

*Building a New Tourist Destination Image for Romania after 1989*

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Abstract

The paper is a critical review of the national imaginary communicated through video tourism campaigns promoting Romania as an international destination after 1989. Despite the efforts to rebrand and reposition Romania within the global tourism market, most of the tourism campaigns tend to reproduce old national stereotypes and practices: the same national imaginary was reapproached in different tourism spots, reinforcing old geographical and historical representations built by school books and media discourses. Together with the tourism promoters' oscillations between internal and external expectations, between economic and political agendas, these campaigns achieved an overall poor and indistinctive country image.

**Keywords:** tourism promotion, destination image, tourism commercials, country branding.

## **1. Introduction**

The increasing global concurrence between states and places sustains the increasing investments in international campaigns aimed to build attractive country images, to increase tourist flows and foreign investments, to facilitate political integration and economic competitiveness.

Often perceived only as part of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries' group, Romania has been trying since 1989 to rebuild its international image in relation with global networks and major entities such as NATO or the European Union (EU). Multiple actors were involved in the process of building and communicating a new country image abroad. Among these approaches, tourism promotion campaigns successively tried to identify and highlight authentic key features of Romania and Romanians. All these campaigns were followed by criticism from national media and branding specialists, repeatedly pinpointing the same issues: hidden political agendas, incondite representations of national authenticity and an indistinctive country image (Evenimentul Zilei 2007, 2008; Popescu and Corbos 2010).

Given the key role of country branding in the present global market and the role of media advertising in the construction of a destination identity, in shaping representations and behaviours, this research was aimed to analyse the country image communicated through national tourism promotion campaigns developed in Romania after 1989. The study focuses on the TV commercials produced in these campaigns and analyzes the national imagery inspiring their versions of country image.

Meant to meet external and internal expectations and to differentiate tourism destinations (Hopf 1988, Van Ham 2008), national representations were a hot topic in media reviews: all the campaigns were accused of lacking originality and authenticity (Mistreanu 2008, Popescu and Corbos 2010, Drăghicescu 2010). Or, each campaign and each political restructuring of the Romanian Ministry of Tourism (RMT) brought new perspectives on the national symbols considered best to promote Romania abroad: traditions (1995), wild nature (2010), Dracula (2001, 2012) etc.

Considering the political and economic context and the evolution of the Romanian tourism after 1990, this study hypothesis was that despite the constant search for novelty, distinctiveness and authenticity, tourism campaigns communicated a rather poor and fuzzy country image, closely linked to Romania's political and economic transition. Video content analysis was used to study and compare the campaigns discourses, highlighting the oscillations between economic and political agendas, between "familiar stereotypes and self-exotisation" (Baker 2009). The study was intended to bring a new perspective to the scarce literature on Romania's tourism promotion strategies.

## **2. Literature review.**

Encouraged by major international organizations (Kaneva 2011a) and supported by national policy and funding, the role of country branding is increasingly shaping the present global political landscape (Van Ham 2001, Snow 2003, Anholt 2008). Based on the understanding of markets' nature and the application of "corporate marketing theory to countries" (S. Anholt cited in Teslik 2007), it is generally aimed to increase foreign investments (Anholt 2003, 2007, 2008; Nye 2004; Szondi 2008; Sussman

2012) and to boost tourist inflows (Kotler & Gertner 2002; Cai 2002; Gnoth 2002; Morgan, Pritchard and Pride 2002; Olins 2002; Konecnik 2004). More focused on visualisation and symbolism (Szondi 2007), tourist destination branding re-constructs a nation state as an object of fancy or fantasy (Sussman 2012: 5; Moisander and Valtonen 2006; Peñaloza & Venkatesh 2006) in order to meet tourist expectations (Saraniemi & Kylanen 2011; Firat and Venkatesh 1995).

Defined as «the sum of beliefs and impressions people hold about places» (Kotler and Gertner 2004: 24), destination image is the result of processing data from various sources, including marketing tools (Pike 2002; Decrop 2007). There is a close relation between the study of destination image and tourism advertisement. Images from photography (Dann 1996; Day et al. 2002) and motion picture (Kim and Richardson 2003) play a major role in building and communicating a destination identity (Millet 1991; Mazas 1995). In this respect, television represents a key information source (Gallarza et al 2002; Beerli and Martin 2004; Gartner 1993) as well as a travel media (image) broker (Miller & Auyong 1998) and a manipulative tool influencing visitors' behaviour (Urry 1990). The role of advertising and media images in the selection and evaluation of potential tourist destinations (Urry 2002) justified the focus of the study on the destination image communicated by TV tourism commercials.

