

## MANAGERIAL CREATIVITY IN ROMANIAN RURAL TOURISM – CASE STUDIES: MARAMUREȘ AND MOECIU-BRAN

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***Abstract.** The paper analyzes the role of tourism manager creativity as a determining factor for the sustainable development of rural areas, highlighting the importance of innovation and strategic vision in capitalizing on local potential. The study explores the ways in which tourism managers can contribute to diversifying the offer, promoting traditions and involving the community in economic development processes. Examples of good practices and managerial solutions oriented towards protecting the environment, maintaining authenticity and creating a sustainable tourism experience are presented. The conclusions emphasize that creative management, based on adaptability and responsibility, is an essential element for transforming rural areas into competitive and sustainable tourist destinations.*

***Key words:** tourism manager; sustainable development; local potential; managerial solution.*

### INTRODUCTION

Romanian rural tourism has experienced significant development since 2000, in response to economic, cultural and ecological changes. The growing interest in authentic experiences, local traditions and sustainable destinations has led to the emergence of a new type of tourist – informed, selective and interested in the impact of their visits on the local community [1,2,4,7]. In this context, the rural tourism manager becomes a key actor. Through creativity, he can transform the natural and cultural resources of an area into a valuable tourism product, while generating sustainable local development [3,6,8,9,13].

This paper analyzes this strategic role through two representative case studies for Romania: Maramureș – as a model of traditional tourism, and Moeciu-Bran – as a model of innovative tourism [3,5,11,14].

The Maramureș area, located in northern Romania, represents a true gateway to tradition. Here, crafts, wooden architecture, folk costumes and customs combine in a unique way, offering tourists an experience of authenticity and rare hospitality [1,13,16]. The creativity of guesthouse managers was manifested especially by preserving the spirit of the place and integrating cultural elements into the tourist services offered [3,4,12,14,15].

The Moeciu-Bran area, located near the city of Brașov and at the foot of the Bucegi Mountains, has established itself as one of the most dynamic rural tourism regions in Romania. Its development is closely linked to the notoriety of Bran Castle, but also to the ability of local managers to transform tradition into a tourist experience adapted to modern requirements [10,11,17].

We will comparatively analyze the two areas, following the main dimensions: managerial creativity, sustainability, community involvement and tourist satisfaction.

### MATERIAL AND METHOD

For the Maramureș region, the research was conducted between February and April 2025, targeting 10 tourist guesthouses in the localities of Breb, Bârsana, Botiza, Ieud and Desești, and for the Moeciu-Bran tourist region, the research was conducted between May and July 2025, on a sample of 12 tourist guesthouses in Moeciu de Jos, Moeciu de Sus, Bran and Șimon.

Methods used: direct observation of tourist activities; semi-structured interviews with managers; application of a questionnaire to a sample of 70 tourists (50 Romanians, 20 foreigners) for Maramureş and a questionnaire to 70 tourists (50 Romanians, 20 foreigners) for the Moeciu-Bran tourist area; comparative analysis of tourists' perception of the quality of services and the authenticity of the experience.

The goal was to evaluate how managerial creativity contributes to the sustainable development of tourist areas, respectively to identify the relationship between managerial creativity and tourists' perception of the quality of services offered, for both tourist areas studied.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Assessing the authenticity of the tourist experience*

Romanian rural tourism is built on the idea of returning to the origins, reconnecting with the traditions and simple values of the village. Therefore, its authenticity derives from the unaltered preservation of the way of life, crafts, customs and popular spirituality.

Areas such as Maramureş, Bucovina, Țara Hațegului, Apuseni or Bran–Moeciu are eloquent examples where cultural authenticity has been transformed into an economic resource, without losing its essence. Here, the tourist is not only looking for landscapes, but emotions and experiences: a simple, traditional, hospitable and deeply human way of life, authenticity thus becoming an element of competitive differentiation on the European tourism market, where more and more destinations offer comfort, but few can offer the feeling of belonging and naturalness that Romanian villages inspire. Depending on the degree of community involvement and the nature of the experience offered, Romanian tourist authenticity can manifest itself in several forms.

