

THE IMPORTANCE OF A BRAND IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY - EFFECTS OF THE LOCAL ECONOMY IN BRAN GIVEN BY THE DRACULA BRAND

**Camelia TEODORESCU, Laurentiu Stefan SZEMKOVICS,
Vasile POP, Nicoleta BIRA, Andrei DUCMAN,
Irina-Valentina RADOI**

***Abstract:** With time, the localities within the Carpathian and Sub-Carpathian space of Romania have changed their functionality because of several historical and social events that took place. The study aims to highlight the transformations that have been observed over time, explaining the situation of the last few years and the trends that could favour the local economic situation. Thus, the research has been based on the analysis of the documents that rightfully proclaimed the establishment of the locality, on the analysis of the economic and political functions held by the locality over time, as well as on the field study concerning the importance of the Dracula brand relative to the upheaval of the local income. Following the field study, data has been collected because of having consulted several representative samples of tourists, resident population and official statistical data. The obtained results emphasize the impact of this development idea, which can contribute to the increase of the functional complexity of these territorial systems, where brand tourism may be implemented. Brand tourism and traditional value tourism contribute to the emergence of economic multiplier effects. Tourism development can mean the emerge of new jobs in a period of economic crisis and of a relative social crisis. It can also be considered a factor of popularization of the cultural identity, which plays an important part in promoting cultural diversity.*

***Keywords:** brand, functional mutations, tourism, economy, income*

INTRODUCTION

Considerable interest and research on the creation of legendary characters have always existed. People need myths, legends, characters to stimulate their imagination and sometimes creation (Teodorescu, 2009; Prados-Pena et al., 2018). Dracula appeared on this background, in an appropriate physical-geographic framework, to enhance his qualities (Reijnders, 2011; Muresan, 1998). The creation of such characters has a

core basis of truth. They should start from something specific and need to discover what is precisely that peculiar thing. Thus, searching for the real determines each author to create legendary characters, thus becoming creators of legends. Stoker is one of these authors, and Count Dracula is the character (Segovia Esteban, 2009; Teodorescu, 2019). The purpose of this study is to conceptualize the antecedents and the consequences of the destination attraction through a brand. In this case, the idea of Dracula attracts many tourists finding themselves on the search of own imagination. All the same, there has also been developed by those living around Bran, the adequate background and context for this concept, which in time became a brand (Aro et al., 2018; Clark et al., 2018; Munar, 2011; Stephens et al., 2011; Teodorescu 2016).

The relationship established between consumers and the brand is interesting (Casidy et al., 2018; Geyskens, 2018, Pintilii et al., 2017; Szymkovicz et al., 2018). The emergence of a brand shapes consumer behavior. In this case, Dracula is the trademark that has changes consumer behavior in the Bran area. One might even speak of a consumer orientation where emotions are decisive in choosing a product (hotel, hostel, or souvenir product). A significant role is played by retailers, including retailers, who have proposed and, really see a necessity in the adapting of their products to the requirements of the market (Dinca et al., 2015; Iancu, 2014; Peptenatu et al., 2012; Scott et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Our study has been based on empirical field analysis. Firstly, the study area was delineated and clearly marked by the administrative boundaries of the commune Bran, Brasov county, Romania. To this field analysis there has been added the statistical databases that have included the number of companies that have tourism and tourism services activity according to NEAC/ CAEN evidence, as well as the number of employees functioning within them for the period 2000-2014. Through this analysis we have tried to determine the relationship between the consumers of tourism and those who offer such services, as well as to determine what may mean the Dracula brand for the locals in Bran (Teodorescu, 2016; Stephens et al., 2011).

Bran village has had an economic development based on agriculture, especially on sheep breeding. The existence of the castle has been a form of tourist attraction, but we cannot say that tourism has primarily been an activity of economic interest. Tourism - driven

transformations or changes have emerged along with the Dracula phenomenon, which has found good conditions for installing and developing, and today constitute a consecrated brand of the area (Teodorescu et al., 2017).