Content analysis is a method used in the study of both destination image and tourism advertisement (Pan, Tsai and Lee 2011; Pike & Ryan 2004). Several researches (Fakeye & Crompton 1991; Reynolds 1965) underline the role of framing in the construction of destination image: through framing, specific aspects of reality are selected and communicated in order to emphasize a certain problem and interpretation (Entman 1993: 52). The frame (or the theme) is the “central organizing idea” (Gamson & Modigliani 1987) providing coherence and meaning to a story line (Pan & Kosicki 1993). In tourism, cultural meanings are used to frame imagery (Morgan and Pritchard 1998; Fursich & Kavoori 2001), organize and emphasize images according to an underlying visual code (Pan, Tsai and Lee 2011). Framing is used to influence tourists' perceptions (Edell & Staelin 1983), experiences (Feifer 1985) and destination choice.

Given its power of persuasion, tourism promotion is often used by governments to achieve political and ideological objectives (MacCannell 1976; Baranowski & Furloigh 2001). Postcommunist CEE states, for example, often used country branding to facilitate their economic and political transition (Dzenovska 2005; Aronczyk 2007; Widler 2007; Baker 2008; Jansen 2008; Volčić 2008; Kaneva 2007, 2011b) and to support their “move from periphery” to the centre of the Western European society (Szondi 2007: 10). Their similar challenges and approaches to country branding inspired several transnational researches (Hall 1999, 2004; Mockute 2008; Anderson 2009; Volcik 2008; Hall 2002; Kaneva & Popescu 2011 for Romania and Bulgaria) and individual case studies (Florek 2005; Endzina and Luneva 2004; Dzenovska 2005; Konecnik 2004; Damjan 2005; Iordanova 2007). Several distinctive functions of country branding in CEE countries were identified by Szondi (2007: 17-19) such as: to distance themselves from the old economic and political systems and labels, to change negative stereotypes associated with the country; to position the country as reliable and eligible member of the new international systems; to position the country as regional hubs and leaders of transition; to reconstruct new ‘Euro conform’ national identities. The perception of the Western society as an aspirational model (Ditchev 2000: 93) explains the constant East – West dichotomy marking their branding approaches (Kaneva 2011a) and their citizens' perceptions of the world: a

(geographically and politically) “in between” situation of Romania was indicated by previous researches on the Romanian students’ mental representations of the world (Grassland 2011).

A key role of country branding is to build a unique, competitive and realistic destination image, seizing the essence of nationhood (Kotler 2002; Kotler and Gertner 2004; Martin and del Bosque 2008). National values and identities are often used as key elements to differentiate states (Hopf 1988, Van Ham 2008). Part of the “fiction” associated to modern states (Kaneva 2011b: 10; Arvidsson 2006), the images communicated by country branding commodify physical and symbolic dimensions of the national territory (Volcic 2009; Kaneva 2011c) in order to explain nations to the world (Jansen 2008; Mokute 2008) and to influence internal and external perceptions (Lury 1997; Franklin 2003). They also build and reinforce national identity by encouraging visits to symbolic places (Kaneva 2011a; Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983).

