Romania, as perceived by the Dutch market**

The list was completed with two other elements: hospitality was mentioned by three respondents with a high response (mean 8, standard deviation 1) and traditional food by one respondent (mean score 8.5 and standard deviation 0.71).

There is a high general agreement among respondents that *pristine nature* (mean score: 8.7 and standard deviation: 1.16) and *rural areas* (mean score: 7.7 and standard deviation: 1.06) are one of the most powerful elements in terms of the general image of Romania.

A debated element is the *Dracula myth*, having the largest standard deviation: 2.37 and a relatively low mean score (5.5). Combined with the results of mystery from the previous assessment of the ecotourism elements, there are signs that the Dutch market does not perceive *Dracula-myth* and *mystery* combination as a clear attraction to Romania. Although, the main stream and the culture oriented travel agencies marked them with a relatively high score (average of 8 for both travel agencies).

The perception of the importance of each element was identified by summing up the scores provided by interviewed persons. The results are presented in the next graph (Fig. 7).



**Fig. 7: The “pulling“elements for the general image of Romania, as perceived by the Dutch market**

According to the Dutch market, *Pristine nature* (total score of 87) constitutes the largest “pulling” force for the general image of Romania. It is followed by a set of five elements (*Carpathian Mountains, rural areas, medieval cities, Danube Delta* and *fortified churches*) that are defined having the total score higher than 70 points.

The lowest ranked elements by the respondents are Bucharest (48 points), winter ski resorts (40 points) and seaside resorts (39 points). These elements were relatively low ranked by all the respondents including the main stream travel agency that ranked Bucharest with 7 points, winter resorts with 6 points and seaside resorts with 5 points, but high ranked pristine nature (10 points), and Danube Delta, medieval cities and Dracula myth (9 points).

### 7.2.3. How the ecotourism elements relate with the general image of Romania?

The question is testing how ecotourism elements can be integrated in the general image of Romania. The approach to answer this question was performed grouping ecotourism image elements around related general images. The importance of each element can be determined by the mean and standard deviation that is related to.

General image element	Importance		Ecotourism image attribute	Importance	
	Mean	Std. Deviation		Mean	Std. Deviation
Pristine nature	8.7	1.16	“Untouched” nature	9.2	1.03
			Large carnivores	8.3	1.70
			Unfragmented natural forest	8.2	0.92
			Large biodiversity	7.7	1.34
Carpathian Mountains	7.9	1.73	Diverse and striking landscape	7.9	1.29
			Caves	7.2	1.67
Rural areas	7.7	1.06	Authenticity of traditions	8.4	1.17
			Hospitality	8.1	1.20
			Traditions: human-nature	7.8	1.55
			Traditional food	6.8	1.48
			Old Christianity tradition	5.6	1.78
			Healing herbs	5.1	1.52
Danube Delta	7.4	1.90	Danube Delta	8.2	1.23
Medieval cities	7.6	0.97	Not researched elements		
Fortified churches	7.1	0.74			
Painted churches	6.4	2.07			
Ethnical mixture	5.6	2.32			
Dracula myth	5.5	2.37	Mystery	5.8	2.49
Bucharest	4.8	2.10	Not researched elements		
Winter ski resorts	4.0	1.94			
Seaside resorts	3.9	2.02			

**Table 7: Ecotourism elements included in the general image of Romania**

Four well-defined clusters were formed as part of the general image of Romania integrating the most important elements of the ecotourism image, too. These clusters are *pristine nature* with six elements of ecotourism image, *Rural areas* including six elements of ecotourism image, *Carpathian Mountains* and *Danube Delta* with three elements of the ecotourism image. The standard deviation of the elements from these clusters is relatively low, varying between 0.92 to 1.70.

#### 7.2.4. The prospects of the ecotourism in the overall tourism development Romania, as perceived by the Dutch market

The perspective of the tourism development in general was evaluated through an indirect open question: ‘**what are the most important issues to be improved that you are getting (more) interested in selling Romania as a destination?**’. As a remark, the question was posed to the respondents before they were asked about the attributes of the general and ecotourism image. Therefore, there is not possible that they were influenced by the pre-defined set of elements proposed for evaluation to the respondents.

