

MEDIA AND BRANDING STRATEGIES IN CULTURAL TOURISM.  
THE CASE OF THE REGION OF MOLDAVIA

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**Abstract**

*The present article analyses the increasingly important role played by cultural tourism seen as a dynamic sector of global tourism and the impact of branding strategies in the development of tourism at a regional level. The aim of the research is to prove that cultural tourism may be a key factor in regional development given the great tourist potential of Romania, in general, and of the region under analysis, in particular. The article starts with a presentation of the factors that caused the rapid evolution of cultural tourism and its 'expansion into the everyday life' a trend that favours a shift of the tourists' interest from the 'iconic' and 'the staged inauthentic' to the local and authentic aspects of a community's daily life. This preference, as it is argued throughout the article, has to be exploited in the elaboration of branding strategies that have to concentrate on the promotion of Moldavia as home of a genuine and well preserved cultural patrimony and traditional lifestyle.*

**Keywords:** cultural tourism, regional development, media and branding strategies, event-based tourism, territorial marketing, brand, cultural patrimony

**1. Introduction**

In the past decades, cultural tourism has developed rapidly, emerging as an important sector of global tourism. This newly acquired status has had a beneficial influence in both economic, social and cultural terms. At the same time, cultural tourism has progressively gained the attention of quite a good number of researchers, specialised in different fields of activity, who made cultural tourism into the focus of their studies, as the extensive literature in this domain may prove. Starting from these assumptions, the present article analyses the ways in which cultural tourism's great potential may be exploited for the benefit of local communities, favouring regional development. The main objective is to prove that cultural tourism may represent a positive solution, an alternative tool to the classical ways of economic development, marking a new trend in the passage from the heavy industries of the 'economies of production' to the creative industries of the 'economies of symbolic consumption' (Smith and Robinson 2006: 5).

Given the huge variety of Romania's cultural and historical heritage, it seems necessary to call attention to the importance of the country's cultural patrimony for the economic progress, first at a local level and then, by the joint effort of the various regions, at a national level. The article also intends to prove that Romania's cultural treasury in general, and Moldavia's in particular, since this specific historical region forms the subject of the applied analysis, may be best spotlighted by the use of carefully planned media and branding strategies.

In order to accomplish the aforementioned objectives, the paper presents various definitions of the main concepts and then applies them in the analysis of the historical region of Moldavia and its cultural particularities which may become focal points for territorial marketing.

## **2. What is cultural tourism?**

As already stated, cultural tourism is considered by many researchers as a rapidly evolving subdivision of global tourism, if not as 'the fastest growing and possibly largest segment' of it (Smith and Richards 2013: 3). With culture that 'has come to be seen as a tool for economic development', cultural tourism has turned into 'an important vehicle for political narratives, tourism and cultural policies initiatives and local ... development' (Smith and Richards 2013: 63). This major evolution has been reflected and investigated by a great number of studies dedicated to it, which presented the phenomenon of cultural tourism. Some of them have made efforts at including as many of its thematic sections as possible (for instance *Key Concepts in Tourist Studies*, 2010, by Melanie Smith, Nicola MacLeod and Margaret Hart Robertson, or *The Routledge Companion to Cultural Tourism*, 2013), some others, have devoted entirely to one thematic aspect of cultural tourism (for instance *Cultural Heritage in the Developing World: a Regional Perspective*, 2009, edited by Dallen J. Timothy and Gyan P. Nyaupane; *Food and Wine Tourism: Integrating Food, Travel and Territory*, 2010, by Erica Croce, Giovanni Perri; *Wine, Food and Tourism Marketing*, 2013 by Michael Hall), to name but a few.

In these studies (and elsewhere), researchers in the domain of cultural tourism have endeavoured to present definitions of both culture and tourism which are used as key concepts. Defining such complex notions seems from the outset fraught with problems, an aspect emphasised by many of the specialists in the field. They point out the numerous meanings attached to these notions and the difficulties with which the theorist is confronted in the process. For instance, the social critic Raymond Williams (1958) pointed out that culture is one of the most problematic words to define and considered culture as being about a whole

way of life, as well as the arts and learning. Along the same lines, Melanie Smith states that there is still no general consensus about what culture really means, '...as it has both global and local significance and it can be deeply historic or highly contemporary. It can be represented as physical and material, tangible or intangible; as political and symbolic, or as the practices of everyday life' (2009: 2). Culture is also seen as a 'constructing power' and 'transformational process', whereas tourism is viewed as 'an expression and experience of culture', but also as a factor which 'assists in generating nuanced forms of culture as well as new cultural forms' (Smith and Robinson 2006: 1).

