

SHOULD DRACULA MYTH BE A BRAND TO PROMOTE ROMANIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION?

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ABSTRACT

Dracula is an international brand, not a Romanian one. But Bram Stocker chose to locate his vampire in the mysterious location of Transylvania. Thus, Romania is the only country in the world which can exploit the myth of Dracula as being at its 'home'. This could be considered a competitive advantage for Romania as a tourist destination.

The vampire named Dracula generates mixed, mainly negative, feelings among Romanians. And maybe – for the 21st century – can become a character falling in desuetude.

Though, the question remains: should the Dracula myth be used as a brand promoting Romania as a tourist destination?

The present paper tries to find an answer to this controversial question.

Key words: brand, Dracula, tourism, destination, product, Romania

INTRODUCTION

As we highlighted in the abstract, Dracula is not a Romanian brand. Romania – through its region Transylvania – got in the delicate and controversial position of being 'the home of Dracula'. This position resulted from the Bram Stoker's book *Dracula* published in 1897.

It is now admitted that Stoker never visited Transylvania and he used writings of his time (Light, 2005) to create a mysterious space for his vampire Count Dracula. For his book at least two sources of inspiration were used (Gruia, 2005): a book with the title *Transylvanian Superstition* wrote by a Scottish woman, Emily de Laszowska Gerard, and published in 1885 – which inspired the location; and a book published in 1820 and written by William Wilkinson, former British consul in Bucharest, *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldova* – which inspired the name chosen for the vampire, Dracula.

For the first 3 more decades of the 20th century, the book was not known worldwide; the 'launch' of Dracula as a brand (even at that moment no one could anticipate how popular Dracula would become) was in the first movie made in Hollywood in 1931 using the Stoker's book as inspiration. The notoriety of name Dracula grew ever since.

At least other 3 decades passed by – due to the situation in Europe before the Second World War, the World War and the reconstruction period of the 1950s – before a clear connection was made between Count Dracula and the Romanian voivode/ lord of Wallachia of mid 15th century - Vlad Tepes¹ (see Miller, 2002). Several sources (Miller, 2002, Light, 2005 and Rezachevich, 2005) explain how the negative campaign conducted by the Hungarian king – Mathias Corvin – and by German chroniclers of the 15th century, portrayed Vlad Tepes, the Impaler, as one of the cruelest person of all time. For those with a real interest in history, Vlad Tepes was a man of its times, punishing the people who did wrong with the methods commonly used during the 15th century (Rezachevich, 2005).

The association of Count Dracula with Vlad Tepes was rejected by Romanian people for many years. Romanians consider the voivode an important historical figure, almost a hero, who fought for the independence of Wallachia against the Ottoman Empire, against the Hungarians and against the Tartars. The association between Vlad Tepes and Dracula was only enhanced by the book written by R.Florescu and R.McNally, *In Search of Dracula* and published in 1972 (Miller, 2002).

The mix between the historical personage and the fictional Dracula triggered, and still triggers, a negative feeling among Romanian people who do not want Vlad Tepes to be seen as a vampire. Another reason which explains the attitude of rejection of Count Dracula is the fact that in the Romanian folklore the vampire does not exist and this fictional personage is associated with Western cultures. However, in the Romanian folklore the evil spirit is present. It is named ‘strigoi’ - in English its best translation is *ghoul* – but this does not have a human body and has no similar features with a vampire.

Dracula is a negative character and Romanians had (some still have) difficulties in separating the fictional personage created by Bram Stoker and the historical figure of Vlad Tepes. This is the most important obstacle to overcome when the use of brand Dracula in connection with Romania as a tourist destination is proposed.

The idea of this paper emerged in connection with two things: the endless – and for the moment without result – discussions which took place during 2005 on the project Branding Romania; and the fictional book *The Historian*, by Elena Kostova published during the same year and which popularized the Dracula myth again.