For a clear understanding of the phenomenon that has attracted and still attracts a number of tourists and that can as well be a source of income for the local population, a comparison has also been made between companies that provide tourism facilities and tourism services in general and, those that have the same field of activity, but own the name "Dracula" or "Vampire" (Figure 1).

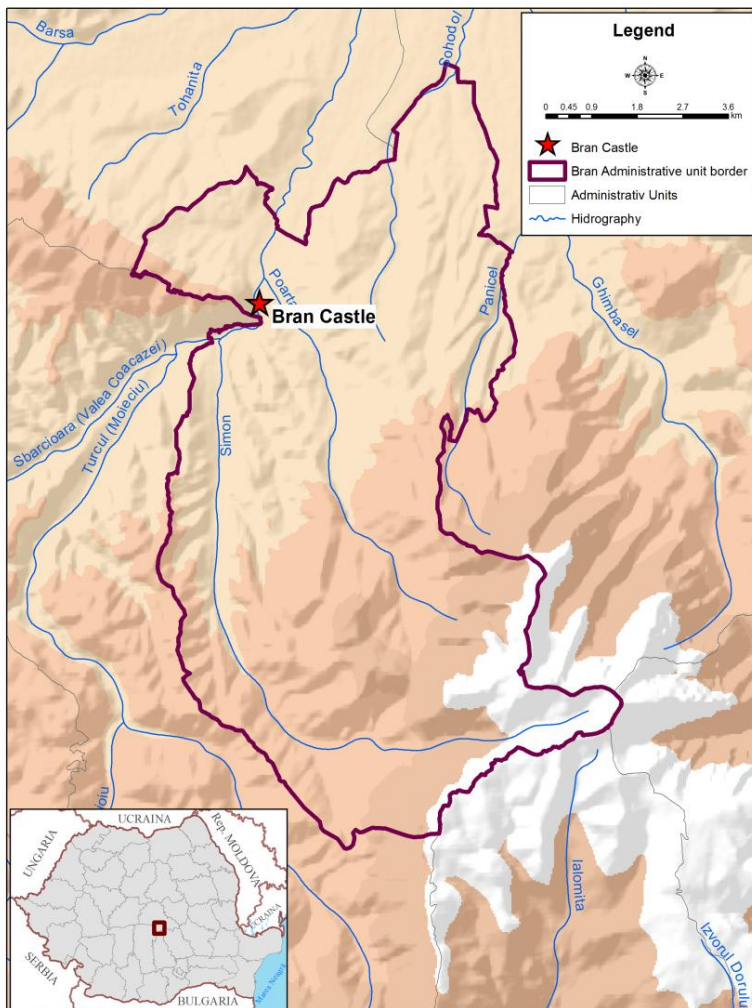


Figure 1. The localization of Bran

Regarding the overnight stays, tourists' visits and the revenue earned from the sale of Dracula- branded products, 110 questionnaires have been applied to residents. To track the degree of satisfaction in the visits and which products are preferred by tourists, but also how much they are willing to spend, 115 questionnaires have been applied to the tourists. Along with the questionnaires, it has been necessary to carry out an investigation to explain, relating to the Dracula phenomenon, the Dracula brand and the changes made to it by the locality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the study have been organized in two main research directions: on the one hand - there are the cumulative results from the statistical data and those on the field related to the tourism companies and the employees of these companies, from Bran, Romania. On the other hand, there are the other results recorded in the field by the surveyed tourists. The general picture of what the Dracula brand means for the commune (rural locality) of Bran, located in the county of Brasov, Romania, I thought it could be described only by calling on both parties involved.

Thus, from analyzing the statistical data, we have noticed there had been an increase in the number of companies with official field of tourism activity and tourist services until 2008, followed by a slight decrease during the following 4-5 years, then stabilizing to a number that seems to have been kept constant for a longer period (Figure 2). The trend is upward, which confirms the development of tourism in the Bran area. Minding those that have had official activity field as catering activities for events (NEAC/ CAEN code 5621), they started their activity in 2006, which could justify an increase in the number of companies in general. Many of the accommodation structures are not present in the lists for booking offers of tourism agencies. The most have been inventoried by the direct research team through fieldwork.