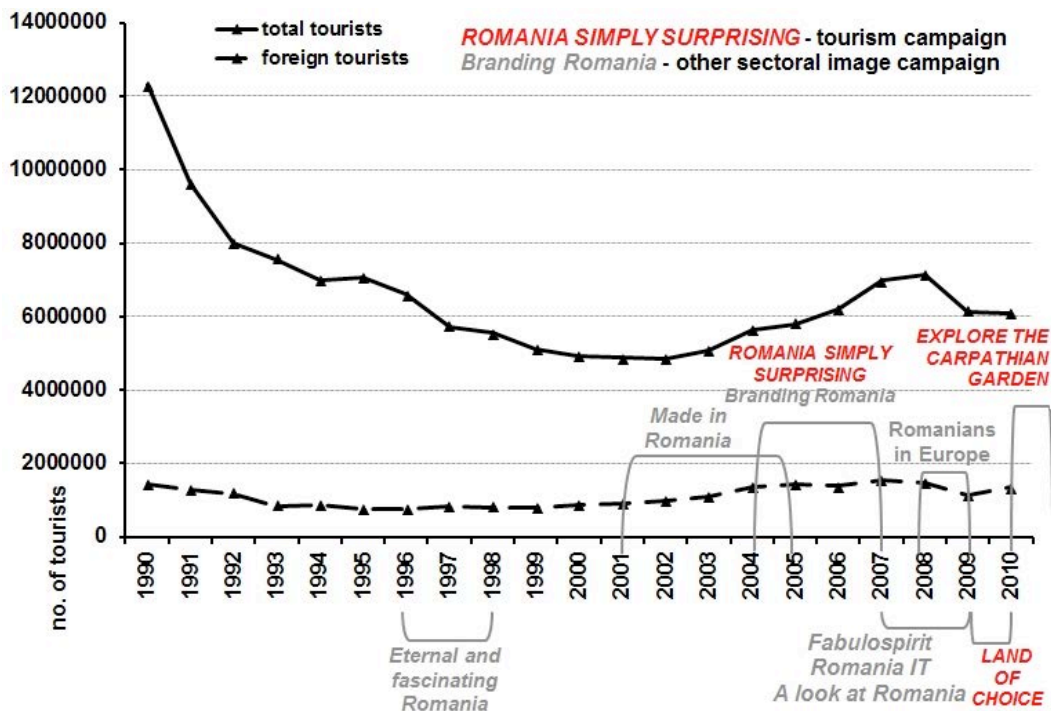
But the versions of national identity communicated in tourism campaigns are usually outcomes of centralized approaches rooted into a pre-existing self-identifying national imaginary (Verdery 1991:3) and often used to achieve ideology, consumption and national cohesion (MacCannell 1976; Baranowski & Furlough 2001). In Romania’s case, national representations (Anderson 1991) are strongly anchored on geographical symbols and historical descentance. Public discourses (history and geography school books, media) before and after 1989 reproduce the same representations of the national identity: “*Romania is a Carpathian - Danubian – Pontian country*”, geographically positioned at the European borders and historically linked to the European civilization, through its Latin origins and cultural influences. The tourism image promoted before 1989 highlighted key tourism assets reinforcing this symbolic national representations: the Black Sea, the Carpathians and historical sites certifying Romania’s European descentance. The present study analyses the role of these national stereotypes in the country image shaped by TV tourism commercials.

Like other CEE states, country branding in Romania has conserved a constant political dimension, manifested in the public actors’ control of national image and narratives, their constant fear of negative associations and the oscillations between political agendas and economic benefits. Country branding initiatives after 1989 were first aimed to replace old negative associations with communism, poverty or lack of democratic values (Sussman 2012). After 2007, the NATO and the EU integration increased the national interest and efforts for country branding (Dolea and Țăruș 2009): several sectoral public campaigns were developed with very low involvement of private bodies (Popescu and Corbos 2010) - **Figure 1**. Three main versions of Romania’s country image were produced: a. *an attractive EU member* - the campaigns implemented by the Ministry of European Integration („A fresh look at Romania”, 2007), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs („Romania-Fabulospirit”, 2007; “Romanians in Europe”, 2008) and the Ministry of Culture (“Sibiu -European Cultural Capital 2007”); b. *an attractive economic market* - the campaigns initiated by the Ministry of Economy and Commerce (“RomâniaIT”, 2007) or the Agency for Governmental Strategies (“Branding Romania”, 2005); c. *an international tourist destination* - three promotion campaigns developed by the RMT. These had the highest echoes in national media and they represent the subject of this study:

- “*Romania, simply surprising*” (RSS, 2004) targeted mainly the EU and USA markets and produced 5 TV commercials (a general one and four themed ones: nature, history, seaside and Bucharest) aired on Euronews, Eurosport,

Discovery, CNN and BBC. The campaign was stopped in 2006, when a WTTC (2006) report recommended the creation of a new country brand.

- "Romania - Land of choice" (RLC, 2009) promoted two TV commercials (a teaser and a general one) on CNN and Eurosport, featuring three famous Romanian athletes (the gymnast Nadia Comăneci, the tennisman Ilie Năstase and the footballer Gheorghe Hagi);
- "Explore the Carpathian garden" (ECG, 2009-2012) was financed with 75 million Euros by the Regional Operational Program and promoted three TV commercials (a general one, a nature and a cultural themed one) on CNN, Eurosport and Euronews.



**Figure 1. The main country image campaigns developed in Romania after 1990**

Tourism campaigns were aimed to facilitate Romania's NATO and EU integration (Evenimentul Zilei 2007, 2008; Mistreanu 2008), which explains the role of external opinions (of foreign branding specialists) and the permanent search for positive associations to certify Romania's "Europeness" (Kaneva 2011a).