A lot of literature has been written on vampires, on Count Dracula specifically and on the historical figure of Vlad Tepes, but it does not connect directly with the topic of our

¹ He was born (presumably) in Sighisoara as the son of Vlad Dracul. He became the lord/ ruler (or voivode) of the Principality of Wallachia in 1448, between 1456 and 1462 and in 1476. Vlad Tepes is also known as Vlad the Impaler. The surname Dracul, inherited from his father seemed to derive from the fact that the men from the family were member of the *Order of the Dragon*, an organization which fought against the Ottoman Empire expansion. Because in the 15th century Romanian language had no word for *dragon*, it was translated ‘dracul’.

paper². Though, very few studies were made regarding Dracula name and tourism on this theme in Romania, because it was and is a delicate subject. The author of those studies is Duncan Light, Associate Professor in Human Geography at Liverpool Hope University.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

For the present study we used:

- exploratory research through which we obtained secondary data from published materials and web sites;
- descriptive research which generated primary data from a questionnaire applied to a small group of foreign tourists who arrived in a determined period of time in one of the possible location for the Dracula myth; the sample used is not representative from the statistical point of view; the representativeness of this sample could not be established because the total population³ is very difficult (almost impossible) to be established; the difficulty comes from two sources:
 - ✓ a complete list of the tourist products including the name Dracula (either as tours for groups or personalized products) is almost impossible to generate due to the fact that not all the products are presented or advertised;
 - ✓ tourists who come in Romania for other purposes – business or other forms of tourism – can use by chance or occasionally the products including the name Dracula, but the statistical data would consider them by their declared goal and not by the secondary ones.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In our study we considered that only 3 books are important for the connection between the brand Dracula and Romania as a tourist destination. Their importance arise from the way they influenced and could influence this relationship and by the fact that those book express the visions of the end of 19th century, the mid of 20th century and the beginning of 21st century.

Those three books are:

- *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, published in 1897; this book represents the starting point for the spreading of Count Dracula myth all over the world, with the help of Hollywood films since 1931⁴;
- *In Search of Dracula* by R.Florescu and R.McNally, published in 1972; this book could be considered the starting point for tourists' interest in Dracula tours – in search of

² For more information on these subjects please see at least Elizabeth Miller books: *A Dracula handbook*, *Dracula: Sense and Nonsense* and *Dracula: Shade and Shadow*.

³ The total population represents the total number of tourist who was in contact and expressed their interest for the (tourist) products which include the name of Dracula.

⁴ In the first Hollywood film of Dracula, the Count part was played by Bela Lugosi, born in Transylvania at Lugoj - now a small town in Timis County (Iancu, 2005). This 'coincidence' generates a stronger link between Transylvania and Dracula.

the vampire Count - in Romania;

- *The Historian* by Elena Kostova, published in 2005 – which presents the Dracula myth from a different perspective, and makes a better mix⁵ between the myth and the history; it could be a model on how the Dracula myth should be exploited from now on.

In the next paragraph we will try to present – briefly - what has been done in Romania to exploit the myth of Dracula.

We must stress the fact that the Bram Stoker's book *Dracula* was almost unknown in Romania during the communist period. The first 'tourist product' connected with Dracula started to be developed after the book *In Search of Dracula* was published and an increasing number of foreign tourists arrived in Romania asking about Dracula (Gruia, 2005). The success of this second book generated, at first, a negative reaction from Romanian communist authorities and – as a result – they tried to present to those foreign tourists, who were asking about Dracula, the historical figure of Vlad Tepes; the tours were concentrated on Wallachia and Romania history. It is no surprise that the tourists were disappointed and not interested: they were looking for 'their vampire' (Gruia, 2005; Iancu, 2005). Not understanding what the foreign tourists were looking for - a fictional personage named Dracula - the Romanian communist authorities felt in the other extreme. They changed the theme of the tours and started to present Romanian folklore, superstitions and frightening experiences (Gruia, 2005; The Diplomat, 2006). The length of such a tour was supposed to be of 6-7 days, but some sources (Gruia, 2005) indicated that the foreign tourists lost interest in this particular and peculiar subject and an average tour was no longer than 3-4 days. After trial and error, between 1976 and 1977, a combination of historic and fictional tours was offered to those who expressed their interest on Dracula myth (Gruia, 2005). Despite the fact that the book *In Search of Dracula* mentioned Poienari Fortress⁶ or Citadel as the 'real Dracula castle', the communist authorities preferred to present Bran Castle⁷ as Dracula Castle; the reasons were simple: this castle was much more accessible – from road infrastructure point of view; and it was (it still is) situated near Brasov where the tourists could be accommodated. The Poienari Fortress was considered too isolated.

⁵ Based on a thoroughly documentation.