Besides the necessary effort at defining culture and tourism, the studies outline the fundamental trends in the evolution of cultural tourism. These significant developments (which are closely interconnected) may be summarised as follows: the first refers to the growing importance of cultural tourism and of the region in the economic development of a community; the second, concerns the so called expansion of cultural tourism into 'the everyday life' (Richards 2011; Smith and Richards (eds.) 2013).

The main reasons that determined the evolving of cultural tourism into a fast growing subdivision of global tourism seems to have been the economic turn in the support of culture (Smith and Richards (eds.) 2013: 63). This shift is characterised by the recognition of the economic benefits that may be brought by various cultural activities and events organized for touristic purposes and must be seen in its turn as the outcome of a series of factors. Among these factors are: the development or the improvement of the neo-liberal ideologies in parallel with the decline of traditional welfare state regimes, in Western European democracies, and the emergence of new and various stakeholders who have become more and more interested and more and more involved in the process of policy making at the level of the communities and their regions. As a consequence, the number of public-private partnerships meant to ensure private finance into the economy has considerably increased, as has increased the complexity of these partnerships and of the necessary policies to be applied for the benefit of the regional development. This evolution is considered by Smith and Robinson (2006) a distinctive phase of 'mature capitalist systems' that, in recent decades, have re-created 'the economies around the symbolic value of culture(s)' (3). ... 'In this vein, the concept of cultural tourism seems to be taking hold everywhere. Former heavily industrial centres have moved from being economies of production to economies of symbolic cultural consumption' (5).

Closely connected with this conceptual shift which acknowledges the role of culture as a tool for economic development, there are the

phenomena of globalisation and so-called ‘commodification’ of culture which have caused certain developments in cultural tourism itself, over the last decades. Postmodernist thought has brought about notions such as the dissolution of boundaries (in language, religion and even identity), the proliferation of *simulacra* (Jean Baudrillard 1981), the disturbing time-space compression which brings about a collapse of both history and geography and the transformation of the whole world into a ‘global village’. Mark Currie sustains that:

Postmodern social theory has taken the spatial compression of the globe into a global village, the theme of globalisation, as a key area of cultural change, suggesting as it does, that is not only history which has been compressed, but geography. Traditionally, travel may broaden the mind, but it also compresses the globe in the sense that, at jet speed, the temporal gap between places is reduced to a co-presence, encouraging us to think of the planet as a simultaneous unity, an effect obviously enforced by the simultaneity of other forms of electronic communication (1998: 104).

Certainly, all the new technologies of communication have made the rapid exchange of information possible; equally they have brought new, ever faster ways of travelling. Today, places that in the past seemed for ever separated by huge geographical distances are brought together within the same sphere, the global network, and seem no longer so distant from one another. Although distances between places and between people and cultures appear no longer that important, there are other kinds of differences which matter and have become increasingly significant for cultural tourism. Many social and cultural theorists have emphasised the fact that globalisation cannot be viewed as a total homogenisation of cultures, and the survival and rapid development of cultural tourism stands as a proof. In recent decades, scholars have talked about a re-conceptualisation of the notion of globalisation that must be viewed more as a process of diversification than of unification. In a paradoxical way, confronted with the dangers (all the negative aspects) of globalisation, communities have developed various forms of resistance to the standardisation tendencies of globalisation and committed themselves to the preservation of the local, the authentic, the unique, against the inauthentic and standardised global. Currie humorously points out in a few words that: ‘Europeans have become more and more aware of the diversity of the European sausage’ (1998: 104) when faced with the ongoing attempts to globalise it.