Apart the originality issues of the campaign logos (ECG) or slogans (RLC), another aspect criticized by national media and foreign specialists was authenticity and misrepresentation of the national essence (Mistreanu 2008; Popescu and Corbos 2010; Drăghicescu, 2010; the UNWTO's representative R. Batchelor, cited in Popescu and Corbos 2010). Authenticity is a frequent concept in tourism studies: either perceived as an inherent feature of tourist products and places (Wang 1999) or as a commodity socially built and shaped to meet tourist expectations (MacCannell 1973, 1976; Bruner, 1994; Sharpley 2008). Wang (1999) distinguishes also an existential authenticity, linked to the internal fulfilment experiences derived from the consumption of heritage (Moscardo 2001). Aimed to extract people from their

everyday life (Bourstin 1963), authenticity is often associated with times and spaces from the past (Olsen, 2002: 161). Different types of authenticity can be analysed in relation with tourism (Gilmore & Pine 2007: 49): natural authenticity (like places conserved in their natural state); original authenticity (as inherent features of objects and places depending on their originality or historical accuracy); exceptional authenticity, linked to the way (exceptionally well) objects and services are produced; referential authenticity which refers to other contexts, tapping into collective memories; influential authenticity which exerts influence upon people's feelings.

### **3. Methodology**

The study focuses on TV commercials produced in three major national tourism campaigns. Aired on major international TV chains, these commercials were the most visible product of the tourism campaigns and their main communication tool. It is known that television has a key role in the construction of destination image, informing and influencing visitors (Urry 1990, 2002; Gartner 1993; Miller & Auyong 1998; Pan, Tsai and Lee 2011). Places selected and promoted in TV commercials usually become iconic. This enhances the importance of images and national representations communicated in tourism commercials.

Frequently used in the study of destination image and tourism advertisement, content analysis was used in this paper to analyse the country image communicated in the TV commercials (Pike & Ryan 2004; Pan, Tsai and Lee 2011). As video and audio text were differently used in the commercials, the study focuses on videos (Dimitrova et al. 2002; Li, Lee, Yeh, & Kuo 2006; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier 2009). First, a structure analysis was used to identify the main themes and destination attributes. Videos were decomposed into meaningful segments like frames, shots (Cotsaces, Gavrielides & Pitas 2005; Dimitrova et al. 2002; Hanjalic, 2002), scenes and sequences (stories). The shot is a sequence of frames captured from a single camera operation and delineated by camera switches on and off, by abrupt or gradual transitions like cuts or fades and dissolves (Iedema 2001; Porter, Mirmehdi & Thomas 2001; Dimitrova et al. 2002). A group of consecutive shots sharing the same thematic content or location form a scene and a set of scenes composes a sequence. Shots were identified manually, then indexed and assigned to a theme. A list of themes (key attributes of Romania as tourist destination) was previously established based on the browsing of tourism commercials and the literature on national tourism campaigns (the ECG campaign manual, national tourism plan) e.g.: nature, traditions and rural life, cities and modern life, myths etc. Then clustering (classes of similar themed shots) was used to synthesize data and compare tourism campaigns. Finally, the weight of the frames was evaluated based on their duration (the percentage of length of time) and frequency (percentage of appearances number) in the commercial. An inventory of key features and iconic national destinations resulted, revealing the symbolic representation of the Romanian territory according to the actors behind the campaigns.

### **4. Results and discussion**

Despite the abrupt changes of orientation announced in the media releases preceding each tourism campaign or following the restructurings of RMT, there are major similarities between the three tourism campaigns, most of them the result of the

centralized approach to country branding. All the campaigns were initiated and implemented by the ministry, employing foreign branding specialists (assumed to have a better knowledge of international markets) and without the involvement of national citizens or private actors. Overall, they use similar communication strategies: TV commercials aired on international TV channels. National imagery is communicated by the listing of key national assets aimed to differentiate Romania and to meet the visitors' expectations.