⁶ Cetatea Poienari (Poienari Fortress or Citadel) is known also as Cetatea lui Negru Voda (the Citadel or Fortress of Black Ruler). Without solid historical evidences, it is supposed that the citadel was erected at the beginning of 13th century by the rulers of Walachia. Some historical sources indicate that Vlad Tepes, the Impaler reinforced the fortress – due to its strategic location. The legend says that for this work Vlad used noble people – including their wives and children – whom he held responsible for the death of his father. But no documents were found to support the legend.

⁷ In Bran, the first fortress was built around 1377 and its strategic position was important for the rulers of Transylvania. In 1920 the castle was given to the Romanian royal family. For more information on Bran Castle please visit www.brancastrlemuseum.ro

Trying to multiply the locations where the myth of Dracula could be exploited, in 1976, in Birgau Pass⁸ - at 42 km from Bistrita, the town mentioned by Stoker in his book – a hotel copying a medieval style was built and named Castle of Dracula Hotel. But the efforts of communist authorities stopped here. During 1980s, vampire Count Dracula was considered too ‘decadent’ (Gruia, 2005, Iancu, 2005) and the idea of tourism connected with Dracula’s name was abandoned; anyway, the number of tourists visiting Romania during that period was very low.

In the first half of 1990s, the name of Dracula was almost all the time rejected; there were two motives:

- the connection that was made between the historical Vlad Tepes and Count Dracula;
- the fact that all that time when Romania was mentioned, the name of Dracula almost logically followed; this assertion is supported by the source *The Diplomat* from February 2006.

Considering the precarious economic situation of Romania along with unfavorable external image, the name of Dracula in direct correlation with the name of Romania acted like ‘a last drop’. And it should not be a surprise that many Romanians considered Dracula as a negative figure that casts a dark shadow over Romania.

By the mid 1990s the feelings toward Count Dracula started to become mixed, since some – very few – perceived the business opportunities which could be generated by Dracula’s name and its connection with Romania.

In March 1995 the first World Dracula Congress took place in Romania. The media attitude was contemptuous and all the participants were characterized as ‘odd people interested in vampires’. This attitude reflected the major negative feelings of Romanians – or at least Romanian media - toward Dracula.

In 2000 the Romanian Ministry of Tourism, through the minister Dan M. Aghaton – took an official position and it was declared that Romania should see in the Dracula name an opportunity to attract tourists and the myth should have been exploited at least at the level of 1970s. A tour named ‘On Dracula tracks’ was proposed and the project of Dracula Park was launched. Both proposals were never put into practice. But a positive outcome emerged from this attitude and the launching of the proposal; it generated discussions and an increasing number of Romanians started to accept the fictional aspect of Count Dracula and fewer connections are made with the historical Vlad Tepes, though the connection could not be ignored.

⁸ In Western literature, Birgau Pass is written as Borgo Pass; on Romanian maps it could be found under the name of Tihuta Pass, too.

At the level of 2005, over 20 Romanian travel companies offered packages based on Dracula's myth (Iancu, 2005). Their activities are based on several locations where Dracula theme is present since 1970s:

- Bran Castle which remained the main destination for the foreign tourists searching for Dracula; at least for other 3 years, the Bran Castle can be visited; in 2009 – the owner⁹ of Bran Castle would decide on its destination, under the regulations imposed by Romanian Commission for Historical Monuments; because the castle has nothing dark and sinister about it, those foreign tourist who come only for Dracula are disappointed; those who want to see more, could enjoy their journey because Bran is one of the best known destination for rural tourism combined with mountain tourism;

- Sighisoara – where is supposed that Vlad Tepes was born¹⁰; Sighisoara is a medieval town – with a lot of German influence in its architecture - and one of the seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Romania;

- Castle of Dracula Hotel, in Birgau Pass, where a short and very simple program is organized for those tourists who expressed their interest in this direction; it is situated in a mountain area where rural tourism is flourishing;

- Poienari Fortress – its location is isolated; the nearest village is at 6 km; to reach it a person must climb over a stair of over 1400 steps; no attractions could be found at the bottom of the hill where the fortress is located; there were some rumors that a hotel would be built near the place where the long stair begin, but it is not clear if the construction started or not;

- the Hotel 'Home to Dracula' opened in Poiana Brasov in November 2005 (the main shareholder is a British company, owning other 3 lodging capacities in Romania; it was stated the intention – if the 17 rooms hotel prove to be a success – of initiating a hotel chain 'Home to Dracula' in the years to come¹¹;

