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EVOLVING ASPECTS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES: A PLANNING VISION FOR ORADEA MUNICIPALITY (ROMANIA)

Abstract. Tourism represents a strategic sector for the economic development of major urban centres in Romania, which compete to attract both domestic and international visitors while strengthening their regional image as successful tourist destinations. This paper represents a second part of a more comprehensive study and analyses the evolution of tourism development strategies in the context of contemporary strategic planning goals, using a comparative perspective on the strategic documents regarding tourism development for Oradea municipality. The theoretical framework addresses key concepts related to tourism destination management, sustainable development, and the role of stakeholder cooperation in tourism development. The analysis focuses on the development strategies of Oradea for the periods 2017–2023 and 2021–2027, emphasizing the main strategic directions and priority objectives established at the local level for the development of this economic sector. The results underline the importance of capitalizing on cultural and architectural heritage, modernizing tourism infrastructure, and promoting the destination on international markets. This research highlights the importance of strategic planning for strengthening the competitiveness of urban destinations.

Keywords: tourism strategies, planning, urban tourism, destination management, sustainable development

1. Introduction

Strategic planning is one of the central concepts in tourism management (Murphy & Murphy, 2004), being considered an essential tool for guiding

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the development of tourist destinations and for the management of profile organization (Phillips & Moutinho, 2014), increasing their competitiveness on the international market.

In the context of globalisation and increased competition among tourism destinations, the development of coherent strategies adapted to the local context is becoming a fundamental condition for the efficient use of tourism resources and for ensuring a sustainable development of the tourism sector.

Located in the north-western part of Romania, on the border with Hungary, Oradea is the capital of Bihor County and exploited since historical times its economic and cultural geographical advantages for tourism development.

The present study is part of broader research focusing on the evolving aspects of tourism development in this important urban area, which has significantly expanded its leisure activities in recent years (Crețu & Lequeux Dincă, 2025). This paper specifically adopts a comparative perspective on the main strategic documents related to tourism development in Oradea Municipality, aiming to demonstrate that progress in tourism planning has been both a key contributing factor to and a driving force behind the significant development of this sector.

2. Study background and scientific literature

2.1. Strategic planning and its role in tourism development

Strategic planning in tourism involves a complex process, which includes the analysis of the internal and external environment, the establishment of long-term goals and the identification of the necessary actions to achieve them. Recent research on strategic planning in tourism and hospitality has developed significantly in recent decades, reflecting the growing importance of strategic management within tourism organizations which set their goals and adapt their strategies to changes in the economic and social environment (Phillips & Moutinho, 2014). Aladag et al. (2020) also highlight that the process of implementing strategies is an essential stage for the success of strategic management in tourism and the efficiency of strategic planning depends largely on the ability of organizations to turn strategic plans into concrete actions and monitor the obtained results.

At the level of tourist destinations, strategic planning is closely linked to the concept of destination competitiveness. In this context, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) stress that the success of a tourist destination depends on its ability to strategically manage tourist resources and coordinate the activities of actors involved in tourism development. Strategic planning is therefore an essential tool for integrating these elements into a coherent vision and also a sustainable pattern for tourism development (Dincă, 2013). Analysing the role of the actors involved in the strategic planning process, Nunkoo (2018) highlights the importance of social capital in developing and implementing tourism development strategies, and the significant influence of cooperation and trust relations between stakeholders on the success of the planning process.

Strategic planning also plays an important role in harnessing the tourism potential at regional level (Fletcher, 1996) while considering both the natural and cultural resources of the area and the economic and social context in which hospitality industry grows. At this level the collaboration between local authorities, the private sector and the local community, as well as their ability to capitalize on the competitive advantages of the region is essential (Fletcher, 1996).

Within the management of tourist destinations, an important role is played by the destination management organizations (Destination Management Organizations – DMO), which coordinate the activities of tourism promotion and development and were recently implemented by governance endeavours for Romanian regional and local tourism destinations (Lequeux-Dincă & Teodorescu, 2024). The collaborative approach to destination marketing and management and involving mainly partnership and networking actions than centralized administrative policies was emphasized in the scientific literature (Fyall & Garrod, 2008; Morgan et al., 2012) that emphasize management methods inspired by Lean principles as tools that can help optimize decision-making processes and increase the performance of organizations involved in tourism destination management (Foris et al., 2020).