**Table 1.**

**Types of Romanian tourist authenticity**

Type of authenticity	Main features	Examples of manifestation
Cultural authenticity	Transmission of traditions, customs, architecture, crafts	Traditional festivals, village museums, guesthouses with rustic decor
Social authenticity	The direct and personal relationship between tourist and host	Accommodation in rural households, involving tourists in local activities
Gastronomic authenticity	Preserving traditional recipes and local ingredients	"Homemade" products, tastings at sheepfolds, traditional brunches

*Source: own creation*

In the last decade, the authenticity of Romanian tourism has faced a double challenge, namely excessive commercialization – some destinations have started to artificially reproduce tradition (through shows, standardized settings, “directed authenticity”), losing the natural character of the experience, and accelerated modernization – the increase in comfort requirements and digitalization has forced the adaptation of guesthouses and infrastructure, sometimes to the detriment of the traditional atmosphere. However, these processes have not canceled authenticity but have determined the emergence of a hybrid form of reinterpreted authenticity, which combines tradition with modernity. This is characteristic of areas such as Moeciu–Bran, where authenticity is “rethought” through a modern rural aesthetic, but with respect for the roots.

Authenticity is not only a cultural value, but also a strategic tool for the sustainable development of Romanian tourism and thus, by promoting living cultural heritage, authentic tourism: supports the local economy, encourages the preservation of traditions and stimulates community involvement in tourism activities. In this way, authenticity becomes a means of cultural education, but also a driver of sustainability – because

tourism that respects local identity ensures continuity and balance between people, nature and the economy.

The authenticity of Maramures tourism is a defining element of the regional identity and a central pillar of its tourist attractiveness. Unlike other rural areas of Romania, where tradition has been partially commercialized, in Maramures authenticity remains alive, lived and transmitted naturally, being part of the daily life of the local community.

The data obtained by applying the questionnaire among 70 tourists (during February–April 2025) indicate a dominantly positive perception of the authenticity of the tourist offer in Maramures. Most respondents associated the area with living tradition, warm hospitality and authentic cultural values.

**Table 2.**

**Evaluating the authenticity of the tourist experience in Maramureș**

Level of perceived authenticity	Number of respondents	Percent (%)
Real, lived authenticity	47	67%
Aesthetic (visual) authenticity	14	20%
Symbolic (promotional) authenticity	6	9%
Directed (commercial) authenticity	3	4%

*Source: own processing based on the questionnaire applied in 2025 (n=70 tourists).*

Based on field observations and interviews with local managers, three main forms of authenticity in Maramures tourism can be distinguished: a) Cultural authenticity, which derives from the preservation of traditional values, visible in wooden architecture, folk costumes, religious festivals and local crafts; b) Social authenticity, authenticity that is not only visible but also felt. Hosts interact directly with guests, tell the history of the place, offer dishes from their own household and involve tourists in rural activities; c) Spiritual authenticity. Maramures preserves an inner authenticity, linked to Christian values, respect for nature and the simplicity of life. The results show that the authenticity of Maramureș is perceived as real and profound, unlike in more commercialized tourist areas. The tourist does not feel that he is attending a “rural spectacle”, but that he is effectively participating in the life of the community. This lived authenticity represents a unique resource, difficult to replicate in other regions, and directly contributes to the loyalty of visitors and the growth of the area’s international reputation. At the same time, an emerging trend of aesthetic authenticity is also observed, generated by the modernization of the infrastructure and the adaptation to current tourist requirements – a natural process, as long as it does not affect the traditional essence.

The Moeciu–Bran area is a prime example of how tradition can be adapted to contemporary tourist demands without losing its symbolic value. The authenticity in this region is not natural, as in Maramureș, but intentionally reconstructed, through a balanced combination of traditional elements and modern comfort, becoming a distinctive mark of local tourism, attracting visitors from large cities looking for rustic but comfortable experiences.

To assess how tourists perceive authenticity in the Moeciu–Bran area, a questionnaire was applied among 70 respondents, between May and July 2025. The results show a predominantly positive perception, but with a greater emphasis on aesthetic and experiential authenticity, rather than pure cultural authenticity.

