

THERE IS MARKETING WITH A FLOWER

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Abstract:

It is well known that the states of the world have the coat of arms, the flag, a dedicated day and the national anthem as symbols and elements of national identity. But, less known is that they are joined by a floral emblem, more precisely the national flower or state flower, adopted by law. The choice of that flower is motivated by specific geographical, cultural, economic and social characteristics. Well-known are the tulip, as a symbol of the Netherlands and Turkey, or the rose as a symbol of the USA and the lotus flower for India. Recently, our country also declared the peony as its national flower.

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1. Brief history – arguments for legislation

An important and, at the same time, surprising news appeared in the public space on 27.09.2022, that the peony was declared the national flower of Romania (<https://www.gandul.ro>).

The press immediately picked up the news and thus learned about the adoption in the Chamber of Deputies of the Romanian Parliament as a decision-making body, of a law (named Peony - National Flower and Floral Symbol of Romania) through which the peony becomes our national flower.

There was no unanimity of votes, but this is a problem for politicians, which should not overshadow the success of an initiative group and its effort of almost 10 years.

The idea has its origin during the reign of King Carol I. The floral emblem of Romania was until the adoption of the Peony Law (27.09.2022) „disputed” between the wild rosehip (wild rose), the edelweiss and the peony, without a legislated winner.

In 2013, a petition (<https://www.petitiononline.com>) was initiated by the Bucharest University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine and the community „Bujorul românesc - The Romanian Peony” proposing the choice of the peony as the national flower (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Bujorul-rom>).

The main arguments can be listed:

- in Romania, there are five peony species that grow spontaneously in nature reservations and they are protected by law (at Zau de Câmpie-Mureș, Stoicănești-Olt, Troianu-Teleorman, Plenița-Dolj, Comana-Giurgiu), isolated in the forests of Dobrogea (between Tuzla and Mangalia, Babadag, Niculițel, Baia) and insular in the Măcin Mountains);
- in addition to these, three other cultivated species grow in more than 100 varieties and species;
- there are local, regional and national festivities dedicated to this flower;
- it is a plant with great decorative potential, adaptable to the climate, which is cultivated throughout the national territory;
- it is a source of artistic inspiration, found in folklore (from songs to traditional objects), literature, music, painting, decorative arts, architecture, design, etc.;
- it is associated with physical beauty and health, having therapeutic characteristics. The peony extract is used for cosmetic and medicinal purposes;
- over 100,000 people, as well as towns or streets bear this name;

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- The Ministry of National Defense adopted it as a symbol to commemorate on November 11 „The Veterans’ Day” as well as to honor „Heroes fallen on the battlefield and on Romania’s territory”;

- in the calendar, May 15th is the International Peony Day;

- the Romanians organize events which are dedicated to the inland species between May and July.

A series of other aspects, which we could call curiosities, are positioned to support the qualities of the peony flower:

- the first documentary attestation dates back to 4000 years ago, and the peoples’ of the world appreciation is indisputable;

- the Chinese raised it to the rank of Emperor's Flower and used it to treat some ailments; also associated with luck, love and wealth, it is used in Feng Shui culture;

- because it had healing powers, the Greeks bowed it to Paeon, the gods’ doctor, from whom it received its scientific name (*Paeonia officinalis*); because it was very important, this flower was cultivated only by the upper social classes (the rich people of those times);

- it does not have high demands, it is resistant to environmental factors, it grows in any type of climate or soil. It has been proven that it has the ability to bloom from the same root for 100 years;

- 4500 varieties and over 500 varieties of younglings were identified;

- the popular wedding and baptism traditions give the peony a special place: it is found in the bride's bouquet, it is the flower of the 12th year of marriage, and its petals perfume the babies' first bath after baptism.

Mainly, Romanian law stipulates for:

- events which should be organized to present this flower in landscape and ornamental arrangements every year; (practically, it could have the role of raising awareness of its importance among the population, especially since there are countless examples of illegal behavior: plants torn to be taken home, although they wither extremely quickly, the devastation of meadows by entering with harnesses, horses, cars, etc.);

- the involvement of the local public administration through material and logistical support measures, in the maintenance and protection of the Romanian peony natural reservations, but also in the adaptation to the specific climate and soil conditions of some non-native species;

- the organization of scientific events that have the different species of peony as their theme, especially the wild ones;

- the organization of floral exhibitions centered on the peony;

- the setting up distinct areas in public parks and gardens for the cultivation of peonies;

- the decoration of peony alleys as a prominent flower in urban landscaping;

- painting exhibitions organized by the Union of Visual Artists and dedicated to this flower,

- the inclusion of the peony flower in Romfilatelia's plans to issue small parcels and stamps.

2. From flower to marketing

Generally, thematic digital marketing is cheap and handy in the current context, having the role of spreading information the cheapest, fastest way and with maximum efficiency.

The creation of online content can bring notoriety to the organization, just as its presence in widely distributed images can also lead to increased visibility, having the dissemination through the audiovisual, radio and TV environment contribute to these effects. At the country level, the results of using online marketing can be even more important.

From a published ranking (<https://www.zf.ro>) it is known that Romania's country brand, which is growing but far from the pre-pandemic level (<https://www.profit.ro>), is 48th most valuable in the world (\$178 billion in 2021). It is significantly based on Dracula, Simona Halep, Gheorghe Hagi, Ilie Năstase, Dacia, Bitdefender, strong but insufficient names and

brands in such a competitive world. As you can see, there is a lot of room for growth. The question is how? How do we add to these lists the food and gastronomy, wines, cosmetics, furniture, towns, landscapes, flowers, unique landforms in the world, personalities and champions who raise the flag on the highest banner and stand on their feet in a roar of applause without end, profile events?