The increased importance of the relationship between strategic tourism planning and spatial or urban planning emphasized the need of urban tourism integration into spatial planning strategies to ensure effective management of tourist flows and to prevent adverse effects on the environment and local communities (Klepej & Marot, 2024).

In the Romanian context, also influenced by EU planning policies, stakeholder governance was developed through significant efforts supported by European programs, ultimately leading to regional and local success stories that were highlighted and promoted by the national media (Lequeux-Dincă & Teodorescu, 2024). Oradea is an illustrative example of urban success story highlighted in the Romanian economic context as an important investment hub (mediafax.ro) with significant results of urban regeneration and tourist and visitor attractiveness also confirmed by the post-Covid important tourism flows recovery rates (Crețu & Lequeux Dincă, 2025).

2.2. Priority objectives in the strategic development of tourism in Oradea municipality from a contemporary perspective

In recent decades, tourism has become one of the most dynamic sectors of the global economy, having a significant impact on the economic, social and cultural development of destinations. Tourism development strategies have the role of establishing the priority directions of action, coordinating the activities of the actors involved and ensuring a sustainable use of tourism resources and in this context contemporary tourism must be analysed in close connection with the principles of sustainable development (Dincă, 2013).

The concept of sustainable development has become a central element in public policies globally, especially after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations (2025) which includes a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs) (United Nations, 2025), aiming to promote balanced economic development, protect the environment and improve the quality of life of the population. Recent studies (Rabadán-Martín et al., 2025) show an important increase in research on tourism and SDGs since 2017, predominantly centred on SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), with ecotourism, behavioral models, and the role of tourism in social inclusion constituting some of the predominant themes.

The integration of SDGs into tourism development strategies contributes to the creation of more resilient and efficient tourism systems, in which economic development should be correlated with social responsibility

and environmental protection while involving local communities in the tourism development process (Dahri et al., 2025). The cooperation between public authorities, the private sector and local communities and an integrated approach in the development of sustainable tourism is essential especially for vulnerable tourism attractive regions for promoting responsible use of resources and ensuring a fair distribution of the benefits generated by tourism activity (Erdeli & Dincă, 2011; Rahmatin and Nawangsari, 2025). These aspects are more and more emphasized also for urban environments where cultural assets and heritage objectives require also complex management in view of appropriate rehabilitation and reuse strategies also for tourism purposes (Merciu et al., 2021).

These aspects can be also underscored for the case of Oradea, a city that has experienced in recent years a significant development of the tourism sector and which supported the capitalization of the architectural and cultural heritage of the city and by active tourism promotion policies. A relevant example in this respect is the participation of Oradea Municipality in the World Travel Market in London (Oradea.ro, 2024; Agerpres, 2024) or at international tourism fairs in Helsinki and Vienna (Stiripesurse.ro, 2025; Travel and Tour World, 2025).

In this context, the comparative analysis of tourism development strategies of Oradea becomes relevant for understanding how strategic priorities of tourism development are formulated while identifying the main action and investment priorities by administrative authorities.

3. Methodology

The present study is based on a qualitative research approach focused on the analysis of strategic planning documents related to the development of tourism in the municipality of Oradea. The research methodology combines document analysis, comparative analysis, and content analysis techniques, supported by visual data representation tools (Lequeux-Dincă & Teodorescu, 2024) in order to highlight the evolution of tourism development priorities within the local strategic framework.

The first stage of the research consisted in the identification and selection of the main strategic planning documents relevant for tourism

development at the municipal level. In this context, two key documents were analysed: the Integrated Urban Development Strategy of Oradea Municipality for the period 2017–2023 and the Integrated Urban Development Strategy for Oradea Municipality and the Oradea Metropolitan Area for the period 2021–2027 (Primăria Municipiului Oradea, 2017; 2021). These documents represent the main policy instruments through which local authorities define development priorities, strategic objectives, and intervention axes for the medium and long term.

The methodological approach is based on the analysis of secondary sources, the selected strategies being examined in order to identify the main strategic objectives, priorities, and areas of intervention related to tourism development. The analysis focused particularly on the sections of the strategies referring to tourism, urban attractiveness, cultural heritage valorisation, tourism infrastructure, and destination promotion.