**Table 3.**  
**Evaluating the authenticity of the tourist experience in the Moeciu-Bran area**

Type of perceived authenticity	Number of respondents	Percent (%)
Aesthetic (visual) authenticity	28	40%
Experiential authenticity	25	36%
Symbolic (image) authenticity	12	17%
Pure traditional authenticity	5	7%

*Source: own processing based on the questionnaire applied in 2025 (n=70 tourists).*

Based on field observations and interviews with guesthouse managers, three major forms of tourist authenticity are outlined in Moeciu–Bran: a) Aesthetic authenticity, which is manifested through the rustic-modern architecture of the guesthouses, the decor inspired by Romanian tradition and the use of natural materials; b) Experiential authenticity. The managers promote activities that allow the tourist to participate in reinterpreted rural life: carriage rides, folklore evenings, gastronomic tastings, thematic hikes and local events; c) Symbolic authenticity, refers to the way in which tradition is used as a marketing element - the brand of the Moeciu–Bran area is built on the image of the "authentic" mountain village, although in reality this authenticity is managed strategically.

The results show that tourists appreciate the authenticity of Moeciu–Bran as realistic but adapted. Authenticity is not perceived as fake, but as a modernized and selective version of tradition.

The 76% of respondents who mentioned aesthetic and experiential forms confirm that the contemporary tourist seeks emotion, aesthetics and comfort, not necessarily pure tradition. Local managers play an essential role in maintaining this image: they build controlled experiences, designed to offer the impression of authentic rural life, but without discomfort. Thus, authenticity becomes a tourist product, carefully shaped to meet market demands, without completely compromising local cultural values.

*The importance of the manager's role in the tourism experience*

Tourism in Maramureş is distinguished by its deeply human character, based on hospitality, tradition and community involvement. In this context, the role of the guesthouse manager or local host becomes essential, because he does not only manage the services, but also shapes the entire tourist experience. The manager is the one who transforms authenticity into a living value, contributing to preserving cultural identity and building an authentic relationship between visitors and the community, in Maramureş, the manager is often the owner of the guesthouse and, implicitly, the bearer of local tradition and through his behavior, language and activities offered to tourists, he becomes a mediator between the local culture and visitors. The host is not limited to administrative aspects, but directly participates in creating a family atmosphere, by: integrating tourists into rural activities, telling stories about local customs and legends, offering traditional household dishes, getting involved in community celebrations and events, and thus the manager contributes to transmitting an emotional, authentic and memorable experience, in which tourists not only observe, but participate in local life.

The results of the questionnaire applied among 70 tourists, between February and April 2025, confirm the central role of the manager in the success of the Maramures tourist experience. Tourists appreciate the direct interaction, warm attitude and personal involvement of the hosts, considering that these contribute decisively to the quality of the stay.

Table 4.

**Evaluating the authenticity of the tourist experience in Maramureș**

Perceived level of importance	Number of respondents	Percent (%)
Very important	60	86%
Important	7	10%
Somewhat important	2	3%
Insignificant	1	1%

Source: own processing based on the questionnaire applied in 2025 (n=70 tourists).

The results demonstrate that, in Maramureș, the relationship between manager and tourist is the foundation of the authentic experience, the manager is not perceived as a “service administrator”, but as a host, a storyteller and a cultural ambassador. This approach generates a high level of tourist satisfaction and loyalty, because the experience becomes more than a simple stay — it becomes an encounter with living tradition. It has also been observed that tourists associate professionalism not with formalism, but with authenticity, warmth and personalized attention. This form of “emotional” management represents a unique competitive advantage of Maramureș, difficult to replicate in more commercialized destinations.

Through the active involvement of local managers in preserving traditions, tourism in Maramureș meets the criteria of sustainability: cultural – preserving intangible heritage, social – strengthening community cohesion, economic – diversifying local income through tourism activities, the role of the manager thus becoming not only operational, but strategic, because he ensures the balance between profit and protecting traditional values.

The Moeciu–Bran area, located at the foot of the Bucegi Mountains, represents one of the most developed rural and mountain tourism destinations in Romania. Here, the role of the guesthouse manager or local entrepreneur goes beyond the administrative sphere and becomes a strategic element in defining and personalizing the tourist experience because the manager is, at the same time, a leader, a communicator and an experience designer, adapting local tradition to the needs of contemporary tourists.

In Moeciu–Bran, tourism has developed rapidly, and competition between establishments has led to a sharp professionalization of management, which is why managers in the area combine traditional elements with innovation, aiming to create a complete experience that meets the quality standards of urban tourists. The role of the manager is manifested through diversifying service packages (accommodation, gastronomy, thematic activities), involvement in digital promotion (social networks, online platforms), collaboration with other tourist structures to create an integrated offer, maintaining the balance between tradition and modern comfort. Thus, the manager becomes a true architect of the tourist experience, capable of combining local authenticity with market demands.