- in 1997, in Bucharest, Count Dracula Club Restaurant was opened; it offered and offers live performances – on Tuesday and Friday – provided by an actor impersonating Dracula. The restaurant is preferred by foreign tourists; the Romanians are going there only if they are with foreign friends or business partners;

- the Snagov Monastery, near Bucharest, is another location for Dracula myth – the legends present it as the burial place of Vlad Tepes, though the true location of his tomb remain an open question; until now the monastery was not very popular among foreign

⁹ Bran Castle was given back, in April 2006, to Dominic Habsburg, the nephew of Mary – Queen of Romania (Anghel, 2006)

¹⁰ The place of birth for Vlad Tepes is an open question.

¹¹ As the following source suggests: Revista AnatMedia, November-December 2005, www.anat.ro/index.php

tourists due to the closed and reluctant attitude of the monks; it could become more popular because it is one of the places described in *The Historian* – and the description is favorable; the monks attitude remains the key for this destination and depends on reading the book and understanding the message; because Snagov Monastery is a religious place, this tourist destination should be regarded and treated with respect.

Relatively ignored, the town of Tirgoviste, from where Vlad Tepes ruled Wallachia, is seldom included in tours connected with Dracula. It can become mainly a cultural destination.

Several sources indicated that some of the tourists who come ‘in search of Dracula’ discovered Romania as a tourist destination and expressed their interest to come back for other tourist products (Gruia, 2005)

All the locations presented in the previous paragraph and the activities developed there took into account the notoriety of Dracula brand. And this notoriety could not be ignored when over 200 films were made on this theme, more than 1000 books were published and almost 50000 associations and fan clubs for Dracula exist (Gruia, 2005; Iancu, 2005).

Another – very simple – argument in the favor of notoriety was a search on Internet using Google as searching engine. We wanted to compare the frequency of name Dracula – which could be considered as the name of a tourist product – with the frequency of several Romanian most well known tourist destination, which could be sold as tourist products. For all the searches we put the words in quota to get only those websites which included what we were looking for. The results were the following (the search was made in September 25, 2006):

Table no.1

Name of the (potential) tourist product	Number of entries using Google
Bucuresti (Romanian name of the capital)	32.400.000
Bucharest (English name for the Romanian capital)	16.500.000
Dracula	18.500.000
Sibiu (the European Capital for Culture in 2007)	11.300.000
Transilvania (Romanian spelling)	6.290.000
Transylvania (destination for cultural and heritage tourism)	6.230.000
Maramures (destination for rural tourism)	4.870.000
Sinaia (one of the most popular mountain resort on Prahova Valley)	3.520.000
Sighisoara (the medieval town, UNESCO World Heritage Site)	2.810.000
Predeal (other popular mountain resort on Prahova Valley)	2.650.000
Bucovina (destination for rural tourism and including the painted monasteries – other UNESCO World Heritage Site)	1.440.000
Mamaia (considered to be the best resort of Romanian littoral)	1.320.000
Costinesti (the youth resort of Romanian littoral)	576.000
The Danube Delta	353.000

As the table shows, the number of entries for Dracula is exceeded only by Bucuresti and the large number of entries for Bucharest comes from the official sites where Romanian capital is mentioned.

We completed these results with the results generated by the application of the questionnaire – during the summer of 2005 - to a group of 30 persons, with the age between 20 and 28, all students in interchanging programs, coming from Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Slovakia. Their answers generated the following results¹²:

- 40% of them heard about Romania as a tourist destination; 60% of them never did;
- 55% consider Transylvania the most attractive region of Romania; other 20% prefer Maramures, 15% chose Bucovina; the rest indicated Romanian littoral or the Danube Delta;
- 100% knew that Dracula myth is connected with Romania and that Transylvania is part of modern Romania;
- 65% expressed their interest in Dracula topic; 35% declared they have no interest in it;
- 40% heard about Dracula Park project; 70% of this number consider that this kind

¹² The study was made by us in collaboration with the undergraduate student Camelia Moldovan.

of park could bring some advantages in tourism field for Romania;

- 55% visited places/ locations in connection with Dracula myth; 10% declared they are interested, but they had no occasion to do it; the rest of 35% maintained their lack of interest toward Dracula.

Those who visited some of the locations for Dracula myth expressed their

disappointment; the respective location has nothing to do with the vampire Count and the gloomy atmosphere they expected.