In order to identify the dominant themes and priorities reflected in the analysed documents, a qualitative content analysis was carried out. This process involved extracting the most frequently used concepts and key terms related to tourism development from the strategic texts. The selected keywords were then processed using visual analysis techniques in order to highlight their frequency and importance within the strategic discourse.

To support this analysis, three-word clouds were generated based on the textual content of the analysed strategies. The purpose of these visual representations was to illustrate the prominence of specific concepts and strategic directions within the planning documents. Word clouds provide an intuitive representation of the most frequently used terms, allowing the identification of the thematic priorities emphasized by the local authorities in the process of tourism planning (Lequeux-Dincă et al., 2018).

In addition to the visual analysis, a comparative analysis of the two strategic documents was conducted in order to highlight the evolution of tourism development priorities between the two programming periods. The comparison focused on the structure of the strategic objectives, the complexity of the intervention axes, and the importance assigned to tourism within the broader framework of urban development. The results of this comparison were synthesized in a colour-coded table that facilitates the identification of similarities, differences, and the progressive maturation of the strategic planning process.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Tourism development strategic goals for Oradea municipality

The Integrated Urban Development Strategy of Oradea Municipality for the period 2017–2023 included a limited number of strategic objectives, focused mainly on solving specific problems and outlining general development directions. In contrast, the new strategy for 2021–2027 is distinguished by a much more rigorous structure and a much more comprehensive framework of objectives and areas of intervention, which respond to both current European priorities and identified local challenges. This evolution reflects the maturation of the strategic planning process at the municipal and metropolitan level, ensuring an integrated approach tailored to the complex needs of the community.

For the new strategic horizon, 2021–2027, the Integrated Urban Development Strategy for the Municipality of Oradea and the Metropolitan Area propose a more complex approach, structured around development objectives and specific areas of intervention. These integrate both European priorities regarding the green and digital transition and the needs identified at the local and metropolitan levels. The list of strategic objectives and specific areas of intervention outlines a medium-term vision that focuses on sustainable urban mobility, digitization, tourism development, and strengthening administrative capacity, ensuring the continuity and expansion of the directions initiated in the previous period (Figure 1).

Mainly from tourism point of view the city of Oradea and its metropolitan area have numerous resources that support the development of the tourism sector, contributing to economic growth and strengthening the cultural identity of the region. Local authorities have adopted a strategy to capitalize on these resources, focusing on modernizing tourism infrastructure, restoring architectural heritage, and promoting the city as a destination of national and international interest.

In this context, Oradea's administrative authorities consider several types of resources essential for the development of tourism. These include natural resources, mainly represented by the geothermal waters of Băile Felix and Băile 1 Mai, which promote spa and health tourism. These resorts attract thousands of visitors every year thanks to the therapeutic properties of the thermal waters and modern treatment facilities. At the same time, the city's exceptional architectural heritage, dominated by Art Nouveau influences, is another central pillar of tourism development.



Figure 1. List of Strategic Objectives for 2023 within the Integrated Urban Development Strategy of Oradea Municipality 2017-2023
(Computed by the authors)

Oradea stands out nationally for its large number of restored buildings, which transform it into a veritable open-air urban museum. In addition, the local administration is constantly investing in tourism infrastructure, modernizing accommodation, the public transport network, and leisure facilities. Last but not least, cultural and sporting events, organized periodically, play an essential role in attracting tourists and strengthening the city's tourism brand.

Thanks to these resources, several forms of tourism are practiced in Oradea and its metropolitan area, each having a significant impact on the local economy. Spa and health tourism is one of the most developed, supported by the nearby thermal resorts, which offer excellent conditions for treatments and relaxation. Cultural and heritage tourism is also a major attraction, given the municipality's impressive architectural heritage. Iconic buildings such as Oradea Fortress, Black Eagle Palace, and Moon Church are landmarks for visitors.

At the same time, business and event tourism has developed considerably, thanks to modern infrastructure that allows for the organization of international conferences, fairs, and symposiums. Oradea has become a meeting point for the business community and international organizations interested in economic and commercial collaborations. In addition to these established forms of tourism, the city also promotes leisure and sports tourism, offering numerous facilities for outdoor activities, horse riding, sport fishing, and international competitions.