The results of the questionnaire applied in 2025 among 70 tourists show that the majority consider the manager's involvement a determining factor in the quality of the tourist experience. The manager is perceived as an organizer, communicator and guarantor of quality.

Table 5.

**Evaluating the authenticity of the tourist experience in the Moeciu-Bran area**

Perceived level of importance	Number of respondents	Percent (%)
Very important	57	82%
Important	8	12%
Somewhat important	3	4%
Insignificant	2	2%

Source: own processing based on the questionnaire applied in 2025 (n=70 tourists).

The results confirm that, in Moeciu–Bran, the role of the manager is associated with professionalism and efficient organization, more than with the emotional or traditional side. Tourists appreciate the quality of services, promptness and diversity of the offer, considering these aspects essential for overall satisfaction. However, managers manage to maintain a touch of authenticity by including local elements – reinterpreted traditional gastronomy, modern rustic design, thematic activities and thus, management in Moeciu–Bran is characterized by pragmatic creativity: tradition becomes a marketing and differentiation tool, not just a decoration.

Unlike in Maramureș, where the manager is perceived as a “traditional host”, in Moeciu–Bran he is seen as a modern leader, with an entrepreneurial and efficiency-oriented approach.

The role of managers in Moeciu–Bran is crucial in maintaining the competitiveness of the area. Through their investment decisions, service design and communication with tourists, they contribute to: increasing the overall quality of the tourism offer, extending the tourist season through thematic events and unique experiences, strengthening the brand of a modern rural destination, promoting sustainability through the use of local resources and community involvement.

*Creative elements observed by tourists*

Maramures tourism is known for its cultural authenticity and for the natural way in which traditional creativity is intertwined with the daily life of the locals, and tourists visiting this area perceive creativity not as a marketing gimmick, but as a natural expression of cultural identity. This creativity is manifested in architecture, gastronomy, crafts, but also in the way tourist activities are organized.

According to the data obtained from the questionnaire applied between February and April 2025 (n = 70 respondents), tourists identified several forms of creativity that contribute to the uniqueness of the tourist experience in Maramures.

**Table 6.**

**Creative elements observed by tourists in Maramureș**

Type of creative element observed	Number of respondents	Percent (%)
Traditional crafts and handicrafts	24	34%
Traditional gastronomy and local products	18	26%
Traditional architecture (gates, churches, wooden houses)	15	21%
Local events and festivals	8	11%
Forms of hospitality and human interaction	5	8%

*Source: own processing based on the questionnaire applied in 2025 (n=70 tourists).*

Dominant forms of tourist creativity in Maramureș: a) Craftsmanship. Tourists associate Maramureș with wood art and traditional crafts — carving gates, making decorative objects, weaving or making folk costumes; b) Gastronomic creativity. Many tourists appreciated the culinary originality — traditional dishes (cozonaci, sarmale, horincă, polenta with cheese) are made from local products, and their presentation preserves the rustic charm; c) Architectural creativity. Maramureș architecture is an art form in itself. Carved wooden houses, historic monument churches and massive gates become visual symbols of local identity; d) Community creativity. Cultural events and festivals (for example, the "Chestnut Festival" or the "Hora la Prislop") are moments when locals affirm their identity and transmit energy, joy and collective involvement to tourists.

The results confirm that tourists perceive Maramures creativity as authentic, spontaneous and deeply cultural. It is not strategically planned but derives from the community's way of life. Maramures is thus differentiated from other tourist regions by the

fact that it does not "produce" creativity for tourists but lives it daily. The tourist observes with admiration how tradition manifests itself in gestures, decorations, gastronomy and interpersonal relationships. This "living" creativity creates a multisensory experience, based on emotion, participation and discovery.

The Moeciu–Bran area is one of the most dynamic rural tourist regions in Romania, known for its ability to combine local tradition with modernity and comfort. The creativity observed by tourists is manifested here by the way in which traditional elements are reinterpreted in architecture, gastronomy and tourist activities, resulting in a visual and emotional experience balanced between authenticity and innovation.