The answers were grouped under 8 different clusters. The summarising of the main ideas is presented below, in the next table (Table 8):

Issue to be improved	No. of respondents	Comments
Create the destination image	7	There is a lack of destination image for Romania – <b>“it is not enough to have a good product in Romania, we need the Dutch market ready to buy it”</b>
Market oriented	6	Tourism promotion and selling need to be more <b>demand oriented</b> , having a market segmentation approach
Service quality	5	More <b>client oriented</b>
Infrastructure	2	Roads, accommodation, walking paths
Increasing access to Romania	2	Besides the perception of Romania being “too far”, the physical aspect should be considered e.g. travel from Bucharest to Maramures takes almost one day; Solutions: Accessibility from Budapest, Flight directly to Transylvanian cities
Access to information	4	Organised tours for tour-operators to show the attractions; Better access of tourists to information
Price policy	2	Price/quality often too high; Differentiated prices season/extra-season
Reliable partners (institutions)	2	Special request of the respondents that have to work with Romanian state institutions

**Table 8: Identified elements by the Dutch market to be improved**

The largest shared comment mentioned by seven respondents relates with the **destination image** of Romania that **needs to be created**. The revealed meaning is that tour-operators are more generally informed about destinations, so they can picture an image about Romania (see the first sub-question), but the general public is not yet aware about Romania as a destination country. Therefore, tour-operators need that Romania firstly acquires a destination image that they can sell tourism products from Romania to the Dutch market.

**Market oriented** is a comment underlined by six respondents. It stands for a better positioning of the tourism product on the international market that is in a direct relation with shaping the tourism product according with the market diverse demands.

**Service quality** improvement was mentioned by five respondents. They meant a better client oriented policy within the process of service delivery.

The prospects of ecotourism development had been researched using an opportunity and threat analysis. Each respondent was asked about his/her perception regarding ecotourism development. The main ideas are mentioned in the below table (Table 9):

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Image of Romania is improving;</li> <li>▪ Increasing general tourism interest for Central and Eastern European countries;</li> <li>▪ General increasing interest in active holiday;</li> <li>▪ International co-operation (Dutch-Romanian co-operation);</li> <li>▪ Growing awareness for nature and ecotourism</li> <li>▪ Good climate (warmer temperature)</li> <li>▪ Tendency to increase travel inside Europe (Sept. 11, 2001)</li> <li>▪ To be first in Europe with a declared national ecotourism policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build the wrong destination image;</li> <li>▪ Long term planning versus short term solutions or conservation versus development;</li> <li>▪ Low awareness for ecotourism;</li> <li>▪ Pollution</li> <li>▪ Crowdedness</li> <li>▪ High criminality</li> <li>▪ Price racing due to increasing demand;</li> <li>▪ Competition with similar destinations</li> <li>▪ Poor grey image</li> <li>▪ Necessary co-operation government – business sector;</li> <li>▪ Natural disasters;</li> <li>▪ Potential street convolutions</li> </ul>

**Table 9: Identified opportunities and threats elements of ecotourism development in Romania**

Under the **opportunity set**, there are a few ideas that need some comments. There is a *slight improvement of the image* of Romania. This idea was mentioned in different ways, by different respondents. Actually, it is part of the general findings of the research during the ten interviews: Romania is slightly changing towards a positive image and this is a process governed by the autonomous agent, in other words the independent image that it is not created with a specific purpose (e.g. tourists promotion) is shifting slowly towards a positive side. This is enhanced by the *increasing popularity of Central and Eastern European destinations* (partially caused by the tragic September 11, event).

On the other side, the *ecotourism is gaining more ground* all over the world. Romania is an attractive destination for tourists from the North of Europe because of the *warmer climate* during summer.

Among the **threat set**, *to not build a wrong image* reveals a worry that Romania is in the process of constructing, promoting and sustaining a new destination image since at present there is not a coherent destination image for Romania. This image is very important for the future attractiveness and identification of the country.

Since ecotourism involves development and conservation, long term planning versus short-term solutions, there is a need for co-operation among business, conservation and governmental sector. This can become a large threat to ecotourism development if not happened.

## 8. Results concerning researched questions

### 8.1. The current tourism destination image of Romania, as perceived by the Dutch market

#### 8.1.1. Current general image of Romania perceived by the Dutch market

There are two contradictory images perceived under the psychological-holistic component of the general image of Romania: a positive one related with *wild nature / romantic countryside/ fantastic history / Dracula myth* and a negative one related with *poor-unsafe-corruption / bad communist time / not the 1<sup>st</sup> tourism choice destination*. On the functional characteristics *nature / rural culture / heritage culture* clusters are in contradiction with the *communism related elements / bad infrastructure / bad services*.