As far as the names of travel companies are concerned, most have taken the name of a family member who has developed the business. Ex. Casa Maria (Maria House), Ela Boarding House etc. Others have been taken over from the town's name and derivate terms. Ex. Casa Braniana, Villa Bran, etc. Among them there are also accommodation structures they have included in their names the term of "Dracula" or "Vampire". Ex. Vampire Camping, Casa Dracula (Dracula House), Pensiunea Conte Vladimir (Vladimir Count Pension), Pensiunea Castelul Groazei

(Terror Castle Pension), etc. The latter figure seems to register a numerical growth, addressing to the legendary tourism type of market (Figure 3).

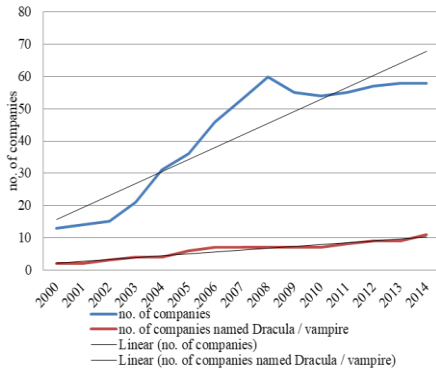


Figure 2. The evolution of the number of tourism companies and those owning the name "Dracula" / "Vampire" in Bran

Source: Booking and empirical analysis on the ground

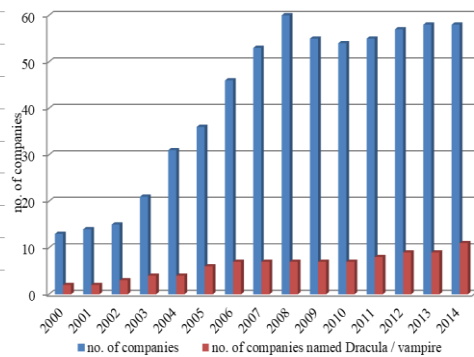


Figure 3. The ratio between the number of tourism companies and those including in their names the term of "Dracula" / "Vampire" in Bran

Source: Booking and empirical analysis on the ground

Mihaela (age 39, employee at "Vladimir Count Pension", Bran)

In this guesthouse there come tourists who know us, especially Romanians, but also foreigners. They came once and then continue to come. They announce us and book directly to us. We are on Booking as well, but the most prefer bookings directly to us. They also recommend us to others. We have families from Israel, Belgium and French settled in Romania, who come to us every year.

Not all hostels and accommodation facilities are found on booking or other sites. While being on the field to complete the list of accommodation structures, we have been surprised by their existence in a fairly large number. We could also see the phenomenon of companies performing such activities within a working point they have in Bran. Many of the tourism companies that perform such activity in Bran, hold headquarters located elsewhere. There are hostels with headquarters in Bucharest or Brasov. No matter where they have their headquarters, their activity in Bran can be influenced by the number of consumers, of tourists. The receipts are modest and many hostel owners in Bran do not afford additional advertising costs. This can also be reflected in terms of employees.

Ioana (age 62, employee at "Vlad Pension", Bran)

In our guesthouse, we're trying to get our guests the perfect home. They come back with pleasure two or three times a year. They also bring friends with them. Our receipts are not high and we can not afford to pay for advertising on the internet. We thank our clients.

Regarding the employees, the average salary value declared during the field discussions with the employees and the employers, tended to be quite high in the value of the minimum wage in Romania of 410.44 Euro (gross salary / month), which means € 251.02 (net wage) / month. These salaries make touristic activity an unattractive one and a field worthy to employ in. Those who are employed and receive this salary are mostly dissatisfied. There are two situations in the case of those who work within tourism field in Bran and they have these salaries: first of all, there are members of the family who have developed this business and, on the other hand, there are passionate people. There is also a third category of those who have no other employment alternative.