All the data presented above support the notoriety of Dracula brand and suggest that this myth should be used somehow in Romanian tourism.

DRACULA PARK

Taking into account the Dracula's name notoriety, the idea of the project Dracula Park (named for a while Dracula Land) was launched in November 2001 by minister of tourism at that time, Dan M. Aghaton. The investment was estimated at \$ 31.5 million. (Drumea, 2002).

When the idea of the park was launched, 5 potential locations were on the list: Sighisoara, Rucar-Bran Pass (near Bran Castle), Birgau (Tihuta) Pass, Poienari Fortress and Snagov Monastery¹³. Breite Plateau – near Sighisoara¹⁴ – was chosen because it was considered the most accessible location from the road and railway infrastructure point of view.

The Fund for Tourist Development of Sighisoara was created and an initial public offering was launched. Between December 2001 and April 2002, through this public offering an estimated \$ 3.3 million was raised from 14000 shareholders. (Drumea, 2002)

But this location generated a lot of critics and protests. UNESCO issued a report regarding the Dracula Park project and its conclusions were negatives. The main request formulated by UNESCO report: to relocate the park. UNESCO's attitude was triggered by the fact that the historic centre of Sighisoara is one the 7 World Heritage Sites listed in Romania and such a park would create a kind of mass tourism which would have a negative impact on Sighisoara's historic centre and an unwanted influence on cultural tourism – a product more suited for Sighisoara and the fortified churches from the surrounding region.

Another strong voice in the matter of Dracula Park location was the British Mihai Eminescu Trust¹⁵ which put a lot of pressure on Romanian authorities to reconsider the location for Dracula Park; the motives invoked were historical, cultural and environmental.

¹³ www.draculaland.ro as it was in 2004

¹⁴ Sighisoara is situated at 50 km from the Tg.Mures airport and at 100 km from Sibiu airport. From Bucharest, by train, it can be reached in 5 hours and the almost same amount of time is needed by car. From Brasov by car or by train it takes 2 hours to reach Sighisoara and from Cluj-Napoca the time needed is of 3.5 – 4 hours.

¹⁵ www.mihaieminescutrust.org

Breite Plateau is considered one of the protected regions from ecologic point of view. And the protest had the support of Prince Charles of Great Britain.

The clergymen from Sighisoara also protested against the park 'labeling the project as satanic' (Spicuzza, 2003).

To all this it must be added the Hollywood Universal Studios which threatened to open a legal action concerning the copyrights on Dracula (Spicuzza, 2003).

Some Western and American newspapers considered the project of Dracula Park to be in a bad taste for 21st century (Iancu, 2005).

For a while it seemed that all the protest and critics were in vain. Though, by the end of 2002 PriceWaterhouseCoopers was solicited to audit the Dracula Park project. The audit report recommended the park relocation. The recommendation was made taking into consideration, along with the cultural and environmental problems, the fact that the location near Sighisoara could not support an important flow of incoming tourists, needed for a successful theme park.

All these pressures and opinions determined the Romanian authorities to relocate Dracula Park to Snagov, at 30 km from Bucharest and near Snagov Monastery.

After generating so many discussions during 2002, since 2003 silence surrounded the Dracula Park project. No important steps were made toward transforming the idea into a real park. We consider one of the reasons to be the vague and blurry ideas which existed about how the park should look like. One other reason was the partnership between a private company (Dracula Park Company which replaced the initial Fund for Tourist Development of Sighisoara) and a state company RA APPS¹⁶. And, maybe, the final reason was the fact that the official approval for the park construction was given only in October 2004 – an election year – and the park was no longer a priority; in 2005 the political power changed and no more political support was directed toward the park.

At the beginning of July 2006, the Romanian government decided to cancel the construction project for the Tourist and Leisure Park Snagov (the new name for Dracula Park) due to the fact that no investments were made to the established location since October 2004.

Several days later, the minister of transports, constructions and tourism – Radu Berceanu – declared that the project 'is not a bad idea' and suggested a new study to be made on the construction of Dracula Park, since 'Dracula is the most well known Romanian brand' (Stoica, 2006). When the study should be started, if it ever would be made, and who would

¹⁶ Regia Autonoma – Administratia Patrimoniului Protocolului de Stat (a State company which administer the buildings and accommodation establishments owned by the Romanian State)

pay for it, was not specified.