The results of the content analysis (Table 1) endorse these similarities and confirm the study hypothesis, highlighting the reiteration of the same main destination features (themes), only differently weighted according to the political and economic (internal and external) context. The increasing international demand for ecotourism could justify the increasing common weight of the two major Nature-based themes: the Carpathians and Danube Delta (up to 35.29 % of the frames number). The Cities theme is clearly dominated by Bucharest and slightly diversified in RLC and ECG with images of Sibiu and Sighisoara. Cultural Heritage underlies several key themes like Cities, Churches, Traditions and Rural, castles and fortresses (and secondarily Legends). Its overall weight constantly increases as well as the number of destinations associated, especially the UNESCO sites: churches and city centres. Legends and mysticism is a more subtle but recurrent theme, progressively developed from blurry references (RSS) to clearer assertions in video text (ECG). Sports are a secondary theme associated with famous Romanians as result of the constant search for positive associations already certified by international media and specialists (impersonations suggested by Shashi Tharoor, cited in Popescu and Corbos 2010). The logos appear as individual frames in RSS and ECG and last longer (especially in association with the campaign sponsors - RLC).

A symbolic construction of national imagery reappears in each tourism campaign, confirming that “instead of fighting stereotypes [nation branding] reproduces and enhances them” (Widler 2007: 148). The results of the content analysis and the campaigns logos repeatedly reassert the same old symbolic representation of Romania as: *a Danubian — Pontian Carpathian (RSS, RLC) / Carpathian - Danubian country (ECG)*. Thus, despite their permanent search for originality, tourism campaigns reproduced and reinforced the same inherited national representations, only adapted to different contexts: e.g. the increasing recent competition of the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast explains the omission of this theme in the ECG commercials. On the other hand, this common imagery has ensured a structural and conceptual continuity between the campaigns, also meeting national expectations.

**Table 1. Synthesis of the main destination features communicated in TV tourism commercials**

Themes	RSS (2003)	RSS (F*, D*)	RLC (2009)	RLC (F*, D*)	ECG (2010)	ECG (F*, D*)
<b>Carpathians (Mountains)</b>	<b>Bucegi Mountains: the Sphynx</b>	6.72 6.9	<b>Fagaras Mountains: Vidraru lake, Transfăgărăș an route</b>	10.81 10.42	<b>- Fagaras Mountains: Transfăgărășan route, Bâlea waterfall, - Maramureș</b>	31.37 29.85

<b>Mountains - Cazane Gorge (Almaj Mountains)</b>						
<b>Danube Delta</b>	nature landscapes: boat, fish, birds, vegetation	18.66 19.68	nature landscapes: boat, fish, birds, vegetation , wild horses	16.22 21.88	nature landscapes: boat, fish, birds, vegetation	3.92 2.99
<b>Black Sea Coast</b>	- <b>Vama Veche, Mamaia, Neptun</b> resorts - beach, hotels, surfing, dolphin, boat	17.91 19.07	beach, pool, hotels	13.51 11.46	-	-
<b>Cities (Architectur e and Modern Life)</b>	<b>Bucharest</b> ("Little Paris"): Athenaeum, Palace of Parliament, Triumphal Arch, National Theatre, Coltea church, Catacuzino Palace, CEC Palace, Dâmbovița river, office buildings	28.36 25.96	<b>Sibiu</b> city centre, - <b>Bucharest:</b> Palace of Parliament, Athenaeum, National Village Museum - night life	32.43 29.17	- <b>Sibiu</b> - <b>Sighișoara</b> - Bucharest: Palace of Parliament	<b>11.76</b> <b>11.94</b>
<b>Traditions and Rural life</b>	Secondary to Danube Delta, Carpathians and Churches: traditional costumes, fisherman	13.43 5.88	sheperd, traditional village, handicrafts	16.22 14.58	- Merry Cemetery of <b>Săpânța</b> , - pottery - traditional costumes	23.53 19.40
<b>Churches and monasteries</b>	- <b>Voronet, Neamț, Sucevița, Putna, Moldovita</b> (Northern Moldavia) - priest/priestess, bells	16.42 16.23	- <b>Sucevița</b> (Northern Moldavia)	5,41 6.25	- <b>Dragomirna, Pătrăuți</b> (Northern Moldavia) - <b>Argeș</b> Monastery - <b>Prislop Church, Bârsana</b> (Maramureș)	<b>21.57</b> <b>19.40</b>
<b>Castles/ Fortresses</b>	<b>Huniad Castle</b>	1.49 1.22	<b>Poienari</b> <b>fortress</b>	2.70 1.04	<b>Huniad and Peleş Castles</b>	<b>1.96</b> <b>2.99</b>
<b>Legends and mysticism</b>	prince, knight, spar	6.72 4.46	-blurred image (sunrise), - fish tree, -"land of.."	2.70 5.21	Secondary to Traditions and Carpathians -blurred image (fog) - Barsana, Sapanta	5.88 7.46