Another important component of local tourism is religious tourism, supported by the presence of historic places of worship, which attract both believers and enthusiasts of religious architecture. In addition, thanks to its favourable geographical position, Oradea is also an important point on the transit tourism map, being located close to the Hungarian border and on the main European tourist routes.

Through constant investments in modernizing its tourism infrastructure and diversifying its tourism offerings, Oradea is consolidating its position as an attractive destination for both Romanian and foreign visitors. Local authorities continue to implement projects aimed at capitalizing on these resources and transforming the city into a modern tourist center with a significant economic and cultural impact.

The development and promotion of tourism is a strategic priority, given that the municipality of Oradea has a remarkable cultural and

historical heritage, which has already been significantly enhanced. The region benefits from well-structured reception and accommodation facilities, a remarkable natural environment that supports a diverse range of tourist attractions accessible throughout the year, and valuable balneoclimatic resources. These elements are complemented by real opportunities to strengthen the image and prestige of local culture and sports.

However, the hospitality industry in the area is currently failing to exploit its competitive advantages to the full and achieve a level of development commensurate with the region's tourism potential. From this perspective, tourism development must be understood as an integrated process based on the coherent management of all available resources. This involves not only capitalizing on the actual tourist attractiveness, but also stimulating related activities, such as the production of goods and services specific to the hospitality industry, training and qualifying the workforce, and developing the professional skills necessary to support competitive and sustainable tourism.

4.2. Comparative aspects on tourism development strategic approach for Oradea municipality

A comparison of the two strategies highlights a clear process of maturation in urban planning at the level of Oradea Municipality and its metropolitan area. While the document for the period 2017–2023 included a relatively limited set of objectives, focused mainly on addressing specific needs and defining general directions, the 2021–2027 strategy stands out for its complex structure, articulated around strategic objectives and well-defined areas of intervention. This shift from a general approach to a much more detailed one reflects both the experience gained in the previous phase and the need to respond to increasingly diverse and sophisticated challenges. At the same time, the emphasis on mobility, digitalization, sustainability, and tourism development confirms Oradea's orientation towards European standards of urban development and the consolidation of its position as a regional hub of attractiveness.

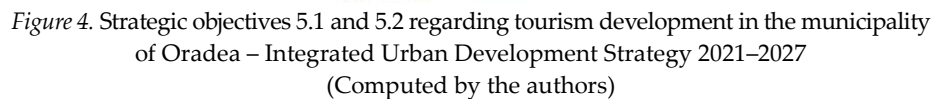
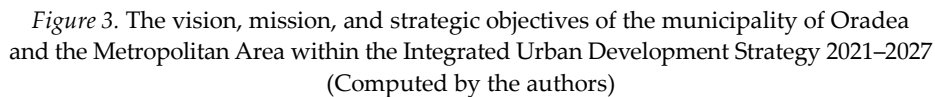
Within the framework of the former Integrated Urban Development Strategy of Oradea Municipality for the period 2017–2023, Chapter VI played a central role in defining the vision, mission, and strategic objectives

Subchapter 8.3 of the Integrated Urban Development Strategy of Oradea Municipality and the Metropolitan Area for the period 2021–2027 outlines a more complex strategic vision for development for the year 2027.

Subchapter 8.5 focuses on the Strategic Objectives and Specific Axes of Development and identify tourism as a major essential domain of interventions. Strategic priorities 5 (Figure 4) were selected by their focus on developing and promoting tourism, an area perceived as playing an essential role in diversifying and revitalizing the local economy. Priorities were based on capitalizing the existing tourism potential of the municipality of Oradea and its metropolitan area, including natural resources, cultural, historical, and architectural heritage, as well as elements of intangible heritage. Through the envisaged measures and interventions, the strategy aims to transform tourism into a sector with a significant economic impact, capable of stimulating investment, generating jobs, and contributing to the overall attractiveness of the area for both visitors and the local community.



Figure 2. The missions, general objectives, and strategic objectives of the Integrated Urban Development Strategy of Oradea Municipality 2017-2023
(Computed by the authors)



The strategic objective 5.2 refers to the development of tourism management capacity and highlights the importance of coordinating and integrating existing resources in the field of tourism. The tourism potential of Oradea and its metropolitan area cannot be effectively exploited without

a coherent management approach that connects local objectives and opportunities into unified, attractive, and competitive packages for visitors. Equally, the involvement of service providers in the hospitality industry is essential, as their performance and quality directly influence tourist satisfaction and, implicitly, the income generated for employees and the community. To support these efforts, the objective is to strengthen the tools necessary for effective destination management by integrating marketing, promotion, and tourist information functions in line with the principles of sustainable development.