Other researchers have called attention to the artificiality of global tourism whose main tendency is to replace ‘real authenticity’ with a ‘staged

authenticity' by a commodification of local traditions which are 'manufactured and simulated for tourist consumption' (Reisinger 2013: 40). Global tourism may be characterized by the production of 'non-places', like Disneyland, 'non-things' (the mass-produced souvenirs) and 'non-people' (people losing their identity within the mass or being simply the clerks in the souvenir shops) (Ritzer 2004). In this context, people become more and more aware of the fact that the world they live in is not a 'culturally homogenized totalitarian world' but it is one represented by 'different cultural powers' (Reisinger 2013: 41). As a reaction against globalisation, on the one hand, people tend to remain attached to place, to region and to tradition and heritage, intending to use their 'localness' in order to produce unique cultural items. On the other hand, tourists avoid the simulated and staged authenticity seeking the uniqueness and originality of the local traditions, products and customs. Consequently, it is considered that in recent years, cultural tourism has creatively evolved and continues to evolve creatively, '...becoming far more inclusive, breaking away from some of the more established notions of culture as loci of symbolic power and elitist expressions of apparent good taste' (Smith and Robinson 2006: 8). Tourism is changing into an experiential activity expanding into the everyday life. It has been observed that tourists prefer less and less the 'formalised' and iconic cultural settings (like museums, galleries or places considered as symbolic in the target, observed culture) and spend more and more time in restaurants, cafes, bars, shops, and other 'everyday', common places. People feel more and more attracted by the local colour and want to know and explore the host's culture in its everyday aspects and behaviours. In this sense, it may be stated that the main trend in the evolution of cultural tourism is its 'domestication' and 'glocalisation' (Reisinger 2013) which allow people around the world to exchange knowledge about their lives, to communicate and understand signs and cultural meanings.

### **3. Branding and territorial marketing**

The so called domestication of cultural tourism or its expansion into the experiences of daily life has been a gradual process taking place in recent years and as a result of the growing need to preserve local customs, products and values within the communities. Local communities have become more and more aware that the only way to fight against the negative effects of globalisation is to conceive and apply policies that enhance the value of their local products. Their policies included well targeted branding campaigns and the organization of events such as folk music festivals, arts and crafts festivals and food and wine festivals meant

to present the everyday life of a local community and to attract tourists interested in these particular aspects. Clichéd places and values that have been given the status of the iconic and the 'spectacular' (Smith and Robinson 2006) are abandoned and rejected by tourists and representatives of the communities in search of the original, the authentic. This is why the branding and media campaigns focus on those elements that are an integrant part of the local life. It is a known and accepted fact that many famous countries have overused some of their symbolic settings in their branding campaigns which had in the end a negative impact. One of the best examples in this sense would be a country like Jordan whose branding campaigns have focused too much on the promotion of its Greco-Roman vestiges and of the city of Petra considered as 'must-see places' (Smith and Robinson 2006: 6). Jordan appears to be 'locked', frozen in this cliché which, although being an important element of the marketing strategy for promoting Jordan's image abroad, does not testify for the complexity of the country's culture as it has been influenced for centuries by the Ottoman, but also by the Western culture. There are certainly other very famous countries which have used and over-used very famous settings, so that today images of the Eiffel Tour or the Greek shores with their white buildings have become common place.

This is the main reason which transformed branding campaigns by shifting their focus from the iconic to the local, the original, the unique. At present, branding and territorial marketing are seen as a means of promoting and revealing the very essence of local culture and identity. Territorial marketing may be defined as a set of strategies conceived and applied in order '...to attract new economic and productive activities into a specific area or territory, to encourage the growth of local business and to promote a positive image. The success of territorial marketing comes from its ability to discover the needs of actual and potential tourists and to develop incisive actions to satisfy them' (Simeon and Buonincontri 2013: 149).

In territorial marketing great attention is paid to the communication and promotion of the territorial supply system. Communication and promotion, the two main pillars of the territorial marketing strategies, are realised through advertising, the elaboration of a tourism brand, the creation of Web sites and the organization of cultural events. The organization of events is more and more frequently used as a tool and part of territorial marketing and this fact led to the emergence of a new concept, namely 'event-based tourism', referring to tourism that is based on the organization of events (Simeon and Buonincontri 2013: 149).

Brand and web sites play a fundamental role in territorial marketing having in mind the ways in which the contemporary human psyche is

influenced and shaped by the image and the iconic. The brand represents a medium for communicating the most valuable features of a territory and has to express the quintessence of local identity. According to Kerr (2006: 277), a brand may be defined as: '...a name, symbol, logo, word or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience' which is 'uniquely associated' with that place. The most important advantages of the brand are, on the one hand, the fact that it guides the tourist's choice both emotionally and economically and, on the other hand, that it facilitate the transmission of intangible factors difficult to transfer to consumers (Clarke 2000).