Regarding the country brand, we previously listed a number of aspects that can explain the need to have a floral symbol of the country. We can add the human connection with beauty, delicacy, desire for better, love and appreciation for loved ones and nature. In addition, it is known that flowers speak, that there is a floral language through which we can express our feelings or transmit messages.

The floral emblem can speak symbolically about the country it represents. The above arguments, which are in favor of the peony, speak of Romania and Romanian people better than words do.

The answer is complex, the key lies in a mix of elements that must be well dosed: marketing budgets, creativity, the discovery made first by us, the Romanians, of our own heritage, support and will from society and politicians, etc. Sources of inspiration exist everywhere and some are right nearby. France, Italy and Spain pressed the pedal on gastronomy, which combined with the historical and architectural endowment ensured an indisputable tourism success, Turkey and Greece are also based on tourism, the Republic of Moldova managed to consolidate a country brand based on wines (although the areas occupied by vines are much smaller than Romania's), Israel is blessed with the Holy Places etc.

A well-utilized floral symbol could contribute to the growth of a country brand. Some examples are the diversity of Dutch tulips, the delicacy of Japanese cherry blossoms, the spiritual dimension of Moldovan basil, the royalty of the Croatian iris, the fragrance of the Bulgarian rose and many others.

As we mentioned before, May 15 is the Peony Day. But, depending on local and regional particularities, in our country, in areas more or less known to foreign tourists, events that have this flower as their main theme are annually organized and are on different dates. A strong motivation for organizing them over a period of about three months (in the spring-summer season) is that the peony blossoms not only in May, but also in June and July, depending on the weather conditions. Events that already have tradition are the following:

- **The „Mountain peony” National Festival from Gura Râului - Sibiu County** (<http://www.sibiu-turism.ro>)

It takes place on the first days of July. The traditional port, the customs, the crafts, the songs, the dances and the food, the rural life as a whole describe a fascinating world of pastoralism.

In this area one can find the well-known Mărginime a Sibiului, one can walk the „Cheese Road” on a route that crosses the places of Boita - Tălmăcel - Sadu - Râu Sadului - Păltiniș - Rășinari - Gura Râului - Sibiu - Orlat - Fântânele - Sibiel - Săliște - Tilișca - Jina and ends with the Transalpina road. The color and scent of blooming peonies can be seen nearby, on the paths of the Cindrelului Mountains. In these mountains there are two mixed reservations, of glacial relief and vegetation, and the landscapes are wonderful.

- **Mountain Peony Celebration from Șaru Dornei – Suceava county** (<https://dornaecoturism.ro>)

In June, in the Călimani Mountains, for two weeks one can admire unique carpets of pink-cyclamen color and bewildering perfume. It is an opportunity for residents to organize days of celebration, where rural customs can be an attraction for tourists.

- **Mountain peony festival from Sâmbăta de Sus – Brașov county** (<https://www.facebook.com/events/cabana-sambata>)

The beginning of summer is marked in the Făgăraș Mountains by this holiday. All moments are dedicated to promoting authentic mountain songs, quality music. The area is sanitized, markers for tourists are restored, medicinal plants are collected for personal use.

- **Comana peony festival** - Giurgiu county (<https://www.facebook.com/events/comana-giurgiu>)

Here being a plain area, the organization is different. In May, once the peonies in the reservation bloom, groups of amateur cyclists set off from Bucharest in search of them. What is specific is that its aim is to educate the participants regarding respect for nature but also the rules of circulation and coexistence.

- **Peony celebration from Plenița** - Dolj county (<https://fiipefaza.com>)

Annually, in the protected area from Plenița, more than 10,000 people come for gastronomic attractions and quality folklore, but also for the 56-hectare wild peony reservation, which has become a protected area.

- **The peony festival in Roșcani Forest**, Târgu Bujor - Galați county (<https://presagalati.ro>)

A countryside event, with dozens of editions, took place in the Roșcani Forest, near Târgu Bujor. Because there was a real risk that nature would be affected, the local administration decided, in 2012, to change its location and transform it into the Târgu Bujor City Days. It is a national event, where folklore and traditional popular crafts have the main role.

- **Peony Festival, an event of Ukrainians from Tulcea** - Tulcea county (<https://discoverdobrogea.ro>)

In the Dobrogea area, the peony blooms faster than in other areas of the country due to the climatic conditions, and in Tulcea county there are several natural reservations of peonies. Hidden under the protection of the forest or scattered on the sunny slopes of the Măcin Mountains, peonies attract tourists on weekend trips on the trails in the reservation and give local communities a reason to organize events. A very well-known one is in Ciucurova commune, Fântâna Mare village, organized through the involvement of the local community of Ukrainians.

Conclusions

We support the idea that the Romanian peony has everything necessary to raise the country's brand. At least the following are related to its image:

- the five protected species, with spontaneous growth, which can contribute to the development of tourism;

- the three species cultivated in over 100 varieties, the color, the decorative character, the elegance and richness of the flower placed in parks and gardens, which can attract visitors as well as their perfume attracts bees;

- its symbolism, which can contribute to large-scale cultivation and successful commercialization (including export);

- its characteristics, which can change the business strategy by: wrapping the flower in a story, segmenting Romanian and foreign customers, addressing large customers with financial potential, identifying what is specific for small customers, capitalizing on the opportunities offered by the Internet, approaching cross-selling sales and spectacular sales (up-selling); creating partnerships with well-known companies;

- the events built around this flower, which can be brought from the local or regional level to the national and international level, and taking into consideration the foreign tourists' interest for traditions, agritourism, ecology etc.;

- therapeutic properties, which can be used in the creation of cosmetic ranges.

The most sensitive element in achieving these goals remains the lack of practice, experience!

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