A detailed analysis of section 9.1. "Complete list of interventions – Project portfolio" of the Integrated Urban Development Strategy of Oradea Municipality reveals a comprehensive strategic approach to the development of the city and the metropolitan area for the period 2021-2027. The document highlights a series of projects with a major impact on urban infrastructure, the local economy, tourism, mobility, and sustainability.

At this planning stage, the local administration has established a portfolio of 861 projects, each of which is intended to contribute to the city's development in multiple directions, with tourism benefiting from 31 dedicated projects. These projects focus on restoring and promoting historical heritage, modernizing tourism infrastructure, and creating new attractions to make the city more appealing to visitors.

Among the main objectives included in this action plan there are the restoration of buildings of historical value, the development of digitalization in tourism, the improvement of leisure infrastructure, and the strengthening of regional partnerships to promote Oradea as a tourist destination. The implementation of these projects is also linked to financing mechanisms designed to ensure the long-term sustainability of investments.

The sources of funding identified for the implementation of these projects are diverse, including non-reimbursable European funds, such as the Regional Operational Program (ROP), the National Recovery and Resilience Program (PNRR), Interreg RO-HU, as well as national funding through programs such as the National Local Development Plan (PNDL). In addition, there is the local budget and public-private partnerships, designed to support the sustainability of long-term investments.

5. Conclusions

In recent years, Oradea has adopted new tourism development and destination management strategies to develop the city and capitalize on its cultural assets. The city has become stronger as an urban tourist destination due to the funds invested in developing tourist infrastructure, restoring historic buildings and promoting the image of the city. The city has achieved better national and international recognition thanks to its improved urban tourist assets, which make it more competitive in the market.

By reporting local strategies to the conceptual framework of sustainable development, it becomes possible to analyse the extent to which strategic objectives include priorities such as the development of tourism infrastructure, the international promotion of destination, the protection of cultural heritage and the involvement of the local community in the tourism development process. Thus, the comparative analysis of the development strategies of Oradea offers a relevant perspective on the evolution of strategic priorities and on how local tourism policies adapt to the new trends of sustainable tourism development at global level.

The case study of the municipality of Oradea demonstrates how strategic planning can support the development of tourism through the capitalization of cultural, historical and natural resources, as well as through investments in tourism infrastructure and destination promotion. The comparative analysis of the Integrated Urban Development Strategies for the periods 2017–2023 and 2021–2027 reveals a clear evolution in the planning process, reflected in a more complex structure of objectives, a stronger orientation towards sustainable development and a greater emphasis on tourism as a driver of local economic growth.

Continuing a first part of a more extended study (Crețu and Lequeux-Dincă, 2025) the results indicate that tourism represents a strategic sector for the municipality of Oradea which mainly supports for this domain the valorisation of its architectural heritage, the development of spa and leisure tourism, and the strengthening of the city's image as an urban tourist destination. At the same time, the portfolio of development projects included in the local strategy highlights the commitment of public authorities to modernize tourism infrastructure, diversify tourism services and increase the visibility of the destination on international markets.

The research highlights the essential role of strategic planning in the sustainable development of tourism destinations, particularly in the context of increasing competition between cities seeking to strengthen their attractiveness on national and international tourism markets. The theoretical framework emphasizes that tourism development requires coherent long-term strategies that integrate economic, social and environmental objectives and ensure the efficient use of tourism resources.

From a scientific perspective, the present study provides a synthetical image of the main strategic objectives concerning tourism development for Oradea municipality, illustrating most recent local development strategies that influence the evolution of tourism for this urban destination. However, the research is limited mainly to the analysis of strategic planning documents and secondary sources, without including extensive empirical data regarding tourist flows or visitor perceptions.

Future research directions may focus on the evaluation of the concrete impact of these strategic initiatives on tourism performance indicators, such as tourist arrivals, economic benefits generated by tourism, or the perception of visitors regarding the attractiveness of the destination. Such analyses would provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of tourism development strategies and their long-term contribution to the sustainable development of urban destinations.

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