Generally, the positive elements overcome the negative elements. There are eight respondents that have an overall positive image about Romania and six of them mentioned a nature or rural culture element on the first place. There are nine respondents that identified elements of *Nature* and *Rural culture* clusters. Generally speaking, the holistic psychological image of Romania is not firmly shaped and it is composed by positive and negative elements, with a general tendency to shift more toward positive side, becoming a *business opportunity*.

Three main comments of the current image of Romania are summarised below:

1. In terms of image formation, the respondents that had a previous direct contact with Romania tend to have a general positive image and to include as first attraction nature and/or rural culture (six respondents considered nature and countryside as main attraction), since the one that did not visited Romania have more dominant negative images including the political issues. This proves that the induced and autonomous image agents still dominate with negative images and only the organic image agents (direct contact to Romania) have changed the formed image until now. The positive induced image agent (promotion) is almost inexistent in the image formation process. Therefore, there is a need to use induced factors to support and improve the positive elements found under holistic/psychological characteristics: *wild nature / romantic countryside/ fantastic history / Dracula myth* and the image clusters identified under holistic/functional characteristics: *nature/rural culture/ heritage culture*.
2. There were identified three image element clusters under the holistic/functional characteristics: *nature/rural culture/ heritage culture*. The elements clustered prove the existent potential in terms of image building that it is not yet developed under the attribute component. The image formation process of Romania as a destination should consider the lack of positive image attributes and a potential in representing them through the identified *nature, rural culture, and heritage culture* clusters under the attribute components. In other words, Romania needs to acquire more concrete images, such as the identified *nature, rural culture and heritage culture* that can position it on the international market as a defined tourism destination.
3. There is a difference between “reality” elements (e.g. bad infrastructure) and “just image” elements (e.g. unsafe or orphan country)<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, to improve the image, two different sets of actions should be considered:
  - a. Image techniques should be applied for “just image” elements that are found mainly under holistic/psychological characteristics;
  - b. Improving firstly the real facts for “reality” image elements and later on improving the image through image techniques.

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<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that behind each “just image” element, there is a real fact that determines its apparition. But often, the real fact was overstated in importance by the image creation around it.

- *Wild nature* and *romantic countryside* are very important clusters that define the holistic-psychological positive image of Romania for the Dutch tour-operators, since they have to overcome the general *poverty / unsafe / corruption* negative image.
- *Nature / rural culture / heritage culture* clusters are important elements that define the holistic-functional image of Romania, but have not representation under attribute elements;
- Respondents that already visited Romania have a positive dominant image (organic agent). The induced image agent (promotion) is hardly present in creating the general image and the autonomous image is still dominated by negative image but having a slightly tendency in shifting towards a more positive one.
- *Nature/rural culture/ heritage culture* should acquire clear attributes as part of the general image.
- Image techniques should be applied mainly for “just image” elements (e.g. poor and unsafe country) since “real” elements (e.g. bad infrastructure and services) need to be addressed first in concrete terms and only latter on improving their image.

### 8.1.2. The perceived problems for developing tourism programmes in Romania

The outstanding perceived problem by the Dutch tour operators is that Romania has a poor general destination image that is difficult to attract tourists. Later on, it will be revealed that in fact Romania is lacking a clear destination image to attract tourists. The second ranked element is the perception that Romania is a *far away destination* with a difficult access. There is a two-fold motivation for this perception:

- the real inconvenience to travel to Romania: it is far from the Netherlands (or Western Europe) by car or by train, and by plane, comparing with other Central and Eastern European countries, and it takes a long journey to get from the main airport to the final destination sites inside the country,
- correlated with the lack of a clear attraction elements, Romania is perceived as far away because the tourists are not yet clearly ‘pull’ by any defined element. Increasing the motivation to visit Romania by specific ‘pulling’ forces will generate decreasing in the perceived distance to travel.

The *lack of access to tourism information* is also perceived as a problem that is actually multiplying the previous image and access issue adding a barrier to develop tourism programmes to Romania.

In terms of *transport infrastructure*, mainly the road quality is considered a problem and related with the transport system, the access from different countryside destinations to the railway stations together with poor signing and lack of indication available in international language (English).

The alternative tourism agencies are not affected by the *bureaucracy, lack of ground initiatives* and *reliable partners* as are the mainstream operators. While the alternative tourism agencies have to deal with relatively small-scale private companies in Romania, the mass tourism agencies often still need to work with the rigid large-scale (often still state owned) companies.