Some voices spoke loudly against the Dracula Park construction.

One of these voices was Duncan Light who considers that a park with such a theme could generate a strange image for Romania, creating a distance between the desire to become a European country, and the message transmitted through a park with Dracula theme. And this message could be really negative and dark – it should not be forgotten that Romania's image abroad is still tainted by the beggars, bad conditions in the orphanages and delayed political reforms (Gruia, 2005).

On the other hand, such a theme park could be received wrong by the tourists of the 21st century; the older and more educated tourists would consider it kitsch; the younger tourist would associate it with Disney parks and would be disappointed. Only a niche of tourists interested by the dark spirits would be interested, after the general curiosity would fade away. The niche mentioned above could prove to be too narrow to support the needed tourist inflow for a large amusement park, letting aside the fact that is unlikely such a tourist would come back every year in the same location. In our opinion, a thoroughly study on demand for a Dracula theme park should be conducted, mainly among foreign tourists, before any decision would be taken for developing such a project.

The other voice speaking against the Dracula park was the Transylvanian Society of Dracula which – along with some Romanian tour-operators – suggested the idea of two smaller parks: one situated in Bran and having the name *Legend Land of Transylvania* and the other one named *Dracula Land* with the location in Birgau Pass¹⁷

Those smaller park projects were suggested to have locations near Poienari Fortress and near Sighisoara. The last one might not be a good idea taking into consideration the status of UNESCO Heritage site of Sighisoara.

Those kinds of parks are easier to operate, do not put a lot of pressure on the environment due to their smaller dimensions and do not require an important flow of incoming tourists. The idea regarding the development of smaller parks could become a better one than that suggesting the development of a large theme park.

After presenting the facts, we will try to present – in the table below - the arguments pro and those against the use of Dracula brand for Romania as a tourist destination.

¹⁷ www.cesnur.org

Table no.2

Arguments in favor of the Dracula brand	Arguments against the Dracula brand
<p>The story which created the Dracula myth exists – the book <i>Dracula</i> by Bram Stoker. And it was completed by at least two other books, we already mentioned: <i>In Search of Dracula</i> by R.Florescu and R.McNally and <i>The Historian</i> by Elena Kostova.</p> <p>Those 3 books could be used at least as inspiration for literary tours¹.</p>	<p>The reticence (sometimes the rejection) Romanians express toward Dracula. This attitude is generated by a combination of historical elements (mentioned in Introduction) and cultural elements (the absence of vampires from Romanian folklore). As a consequence, Dracula is perceived in a negative manner and not as the fictional personage it should be.</p>
<p>Romania has already a number of known locations in connection with Dracula myth – Bran Castle, Sighisoara, Birgau Pass, Poenari Fortress, and Snagov Monastery). These advantages should not be lost.</p>	<p>The problem of the copyright on Dracula name should be solved and it could be a complicated one. If ignored, the legal actions would, at least, delay the launch of the tourist product/ products.</p>
<p>Dracula is an international brand and it has an important notoriety, built on over 70 years of existence². No new brand could compete with this.</p>	<p>The ideas put in practice to exploit the Dracula name have little proportions and are known only by a limited number of interested tourists.</p>
<p>The cost of promoting a tourist product including Dracula name at international level are very low. This situation is due to Dracula brand notoriety and to the fact that – without spending any money on advertising – Romania and Dracula are mentioned in the Western press every year when Halloween approaches (Iancu, 2005).</p>	<p>The lack of vision which is a characteristic for Romanian authorities in charge with developing tourism beyond the declarative stage. Until 2006 we could invoke the lack of strategy for Romanian tourism development. Since August 1, 2006 this strategy exists, but the name of Dracula is neither mentioned, nor taken into account as a possible tourist product.</p> <p>The lack of vision is combined with the lack of funds; there are no available funds at least for studies concerning the development of tourist products including Dracula name; no one dare to dream that Romanian authorities would invest money in developing such products.</p>

Considering the arguments in favor of Dracula brand we can say that all the ingredients exist to exploit a tourist product including the name of Dracula. The Dracula brand notoriety could be the most important; combined with the story told by Bram Stoker

– making from Transylvania the ‘home of Dracula’ - and with the established locations since 1970s, Romania has an important competitive advantage in this field.