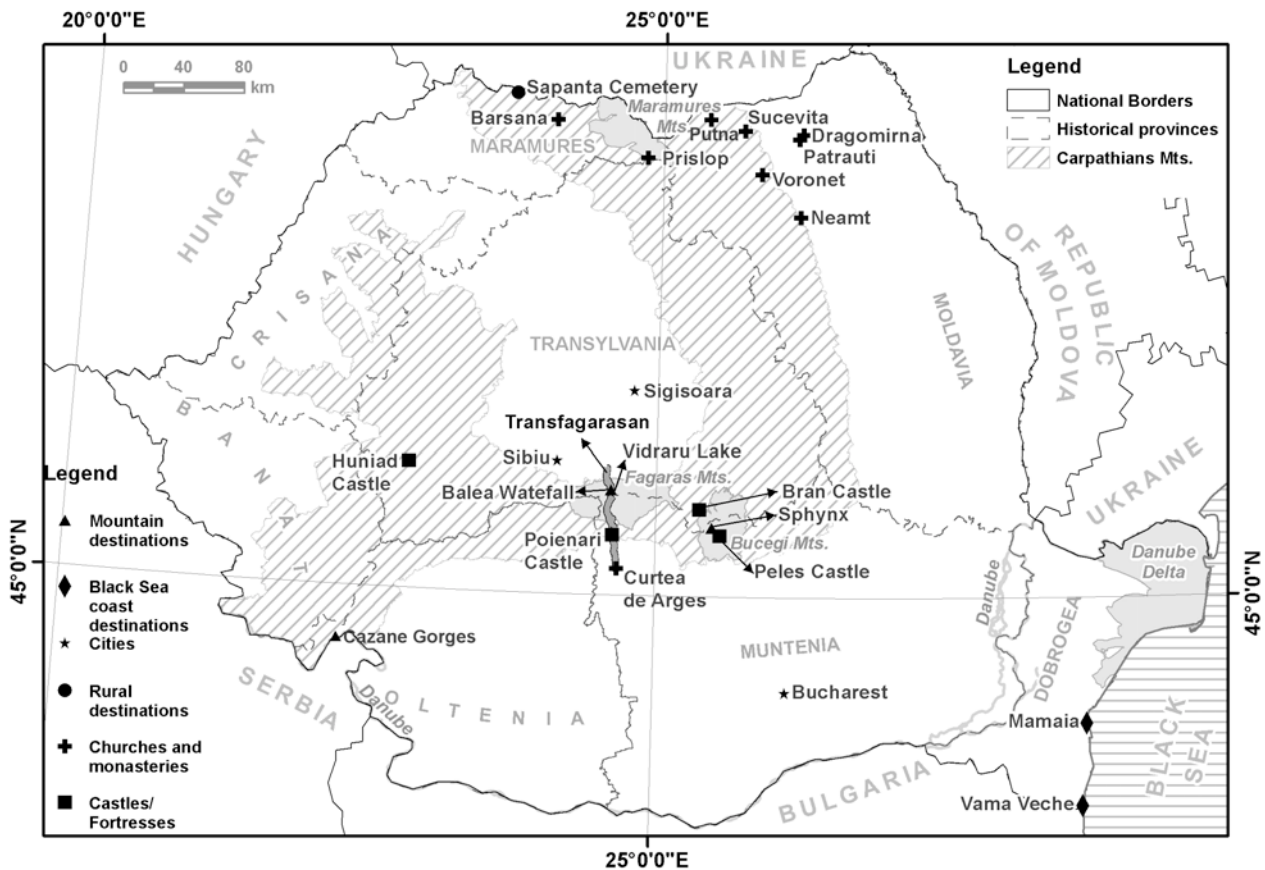


<b>Sports</b> (Secondary theme)	gymnastics, surfing, volleyball	7.29	Impersonations: gymnastics, football, tennis	27.03 21.88	-	-
<b>Logo</b>		3.73 6.49	Secondary to frames of Danube Delta and seaside	5.41 12.50		5.88 13.43

\*D – duration of the frames (% of the length of time in the commercials); F = frequency of frames (% of their number of appearances)

There are elements of continuity within a video (in RSS: the plane for Bucharest; the boat for Danube Delta etc.) and among the campaigns (the bride from RSS and RLC). The transition between frames is abrupt. The frames are reinforced by audio and video text in ECG; video text reasserts the commercials theme in RSS (e.g. “Bucharest”, “Danube Delta”) to support images and audio in ECG and it lacks in RLC.