There are three important elements that need to be considered in the overall destination image: *cleanliness, personal safety, and accommodation*. They are more likely to be perceived as a problem by the main stream tour operator than by the alternative travel agencies.

- The main problem perceived by the Dutch market in developing tourism programmes in Romania is the general image of Romania.
- Travel distance to Romania needs to be improved in terms of perception using better information and creating real ‘pulling’ factors to the country.
- Generally, the main stream agencies perceive as larger problems: *bureaucracy, reliable partners, accommodation, safety, and cleanliness*, than alternative tourism agencies.

### 8.1.3. Positioning of Romania with respect to the other countries from Central and Eastern Europe, as perceived by the Dutch market

In terms of willingness to develop tourism programme, Romania is perceived after Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia. This measure the present interest of Dutch tour operators to include Romania in their catalogues compared with other countries. This positioning needs to be careful judged to not lead to misinterpretation. For example, Bulgaria is already more often present in the tourism catalogues (of the interviewed travel agencies) than Romania, although the willingness to develop tourism programmes in Romania is higher. This reveals a potential that Romania has that is still not properly used.

- Romania has a moderate image attraction compared with other Central and Eastern European countries. However, Romania has a larger potential: “it is still on the waiting lists”, as a Dutch tour-operator said.

### 8.1.4. Conclusions about the current tourism destination image of Romania

Integrating the three researched aspects, two questions might arise:

- How does Romania have at least two identified main image components (nature and countryside) for tour operators and still does not acquire a positive defined tourism destination image?
- What is behind the destination image potential of Romania that was partially questioned?

To answer the first question, the tourism agents need to be understood as higher sensitive receptors of a country destination image than the large public. They are the ones that promote a destination at the very moment that the destination has an appealing image based both on its image and tourism offer. Therefore, the image that they hold of Romania is not yet representative for the larger public mainly because there is not yet a formal policy to induce specific images and position them on the market<sup>5</sup>.

There is not yet a general holistic image of Romania as a destination. Although, Romania has potential in terms of psychological-holistic image: *wild nature* and *romantic countryside*, and it has a pre-set of attributes related with: *nature*, *rural culture* and *heritage culture*, they are hardly used as promotion themes in a coherent national image positioning strategy. The image identified by tour-operators is not yet promoted through induced agents to be able to create “pulling” forces to the country.

- Romania is not yet positioned as a destination country on the Dutch market. It has an image potential identified by the Dutch tour-operators but it is not yet shaped to form the country destination image. The general negative image is slightly decreasing as intensity but Romania needs to acquire a coherent (holistic and attribute based) image.

The second part of research looked deeper to answer what is the potential image destination that Romania has related with ecotourism.

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<sup>5</sup> The image should always be supported by the services and product delivery, otherwise, when the tourists arrive to the destination and they do not find what was promoted their satisfaction drops.

## 8.2. How ecotourism can be integrated and promoted in the general image of Romania, as perceived by the Dutch market?

### 8.2.1. The main elements of the ecotourism destination image of Romania

The main elements were selected to be analysed from the pre-defined set of attributes produced by the Initiative Group for Ecotourism. About one third of the elements were well perceived as part of a potential ecotourism destination image that Romania might acquire in the next future.

“*Untouched*” nature is the most prominent identified element. There is a large agreement that this element can become the essential attraction as part of the ecotourism image. Nine other elements are part of the ecotourism image. They are grouped under two categories:

- Nature related: *Danube-Delta, large carnivore population, unfragmented natural forest, diverse landscape, large biodiversity and unique caves;*
- Human related: *authenticity, hospitality, human-nature traditions.*

- Dutch market perceives “*untouched*” nature together with *Danube Delta, large carnivore population and unfragmented natural forest*, the core value of the ecotourism image elements. There are two important elements to be added: *authenticity of traditions* and *hospitality* that form the ingredients of the Romanian ecotourism image.

### 8.2.2. The main potential elements of the general tourism destination image of Romania

The researched assessed the perception of different elements by the Dutch market. These elements are identified in terms of their potential to form the future destination image of Romania.

Three sets of elements were identified:

- Nature: *Pristine nature* and *Carpathian Mountains*;
- *Rural areas*;
- Heritage culture: *medieval cities, fortified churches,*

*Pristine nature* is the dominant element, generally agreed as the highest importance for the general destination image of Romania.

The results of the in-depth, unstructured interviews prove to be similar with the ones provided by the structured analysis. This remark is enforcing the outcome of the research in terms of its reliability. Two different methods proved to highlight the same cluster elements to be used in forming the Romanian image destination.