#### **4. Branding and cultural tourism in the Region of Moldavia**

Romania has a huge touristic potential ensured not only by the great diversity of its forms of relief, its climate and avifauna, but also by its impressive and unique cultural patrimony inherited from generation to generation.

The region of Moldavia is one of the most beautiful in the country, preserving a great and unique cultural heritage. Geographically, the region is hilly, being situated on the most part of the plateau and including a space with medium altitudes (summits and plateaus, separated by large valleys with terraces at 50-200m), with a high density of rural and urban settlements. The natural environment is favourable for touristic activities with accessibility in all directions. The climate is continental, with aridity touches, which allows touristic activities along the four seasons (Ielenicz, Comănescu and Nedelea 2010: 35-36). There are also a large number of lakes and vegetal formations like forests, a characteristic feature that transforms Moldavia into an attractive place ensuring the best conditions for various recreational activities. Moreover, in Moldavia there are several mineral springs and local balneal resorts. Added to its natural beauty, there is Moldavia's cultural and historical treasury. Its centuries-old cultural heritage includes: original architecture, traditional costume, popular music, artistic and crafty creation, naive painting and ceramics. The two main elements - nature and cultural heritage - have to form the hard core of every branding policy intended at developing local cultural tourism. Features like the persistence of traditions and rituals and the unequalled, for their taste and quality, home-made products have to be emphasised and used to attract tourists.

Every branding strategy should begin by the identification of a cluster of fundamental characteristics of local identity. Besides being a province with a great historical past, the Region of Moldavia has also the

benefits of uniting in itself various geographical and cultural zones, each with its unique status. It is probably one of the regions with the greatest tourism potential, having in mind that it is also the home of some of the most famous Romania's vineyards, Cotnari and Odobesti. Thus, media and branding campaigns should be based on the well known advertising strategies, including the internet and television, but also and mostly on the organization of festivals or events that celebrate local wine and food and local tradition and lifestyle. Another strategy would be the advertising of local crafts made visible by the organisation of workshops where tourists can be initiated in the art of pottery, for instance, by local artists.

A remarkable dimension of cultural tourism that holds a particular place in this region is the hospitality of the people, which may become a brand in itself. On many occasions, foreign tourists have appreciated not only the beauty of nature and of traditional ways of life, but also the kindness with which they have been received by the locals. Hospitality may be thus considered a specific feature of local identity and may become a strong point of any advertising and branding strategy.

The World Tourism Organization has elaborated and presented various materials and documents that analyse key topics relating to tourism, including cultural tourism and its forms. For instance, a document that refers to domestic tourism emphasizes the importance of a series of strategic actions that can be taken in order to develop tourism and these statements may be considered applicable in the case of local tourism as well. First of all, it is emphasized that 'There is no magic formula and everything depends on the national and regional context'. Then, several actions are identified as strategies, and special attention is given to the developing and diversifying of the tourist services quality and of the infrastructure, namely the roads and the accommodation. Direct reference is made to the development and improvement of the transport means and roads of access at regional and local level, like the railway network and the network of roads and highways which play a very important role in the choice of a destination. Another key point is the improvement of the accommodation services by creating newer, more original means of accommodation which preserve the local peculiarities of a region. In this sense, actions that can be taken also in the case of cultural tourism are: the development of family-run hotels and chains of independent hotels; the creation of residences where catering is ensured by families; 'original' accommodation - for instance, old buildings that can be made, after their renovation, into rural inns.

The improvement of accommodation services has to be accompanied by strategies that ensure the creation of tourism offices (at



regional and local level) and activities of marketing in which branding and promotion enhance the impact of the image created.

### **Conclusions**

Cultural tourism, in its various forms, including what may be termed as food and wine tourism (in the article also referred to as local cultural tourism) and event-based tourism, can be an important tool and a beneficent force in the process of economic growth at a local level. Romania, in general, and the region of Moldavia, in particular, have a real tourist potential offered not only by their natural beauties of a huge diversity, but also by their unique cultural patrimony that includes millenary customs and traditions, popular costume and crafts, folklore and delicious local meals.

The policies for developing cultural tourism have to be based on the development of both the 'hard' and 'soft components' (Baleanu, Irimie and Ionica 2006) of the tourism industry. The hard elements are the quality of products and services and the creation or improvement of the infrastructure at a regional level, whereas the soft ones are represented by the marketing strategies which have to lead to the creation and promotion of 'destination images' and local brands with a strong impact on the tourism market.

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