**A short list of iconic destinations (Figure 2)** was used to illustrate Romania’s key destination features. The underlying geographical references are slightly extended according to the weight of the corresponding themes e.g.: more UNESCO labeled destinations were added in RLC and ECG (the old city centres of Sibiu and Sighisoara, other churches). Larger areas of the Carpathians were illustrated: Bucegi, Fagaras (RLC and ECG) and Maramures Mountains (ECG). Images from the upper sectors of the Danube River were added in ECG, while very similar images of the Romanian seaside appear in RSS and RLC.



**Figure 2. Destinations illustrated in the TV tourism commercials**

The main themes resulting from the content analysis shape a rather blurry country image of Romania. The transition to a new “desired identity” (Ditchev 2000: 93) linked to the European integration generates conflicting discourses of national self-identification (Kaneva 2011b: 9). In their effort to compromise external and internal expectations, economic (boosting visitors flows) and political (ideological) agendas, TV commercials present Romania as an in between territory, at the intersection of: urban and rural, past (traditions) and present (modernity), communism and Europeanness; reality (history) and myths (Dracula).

Mixed images of modernity (city life) and traditions (rural life) draw the picture of a country oscillating between past and present. In the early 90’s, when Romanian cities had plenty of reminders of their communist past, rural tourism was considered the best product to promote the „new” Romania abroad and therefore endorsed by national plans (1994) and new public bodies. Symbolic images of Traditions and Rural life (traditional costumes, handicrafts, rural landscapes) progressively increased their weight in tourism commercials (reaching the second place in ECG), while City images decreased but diversified: from the image of Bucharest (with 28.36 % of the RSS frames), to UNESCO destinations like Sibiu and Sighisoara.

Mixed mythical and historical references reflect the constant efforts to satisfy internal and external expectations with iconic national (historical) symbols and stereotypes frequently associated with Romania (the imported Dracula myth). Thus, the castles and fortresses theme oscillates between supporting either the mystical feature of

Romania with references to Dracula (the Poienari fortress belonged to Vlad the Impaler) or the heritage theme, with the historical references of Huniad or Peles Castle. The unexpected omission of Bran Castle (one of the most popular tourism destination among foreign visitors) is an example of the tourism authorities' oscillations regarding the capitalization of Dracula. Still, more or less subtle references to the famous character appeared in every campaign: from images of cloaked flying princes and medieval knights (RSS), to the campaign slogan ("the land of" in RLC), teaser images (of fish trees and Romanians riding zebras in RLC), new destinations (Poienari fortress) and blurry mysterious landscapes (in RLC and ECG), up to the clear assertion of "mystical" on the screen text (ECG) and frame highlighting (RLC and ECG). This progressive development reflects the tumultuous relationship between the Romanian tourism and Count Dracula: first strongly rejected by RMT, officially embraced in 2001 with the initiative of a Dracula park, then abandoned, and reactivated in 2012 by private tourism actors with the launching of a "Discover Dracula" Tour, publicly supported again by the ministry. The internal appropriation of the foreign legend was a lot faster among private actors and residents and facilitated by media (enhancing its popularity and highlighting its economic benefits) and the foreigners' interest (including famous figures like Prince Charles who officially reclaimed his bloodline from Vlad the Impaler in the British TV show "Wild Carpathia", aired in October 2011).

There is constant focus on symbols of national authenticity in all the tourism campaigns as well as in their media reviews. Most of the images in the TV commercials suggest a natural and original authenticity (Gilmore and Pine 2007) illustrated by: wild nature landscapes (Danube Delta and the Carpathians), traditional costumes (RSS, ECG) and lifestyle associated with rural life (dances, handicrafts rural life - RLC, ECG). In ECG there is an explicit focus on the original authenticity, reinforced by video and audio text: "authentic" is associated with images of traditional costumes and the Merry Cemetery of Sapanta but also with Sighisoara city centre. A referential authenticity (Gilmore and Pine 2007) is illustrated by constant references to a medieval (castles, knights) and communist past (the palace of Parliament). Images of worship places, architecture, wild nature and rural life could be also seen as illustrations of an influential authenticity linked to environmental, spiritual or cultural experiences and nostalgia for the past. These are reinforced by the ECG video text: "explore", "discover", "mystical". An exceptional authenticity associated with human interaction and tourist services is also implied in ECG by words like "welcoming" or "relaxing".