- The perceived general destination image of Romania and the potential attribute elements are supplied from the same clusters: *nature, rural areas and heritage culture*, emphasising on nature and rural elements.

### 8.2.3. How the ecotourism attributes relate with the general image of Romania?

The identified group of ecotourism attributes are clustered around the elements of the general image, such that: *Pristine nature* encompasses “*untouched*” nature, *large carnivores, unfragmented natural forest, large biodiversity*;

*Carpathians Mountains* element includes *diverse and striking landscape* and *caves*;

*Danube Delta* has a self-contained image (there was no insight into this element as part of this research);

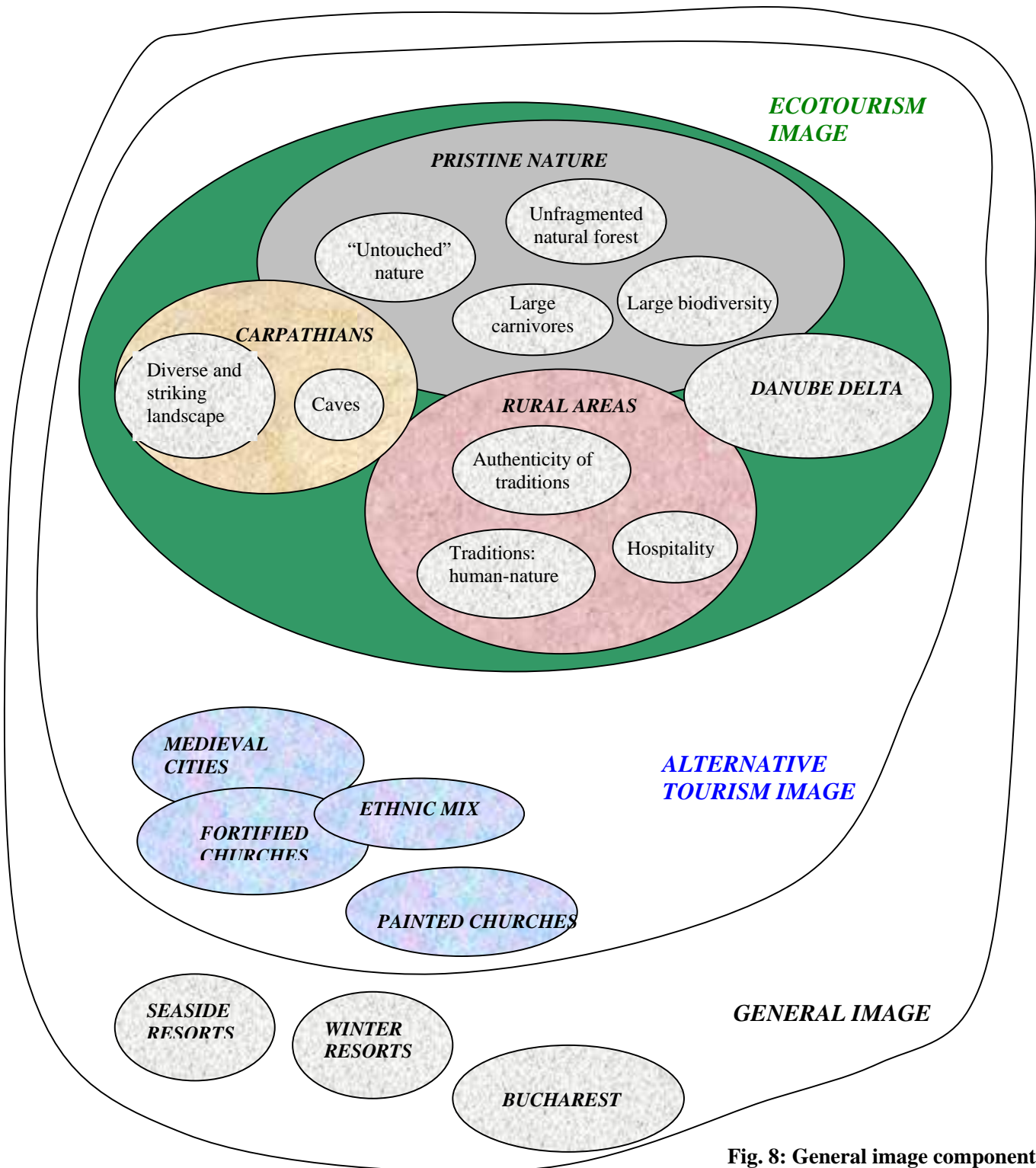
*Rural area* includes *authenticity of traditions, hospitality, human-nature tradition*;

Besides the ecotourism elements, there are identified some other general elements that can be clustered under the *heritage culture*, such as: *medieval cities, fortified churches, painted churches* and *ethnic mix*.