The arguments against Dracula brand are serious. Those connected with the mentalities could be overcome if the creation process for tourist product including Dracula name would consider and handle with care the resentments the Romanians have against Dracula name and its association with Vlad Tepes. Others could be more difficult to solve, but a partnership with those having the rights on Dracula brand could be an intelligent move. The most threatening of the disadvantages could be the lack of vision because it could generate the creation of a product not in tune with the tourist requests. And the line between an original product and kitsch is very thin.

We consider that – at the present moment, due to the changes generated by 10 years of ongoing discussions – the Dracula tourist product have pass through some of the barriers tied to mentalities. It must overcome the other barriers of vision, imagination and implementation.

Another big barrier is represented by the necessary funds. With a good and intelligent idea for a tourist product, completed with a clever choice of partners, the problem of lack of funds could be solved. But the first and hardest step: the market research should be made properly.

Taking into account that some mentalities would never change (The Diplomat, 2006) and that some cultural barriers would always exist, we consider that in the creation process of Dracula tourist product, this should be divided in two distinctive, yet complementary, products:

- one product for foreign tourists which has to have as a base the fictional personage created by Bram Stoker or the newer (more sophisticate) personage created by Elena Kostova in *The Historian*, or having features from both sources; when this product would be created, it must be taken into account the Western vision of a vampire and the atmosphere the foreign tourists are looking for; several sources show that the present offer was and is disappointing for foreign tourists because it did not match with their expectations (Gruia, 2005; Iancu, 2005, Light, 2006); this product for foreign tourist should have a distinct component including the Halloween¹⁸ – mainly for American tourists who would express their interest for spending this celebration in Romania; of course, the product should be tailored for that niche of tourists expectations, which have nothing to do with the local customs and traditions;
- one product for Romanian tourists which should include historical features in

¹⁸ Similar to the Halloween, the night of October 30 is the night of St. Andrew for Romanian orthodox believers (the Orthodox religion is the main religion in Romania) – a night when the dark spirits are wandering free and everyone must protect his/ her home. This night is important for the people living in the rural areas. To complete the idea of celebrations similar to Halloween, in Transylvania November 1st is named ‘the day of the dead people’ and nowadays people are going to the cemetery, light candles and cover the tombs with fresh flowers – mainly chrysanthemums. Both days have more religious connotation for Romanian people than the Halloween for Western people.

connection with Vlad Tepes and cultural features in connection with local traditions and legends; for this product the smaller parks are suited because they can combine the story told by the international bestsellers with the local legends, customs and traditions; and there are plenty to choose from.

As we mentioned above, those two products should have a common zone, where the fictional and fantastic elements of the story could be combined with Romanian historical and cultural elements. This common zone should allow the product to be sold as a whole or by components, depending on tourist demand.

Related to this we consider that this zone of interference could be used for promoting another product: the cultural tourism in Romania. General references to Vlad Tepes link his figure with some important tourist destinations like: Bucharest, Snagov, Bran and Sighisoara. In fact, Vlad Tepes was more dynamic, crossing many parts of our country (mainly Wallachia) and letting there important buildings for the medieval times. Reviewing these locations and destinations we consider that the Vlad Tepes historical figure could be related to medieval heritage sites (like Sighisoara, Bran Castle, House Thomas Altemberger from Sibiu, the Huniazi Castle or Citadel from Hunedoara) and late gothic architecture style places (like Poienari Fortress, the old palace of Tirgoviste, Curtea Domneasca¹⁹ from Bucharest, Turnu Rosu Fortress, and the old fortress from Medias). Using historical

dimension of Dracula through its (unavoidable) connection with Vlad Tepes, we consider that the cultural tourism could be better and more attractively promoted for the foreign tourists. This kind of link, also, could soften the rejection attitude of Romanians. The cultural dimension of the Dracula product could attract Romanian tourist to rediscover their country.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the fact that vampire Count Dracula is a negative personage and could create negative associations, we believe that – if handled with care – its name could be used for a complex tourist product promoting Romania as a tourist destination.

Our opinion is supported by several opinions expressed by people specialized in advertising and cited by The Diplomat from February 2006.

The competitive advantage generated by the Count Dracula location in Transylvania could not be ignored and even if Romanians do not like the personage, it can not be ignored (The Diplomat, 2006). Romania need such a competitive advantage because it was absent from the international tourist market since 1980s and during 1990s its image was stained and blurry. Romania did not manage to regain its position as a desired tourist destination – as it was during 1970s - using its landscape, spa resorts, medieval towns, fortified

¹⁹ Roughly translated as Rulers Court or Palace.

churches, and other natural beauties and cultural elements. Unfortunately, because the tourism and hotel industry were neglected during 1990s, Romania was not an interesting tourist destination for its citizens too.