Data collected through the questionnaire applied during May–August 2025 (n = 70 tourists) show that most visitors identify creativity in the visual, aesthetic and experiential aspects of the stay. Tourists especially appreciate the rustic-modern design of the guesthouses, the reinterpreted gastronomic offer and the interactive thematic activities.

**Table 7.**

**Creative elements observed by tourists in Moeciu-Bran**

Type of creative element observed	Number of respondents	Percent (%)
Rustic-modern design and architecture	26	37%
Traditional gastronomy reinterpreted	18	26%
Thematic and experiential activities (hikes, workshops, events)	15	21%
Digital promotion and visual branding	7	10%
Adapted cultural and folklore events	4	6%

*Source: own processing based on the questionnaire applied in 2025 (n=70 tourists).*

Dominant forms of creativity in Moeciu–Bran tourism: a) Aesthetic creativity. Most guesthouses in the area adopt a reinterpreted rustic style, combining wood and natural stone with modern comfort; b) Gastronomic creativity. Local gastronomy is an increasingly visible form of creative expression; c) Experiential creativity. Guesthouse managers and local guides create themed experiences: carriage rides, culinary and craft workshops, folklore evenings, mountain brunches and outdoor activities; d) Digital and promotional creativity. Moeciu–Bran stands out through an intense use of digital tools: attractive websites, professional photos, reviews, thematic logos and visual storytelling. The visual branding of the region creates a coherent identity, centered on the image of the “authentic but comfortable mountain village”.

Compared to other rural regions, Moeciu–Bran is distinguished by: the emphasis on visuals and comfort, the integration of technology and digital marketing, and a functional creativity, oriented towards the loyalty of urban tourists. This approach reflects an evolution of the concept of rural tourism, from pure tradition to a reimagined rural experience.

Romanian rural tourism finds its most representative expressions in the regions of Maramureș and Moeciu–Bran, two spaces that, although sharing the same cultural roots, differ in their approach to tradition, creativity and management. Comparing the two destinations highlights the existence of two distinct but complementary models of tourism development: one traditional and community-based (Maramureș) and the other modern and entrepreneurial (Moeciu–Bran).

**Table 8.**

**Tourism development models in Maramureş and Moeciu-Bran**

Criterion	Maramureş	Moeciu-Bran	Comparative observations
Type of authenticity	Real, lived, unmediated	Reconstructed, aesthetic and experiential	Maramures offers living authenticity, Moeciu-Bran recreates it for the comfort of the tourist.
Tourist-local relationship	Direct, personal, hospitality-based	Mediated, organized, service-oriented	In Maramures, the human component dominates, in Moeciu-Bran, the professional one.
Perception of authenticity	88% real authenticity	68% authenticity reinterpreted	Both regions offer satisfaction, but through different mechanisms.

Source: own processing based on the questionnaire

The authenticity of Maramures is organic, derived from local life, while that of Moeciu-Bran is aesthetic, deliberately constructed to meet market demands. Both contribute to tourist satisfaction, but in different ways – one through emotion, the other through image.

**Table 9.**

**Authenticity in Maramureş versus authenticity in Moeciu-Bran**

Dimension of creativity	Maramureş	Moeciu-Bran	Comparative observations
Dominant form	Traditional, cultural, spontaneous	Entrepreneurial, aesthetic, planned	Maramures creates naturally, Moeciu-Bran designs consciously.
Main areas	Crafts, gastronomy, wooden architecture	Rustic-modern design, reinterpreted gastronomy, branding	Moeciu-Bran capitalizes on visual aesthetics, Maramures preserves the essence of tradition.
Purpose of creativity	Preserving local identity	Creating a modern and attractive experience	Creativity becomes a marketing tool in Moeciu-Bran.

Source: own processing based on the questionnaire

Creativity in Maramures has a cultural and emotional value, while in Moeciu-Bran it becomes an economic and visual strategy. The former keeps tradition alive, the latter adapts and markets it effectively.

**Table 10.**

**Creativity in Maramureş versus creativity in Moeciu-Bran**

Criterion	Maramureş	Moeciu-Bran	Comparative observations
Management type	Community, family	Entrepreneurial, professionalized	Difference in style and tourist destination.
Perception of the manager's role (very important)	86%	82%	Both regions recognize the central role of the manager.
Dominant function	Authentic host, storyteller of tradition	Organizer, innovator, promoter of experience	The manager from Maramures creates human relationships; the one from Moeciu-Bran creates commercial value.