*Dracula myth* although represents a debated attraction element within this research, it can be combined with *mystery* and included under the general image of Romania. It is far from being a strong “pulling” force to deter tourists to visit Romania for its own sake (even if other contrived realities will be physically shaped, such as: Dracula castle, themes parks, etc.), but it can create an interesting ingredient for the general image of Romania, if it is well dosed.

The last segment of the general image is represented by *Bucharest, winter ski resorts* and *seaside resorts*. Although the present research did not target to assess the importance of these elements, they were critically perceived by the Dutch market. However, the results must be interpreted as an option to position general image of Romania through ecotourism (nature related elements) than to compare ecotourism versus mainstream tourism (seaside and ski resorts).

The identified and clustered elements of the image of Romania are presented in a graphical form in the below figure. They represent a proposal for the promotion of the general image of Romania, based on the outcome of the research.



**Fig. 8: General image components**

The general image of Romania is composed by the main stream elements (e.g. ski and seaside resorts, Bucharest, etc) combined with the alternative tourism image attributes. The alternative tourism image consists in a mixture between the heritage culture (e.g. painted churches, medieval cities, etc) and the ecotourism elements (pristine nature, Carpathians, Danube Delta and rural areas).

- The Dutch market identified the ecotourism elements as a core value for the promotion and positioning of Romania on the international tourism market.

#### **8.2.4. The prospects of ecotourism in the overall tourism development in Romania, as perceived by the Dutch market**

The perspective of ecotourism development in Romania was very well perceived by the Dutch market. All the interviews agreed on the potential of Romania for ecotourism.

The ecotourism perspectives can not be dissociated by the general tourism perspective. A few elements were identified under the general perspective of tourism development, that directly affect the ecotourism development, too. There is a lack of destination image in selling Romania. Although having a big image potential, Romania is still not positioning itself on the international market through a coherent image promotion. There are already good tourism products (including appealing ecotourism offer), but it is not enough. Romania needs to make Dutch market ready to buy it.

Both in terms of product promotion and selling, Romanian tourism needs a clear market approach based on targeting each market segment with a specific product. Ecotourism is an important international growing niche that need more support for promotion to the right international segment of the Romanian products. In terms of services, large efforts need to be made in educating the service sector in a better client oriented direction. A privatised tourism sector will rapidly understand the need of a client-oriented policy within their own business. Since ecotourism is based mainly on small-scale enterprises, it is likely that the ecotourism service sector is faster adapting to the client-oriented policy than main stream operation chain. On the other hand, the international ecotourism companies rather look for 'clean' and 'fair' services than for highest quality services. In this respect Romania is ready to provide them.

Romania is perceived as being "too far away" from the Netherlands. The real aspect behind "too far away" is represented by the over 2000 km travel distance between the two countries. This distance is virtually increased by the lack of tourism information about Romania and within Romania. The interviews provided a couple of alternatives as part of their perspective of tourism development: to facilitate access from Budapest to different destination within Romania or to increase the direct international flights to the Transylvanian cities. Besides the mentioned solutions, it is necessary an improving information system within and outside the country.

According to the interviews, the general image of Romania is slightly improving, in the overall context of the increasing interest of the Western tourists in Central and Eastern Europe. Specific to ecotourism market supply, there is a growing awareness for nature and ecotourism among potential international tourists that can enlarge the demand for ecotourism products in Romania in the next future.

An identified strong point in the overall European context is that Romania might become the first country with a declared national ecotourism policy. Romania can be pushed on the European level as a country that promotes and understands ecotourism as conservation and nature-based tourism. This could bring international recognition on the European political level, better chances for positioning of Romania on the international tourism market, increasing the attractiveness of the country and as a direct consequence enlarging the tourist incoming flow within the country.

Under the current circumstances, there is a need for a careful image formation. *To build the wrong image* was identified as a major threat for the tourism and ecotourism development in Romania. Currently, Romania is a new emerging destination on the international market and it is highly important how the image of Romania will be promoted from now on. A good image combined with adequate tourism products and support in improving the quality of services and of the infrastructure can make Romania one of the important destinations of Europe. The Dutch market identified as a core value for the future image promotion and positioning strategy, the

ecotourism elements that should be promoted to create the new destination image of Romania within Europe with a unique character.