This competitive advantage is now put under a question mark if Bulgaria would decide to exploit the fiction in *The Historian* where the ‘temporary tomb of the vampire Dracula’ is situated. There is a third alternative, as *The Historian* locates its fiction both in Romania and Bulgaria, at least common literary tours could be organized.

Another competitor in this field appears to be ‘the Croatian Dracula’ as Internet searches generated several entries with this topic. We could not gather enough information to analyze in depth this potential competitor, but those who want to develop the Dracula tourist product for Romania should.

In the complex process to develop a tourist product using Dracula name, the mistakes from the past should be avoided – we mention here the wrong understanding of tourists’ requests during 1970s. We also want to highlight – in table no.3 - what evident mistakes were made in the project of Dracula Park and what it can use as inspiration sources if the idea of a big theme park would be resume in the years to come.

Table no.3

The initial idea – from 2002	The idea for the location near Snagov	What it could be
<p>The project had only one theme: the book <i>Dracula</i> by Bram Stoker.</p> <p>It should include⁴:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a copy of a medieval 15th century castle from Transylvania; - a building copying the Renaissance style for conferences, including a library with books on the theme <i>Dracula</i> and on vampires; - a main street with shops, bars, restaurants, theatres and a Grand Hotel <i>Dracula</i>; - a circular square with interactive workshops - an artificial lake - an amusement park (it was not clear if the theme of the park would be kept in the amusement park too) 	<p>The sources available to us did not say if the concepts from initial project have been included in the second location of the park.</p> <p>After the decision to relocate the park was taken, it was suggested that <i>Dracula Park</i> should include a golf course, a hippodrome, an aqua park and a race track (Iancu, 2005; Stoica, 2006).</p> <p>It is the time to mention that those who made the second proposal had no idea what a theme park is. And it is not surprising – Romania has no tradition in developing and operating amusement and theme parks. From this point of view, maybe the failure of this project it was a blessing in disguise.</p>	<p>If the idea of a big theme park was not abandoned and such a tourist product should be developed, at least the 3 books mentioned above could be used as themes (and the copyrights problems should be solved).</p> <p>Maybe the involvement of Universal Studios in such a park would be an idea to consider.</p> <p>And the theme could be completed by other two books which used the mysterious Transylvania in their pages before <i>Dracula</i> by Stocker. Those books are: <i>One thousand and one phantoms</i> by Al.Dumas, published in 1849 and <i>The Castle of the Carpathians</i> by J.Verne, published in 1892.</p>

A lot of imagination and vision would be needed to create and operate such a theme park. We presented the main negatives aspect of such a park in Results and discussions.

But maybe the *Dracula* tourist product with its two components would be easier to exploit through other alternatives:

- smaller theme and amusement parks developed near the locations already known

for their connection with Dracula myth; these kind of parks could combine local legend and traditions with the fictional Count Dracula; here both imagination and vision are a must;

- literary tours based at least on the 3 books mentioned above – using the location mentioned in them; if this literary tours could have the benefice of theme restaurants, bars, accommodation establishments, it would only enhance their attractively.

These ideas could complete themselves generating many alternatives tourist packages from which tourists could choose.

Of course, the Dracula tourist product should be developed within the trends and requirements of 21st century. And it should be a flexible product; mainly its central character – Count Dracula – must be able to change form the Count vampire created by Stoker to the sophisticated scholar from *The Historian* and even become a ‘Mr. Nice’ vampire if the trends and tourist tastes would request that.

When developed, the product should have style and should not offend local traditions and culture.

Romania could choose to be haunted by Dracula’s ghost or could decide to put the vampire to work for it in the tourism field.

We consider that the Dracula tourist product should be developed. It would open the door for other tourist products – from cultural to leisure and adventure – for those foreign tourists who want to know more about Romania beyond the connection with Dracula name and myth.

Once Romania would enhance its position as an interesting and desired tourist destination, the Dracula tourist product could become of lesser importance. It would never be abandoned, because as long as the humans would have an interest on the dark powers and dark spirits, Dracula would be present in their choices as a tourist product too.

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