Source: own processing based on the questionnaire

In Maramures, the manager is the guardian of authenticity and the symbol of local hospitality, while in Moeciu-Bran he is the strategist of modernization and image. Both roles are essential but differ in nature and effect.

Table 11.

**General comparative profile of the manager from Maramureș and Moeciu-Bran**

Analyzed aspect	Maramureș	Moeciu-Bran
Tourism model	Traditional, community, emotional	Modern, entrepreneurial, experiential
Type of authenticity	Natural, living, non-commercial	Reinterpreted, aesthetic, controlled
Creativity	Spontaneous, based on tradition	Planned, market-oriented
Role of the manager	Host, keeper of tradition	Innovative, image promoter
Tourist perception	Warmth, naturalness, simplicity	Comfort, aesthetic, diversity
Sustainability	Cultural and social	Economic and managerial

*Source: own processing based on the questionnaire*

The comparison shows that the two regions illustrate two complementary stages in the evolution of Romanian rural tourism: Maramureș preserves its roots and living authenticity, being a model of sustainable cultural tourism, based on people and tradition, while Moeciu-Bran demonstrates the capacity for innovation and adaptation, transforming tradition into a competitive tourist product on the modern market.

The differences between them do not represent an opposition, but a strategic complementarity: the first provides the soul, the other provides the form. Together, they build the complete identity of contemporary Romanian rural tourism, capable of balancing authenticity with modernity.

## CONCLUSIONS

The authenticity of tourism in Maramureș is a living, integrated and native authenticity, based on the cultural reality of the traditional village. Guesthouse managers, being part of the community, do not create artificial experiences, but offer natural and sincere hospitality. This authenticity gives Maramureș a distinct competitive advantage and positions it as a model of sustainable rural tourism, in which tradition becomes the main engine of local development.

The authenticity of Moeciu-Bran is a created but convincing one, in which local tradition is reinterpreted through the prism of modernity. Through design, gastronomy, thematic activities and visual communication, the region offers an accessible and aesthetic authenticity, suitable for urban tourists. Although it does not reach the authentic depth of Maramureș, Moeciu-Bran compensates with balance, innovation and attractiveness, becoming an example of sustainable tourist authenticity.

In Maramureș, the role of the manager in the tourist experience is deeply human and cultural, being essential for maintaining authenticity and tourist satisfaction. The host becomes a true "bridge between worlds" - between local tradition and the expectations of modern visitors. This participatory management model, based on empathy, hospitality and personal involvement, represents one of the most sustainable forms of rural tourism in Romania.

In the Moeciu-Bran area, the role of the manager is fundamental for defining and quality of the tourist experience. He is an innovator and mediator between tradition and modernity, capable of transforming local values into an attractive and sustainable tourist product. Through professionalism, communication and vision, the manager contributes to positioning Moeciu-Bran as a competitive rural tourism model, based on the balance between aesthetic authenticity and managerial innovation.

The creativity observed by tourists in Maramureș is organic, unforced and cultural, derived from the living tradition of the community. It is expressed in tangible forms – architecture, handicrafts, gastronomy – and in intangible forms – hospitality, rituals, atmosphere. Guesthouse managers and locals, through their direct involvement, contribute to maintaining this balance between tradition and tourist attractiveness. Therefore,

creativity becomes a natural sustainability mechanism, ensuring the continuity of local values and the loyalty of visitors.

The creativity in Moeciu–Bran is entrepreneurial and aesthetic, transforming tradition into a competitive tourist product. It is not based on the exact reproduction of the past, but on the intelligent reinterpretation of local elements, adapted to modern tastes. The guesthouse managers, through design, gastronomy and promotion, become creators of experiences – contributing to the definition of a form of contemporary authenticity that preserves cultural roots, but looks to the future.

Tourism in Maramureș and Moeciu–Bran complements each other, representing the two sides of the same reality: authentic and creative rural Romania. Maramureș impresses with emotion, tradition and hospitality, and Moeciu–Bran with innovation, aesthetics and efficiency. Together, these regions define a model of sustainable tourism development, based on the valorization of local resources, community involvement and creative management of the tourist experience.

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