## 9. Conclusions

The objective of this research was to provide insight into the positioning potential of Romanian on the international market identifying the elements that can position the image of Romania as an international destination market in relation with ecotourism development. The research measures the perception of the Dutch market, as an important international supply of tourists all over the world.

The research revealed that Romania has not yet acquired a definite destination image that can play as a “pulling” force for the international tourists. Although this is true for the large public, the tourism agents from the Netherlands were able to identify a larger potential under the current “look” of Romania, both in terms of promotion and developing new products such as ecotourism.

*Wild nature* and *romantic countryside* were appointed as important images under the holistic-psychological positive image of Romania, since this potential positive image need to overcome the general *poverty / unsafe / corruption* negative picture already in place. Therefore, according to the Dutch market, the combination *wilderness* and *romantic countryside* can be sold under the general image of Romania within a coherent positioning strategy, with big chances to overstate the old negative image regarding poverty, orphans, etc. The identified and proposed holistic elements that can create the general feeling about Romania need to be supported by clear attributes with their specific images. *Nature / rural culture / heritage culture* clusters were emphasised by the Dutch market as holistic-functional elements, but there is still necessary to develop them in particular attributes of the general image in order to shape a coherent attraction and selling point within the general destination image of Romania.

In terms of image agents, the results of the research proved that the subjects that visited already Romania have a positive dominant image (organic agent). Promotion (induced agent) is hardly present in creating the general destination image that is still dominated by the image of the country itself (autonomous agent). The autonomous image, although overlooked by the negative elements has a slightly tendency in shifting towards a more positive one. Generally, there are two types of identified bad images: “just image” elements (e.g. poor and unsafe country) and “real” elements (e.g. bad infrastructure and services). The first type can be addressed basically through image techniques since the second type needs firstly to be resolved in real terms and latter on to improve its image.

Long travel distance to Romania was identified as an important issue that needs to be addressed both in real terms facilitating access to Romania to particular destinations through the closest airports, such as: Budapest or Sibiu, and Timisoara and in terms of decreasing the virtual travel distance establishing a better information system outside and inside Romania, able to provide the needed key elements that stand for the “pulling” forces.

The researched proved that the alternative tourism agencies are more adapted to the current Romanian situation being not disturbed in developing programmes in Romania by the *high bureaucracy, reliable partners, accommodation, safety, and cleanliness* as the main stream tour operators are. Therefore, Romania might be ready for promoting alternative tourism sooner than for main stream tourism.

Romania has a moderate image attraction compared with other Central and Eastern European countries. Although, Romania has a larger potential: “it is on the waiting lists” as a Dutch tour-operator said. The large potential is perceived by the Dutch market behind elements, such as: “*untouched*” *nature* together with *Danube Delta, large carnivore population* and *unfragmented natural forest*. They represent the core value of the ecotourism image elements together with *authenticity of traditions* and *hospitality*. The ecotourism elements were identified by the Dutch market as a core value for the general destination image of Romania. The ecotourism elements together with the heritage culture features (e.g. painted churches, medieval cities, etc) forms

the alternative image that is part of the general image of Romania to which it is necessary to add the main stream tourism elements (e.g. ski and seaside resorts, Bucharest, etc.).

Romania can be positioned on the international tourism market using the identified ecotourism and alternative tourism elements. According to the Dutch market, this can provide a unique position on the European level creating a unique selling point that needs to be carefully addressed as part of a national positioning strategy.

## Appendix 1

### Questionnaire

Name:.....  
 Organisation:.....  
 Date:.....

The results of this research will provide understanding how Romania is perceived as a destination by the Dutch tour-operators. Filling in the questionnaire you can bring your own contribution to a better awareness for promotion of Romania.

#### A. Image perception

1. **What are the first (five) topics that you relate the image of Romania with (not necessary from the tourism perspective; could be positive as well as negative)?**
2. **Please mention the most (five) negative elements about Romania.**
3. **Which of the next elements would you consider a problem to develop programmes in Romania:**  
 Please rank each of them according to the importance from a scale from 1 to 10 (10 is the maximum in importance), e.g. if access to tourism information is a big problem then mark it with 9 or 10.