## **5. Implications**

The themes highlighted in Table 1 and their corresponding destinations shape a synthesized national tourism geography: just a few iconic places were selected to illustrate what tourism authorities considered representative and authentically Romanian. Large areas of the national territory were repeatedly excluded from these commercials. This narrow territorial perspective is reinforced by other public documents: e.g. the campaigns themes correspond to the tourism development axes proposed in the national Tourism MasterPlan for 2007-2026 (MTRD 2007: Black Sea coast, health resorts, UNESCO churches, urban destinations, rural tourism and ecotourism). National statistics frequently present tourism data aggregated in six major destinations: mountains, Danube Delta, seaside, Bucharest and big cities, health resorts and "other destinations" summarizing the rest of the country.

The lack of involvement of national private actors and citizens in the construction of country image affected the success of these campaigns and their national impact. This was confirmed by the reaction of a national journal and a tourism blog that launched subsequent online surveys aimed to identify the Romanians' versions of the most representative national destinations. Excepting the first one (Evenimentul Zilei 2007, with 60000 online voters), when only three of the top seven Romanian anthropic destinations appeared in TV commercials (Moldavian monasteries, Huniad castle and Sibiu city centre), the other surveys showed high similarities between the residents and tourism authorities' opinions. The 2008 top of natural destinations (Hera 2008) included the Danube Delta and 6 Carpathian destinations; five of top seven destinations voted in 2012 were already included in TV commercials (Huniad and Peles castles, Săpânța, Transfăgărășan and Voroneț). This suggests that the negative reviews of tourism campaigns actually targeted not necessary the national symbols used but the means of building and communicating the country image.

Ignored by political actors, these surveys revealed a significant aspect that could be capitalized by tourism campaigns: the localist reactions such as local media campaigns developed by local journals, authorities and residents and aimed to promote places constantly missing from national tourism plans and advertising. The surveys also underlined once again the significant omission of Bran Castle from the TV commercials despite its increasing popularity and the progressive national embracement of the imported Dracula's myth (missing in the 2008 survey results and ranked third in 2012).

Another argument supporting the involvement of private actors in the national tourism strategies is the failure in the capitalization of a very popular brand associated with Romania – Dracula. The permanent oscillations of the Romanian authorities on this topic and their constant fear of negative labels is reflected by a blurred country image, at the limits of reality and myths. This had a negative impact on meeting the expectations of both foreign visitors and national private actors (that did not to fully benefit from the economic advantages of this brand).

Another factor that could help further promotion strategies is the use of content analysis in the development of better evaluation tools for the tourism campaigns. It is true that given the very divers factors shaping the destination image, it is very hard to separate and measure the impact of only tourism campaigns (commercials) on Romania's external perceptions and tourist flows, but a cross-analysis with different statistics (like tourist inflows and investments) could bring new information and orientate further approaches. For example, according to the national statistics, along the implementation of the three campaigns, Bucharest and the main Romanian cities concentrated the highest shares of the foreign tourist inflows (50 % in 2010), but they followed the decreasing trend indicated in the analysis of TV commercials; at the same time, the constant promotion of wild nature corresponds to an increasing attractiveness of the mountain resorts (up to 36.7 % of the foreign inflows in 2010). On the other hand, the slightly increasing inflows to the Black Sea coast after 2008 reflects better the economic context than the tourism campaigns orientations, where the seaside I omitted from the ECG commercials.

## **6. Conclusions.**

Overall, these centralized approaches of tourism promotion shaped an indistinctive country image, linked to evolving economic and political, internal and external factors. All the campaigns have reinforced the idea of a politically (European/non-

European; democracy/communism), geographically (urban/rural; West/East) and historically (past/present) “in between” country.

Despite the successive attempts to rebuild a new country image, the reproduction of powerful identity stereotypes (Romania as a Carpathian – Danubian – Pontian country) in the TV commercials ensured continuity and facilitated self identification. Still, a higher involvement of residents and private actors in building Romania’s destination image could enhance the campaigns messages and their success.

A special attention should be paid to the promotion of several key national features that are similar or shared with other neighbour countries and already included in their tourism commercials: Ukrainian monasteries and the Carpathians or the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast. On the other hand, Romania’s high premises of self-exotisation that could lure western tourists (Dracula) are still poorly capitalized because of the tourism authorities’ oscillations on this topic. A transnational study on the content of TV commercials could be the subject of further studies.

A major constant of the three campaigns analysed is the lack of any impact studies. These could justify reinvesting in a new country image before abandoning previous ones (with every major political shift); positive aspects could be identified and reinforced, ensuring the continuity of messages. The development of precise and complex indicators should be another topic of further researches.

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