No	Element	1 (the least)	10 (the most)
1	Access to tourism info		
2	Bureaucracy		
3	Poor financial system		
4	Personal safety		
5	Poor general image – difficult to sell as an destination		
6	Lack of ground initiatives – ground-handling operators, local guides, etc		
7	Reliable partners		
8	Poor accommodation		
9	Cleanliness		
10	Political stability		
11	Accessibility (distance to travel to Romania);		
12	Transport infrastructure		
13	Communication		
14	Transport system		
15	Culture differences		
16	Different cuisine/food and drink		
17	Cost/prices level		
18	Sport and health facilities		
19	Other		

#### B. Knowledge level

1. Do you have any experience (good/bad) with/in Romania? Yes / No
  - A. If yes, what?
  - B. How many times did you visit Romania?

.....

.....

.....

.....

2. Do you consider that you have a good insight into present Romanian socio-cultural environment?

.....

.....

.....

**C. Willingness to develop programmes in Romania**

1. What is your willingness to develop programmes in the following countries?

Please rank each of them according to the importance to a scale from 1 to 5 (5 is the highest score).

No	Element	1 (the least)	5 (the most)
1	Bulgaria		
2	Croatia		
3	Yugoslavia		
4	Czech Republic		
5	Slovakia		
6	Poland		
7	Romania		
8	Ukraine		
9	Hungary		

2. Why would you like to avoid Romania?

.....

.....

.....

3. What are the three most important issues to be improved that you are getting (more) interested in selling Romania as a destination?

.....

.....

.....

4. Has Romania got a (potential) ecotourism image?

.....

.....

.....

**D. SWOT<sup>6</sup> analysis for ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA**

(We understand through ecotourism a mixture of **nature (and culture) based programmes** mainly performed through **outdoor activities**, supporting conservation and local people)

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>

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<sup>6</sup> A SWOT analysis was initially thought to be used, but under practical circumstances only the opportunities and threats had been proved to be useful in data analysing process.

**E. The following strong points were identified through a participatory workshop by the different Romanian ecotourism actors. They represent the most attractive elements in terms of ecotourism. If you would have the chance to advise the Romanian Ministry of Tourism how to internationally promote the ecotourism in Romania, what would be your priorities? Please, rank each of them from 1 to 10 (10 is the most attractive element from your perspective).**

No	Element	1 (the least)	10 (the most)
1	“Untouched” nature		
2	Mystery		
3	Authenticity of traditions		
4	Human-nature relation – traditions		
5	Danube Delta		
6	30% of the European large carnivore population		
7	Unfragmented natural forests		
8	Large biodiversity		
9	12,000 caves (some unique in the world)		
10	World unique salt relief		
11	Diverse and striking landscape		
12	Old Christianity traditions		
13	Traditional food made of natural products		
14	Hospitality		
15	Healing herbs		

**F. What do you consider the most attractive elements for Romania (if the previous question was related how would you promote the ecotourism image, this question relates with the general destination image of Romania). Please, rank each of them from 1 to 10 (10 is the most attractive element).**

No	Element	1 (the least)	10 (the most)
1	Pristine nature		
2	Dracula myth related to Dracula phenomenon		
3	Carpathian Mountains		
4	Danube Delta		
5	Medieval cities		
6	Fortified churches		
7	Bucharest		
8	Seaside resorts, beaches		
9	Winter ski resorts		
10	Rural areas		
11	Painted churches		
12	Ethnical mixture (Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, Turks, Tartars, Gypsies, Jewish, etc)		
13	Other		

**G. The Dracula Land phenomenon**

**Dracula Land** is proposed to be built in Romania. Do you consider that Dracula Land would help in promoting and developing tourism in Romania?

Thank you very much for your time.

This research is conducted by  
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 Fellow researcher  
 Department of Leisure and Environments  
 World International Centre of Excellence  
 University of Wageningen,  
 The Netherlands

## Appendix 2

### The interviewed agencies and the appointment date

No	Agency	Appointment data
1	Topo-Aktief v.o.f	22.03.2002
2	Aragon	24.03.2002
3	SNP	25.03.2002
4	Djoser Reizen	26.03.2002
5	ANWB	27.03.2002
6	RTO	28.03.2002
7	Intertrek	29.03.2002
8	East European Travel BV	10.04.2002
9	TUI	09.04.2002
10	ECEAT	08.04.2002

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This paper remains open to any comment, which might improve it, making it useful for broader goals. In this respect, the author kindly asks to send him the eventually comments and also to let him know if the current research will be used for any other specific project or further studies. Hopefully, this could help in measuring the usefulness and the impact of the current research.

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