The number of employees in these companies that have the brand name of "Dracula" has also registered oscillations, but the general trend in the analyzed period 2000-2014 shows the upward slope (Figure 4). As a ratio of the number of employees, those in which the name of "Vampire" is present, because of the requested tourists, keep a considerable number (Figure 5), especially in restaurants.

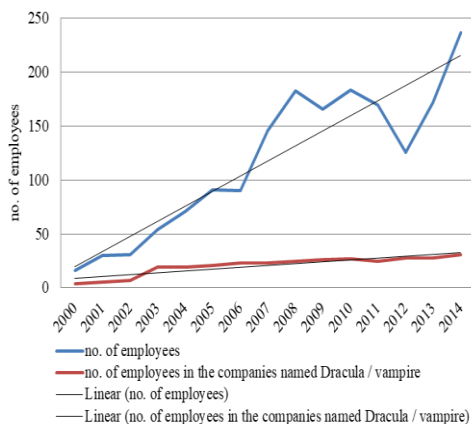


Figure 4. The evolution of the number of employees in the tourism companies/the evolution of the number of employees in the tourism companies named Dracula in Bran

Source: Empirical analysis on the ground

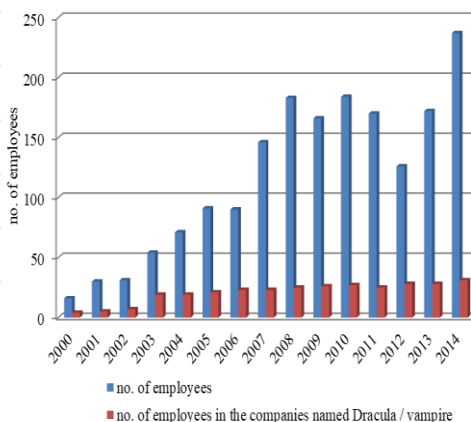


Figure 5. The numerical ratio between the number of employees in the tourism companies / the number of employees in the tourism companies named Dracula in Bran

Source: Empirical analysis on the ground

The "Dracula" brand helps develop commercial life. The souvenir market in the castle area exercises the greatest attraction in this respect. The products bear the print and impression of Count Dracula. Along with these souvenirs, traditional products constitute also another local attraction.

Nicolae (age 67, work retired person; also authorized natural person, living in Bran)

The inhabitants of Bran have always grown sheep. Sheep cheese or the one obtained by blending from sheep's and cow's milk have a preparation recipe and know-how like anywhere else in the world. Our fresh cheese (called "Cash" in Romanian, a kind of soft and un-salted cheese) is sold to all strangers. More recently, the best-selling are all the products that have the face of the vampire Dracula imprinted on. I did not like it at first, but I saw it sells well. We are adapting to the market. We sell what the market requires (Figure 6). People buy spicy and red sausage, pomegranate beer called "Dracula beer" and whatever has his image on it: magnets, sculpted wood, red raspberry jam, anything. For us it's a gain source!



Figure 6. The best-selling products in the Bran Castle's souvenir market: a. souvenir magnets; b. statues with the vampire Count Dracula's image on; c. wooden objects with the vampire Count Dracula's image on; d. Dracula beer (1.73 euro)

The overall picture of the theme studied can also be given by tourists' answers connected to Bran Castle and what it may inspire. Every tourist seeks to find here what he has imagined. The rooms with massive wood furniture, the objects arranged to delight the viewer and to let the viewer's imagination to complete the picture, is what you may find at Bran Castle.

Simona (age 23, from Cluj Napoca city, Romania, tourist at Bran Castle)

Visiting the castle is perhaps obligatory for those who want to know the history of the royal family in Romania and, why not, Romania as a whole, because there was a customs house checkpoint between Transylvania and Wallahia/ Tara Romanesca (also known as Muntenia province). There are also other attractions that it offers, and, I mean the entire Dracula phenomenon. It gives life/ vividness to the place and attracts especially foreign tourists. This culture of Dracula tourism consumers has existed for decades but has enlarged dimensions with the expansion of the Internet since 1990.

The landscape is very attractive. It has long been a customs house area, the crossing corridor between the two provinces that today belong to Romania - Wallachia and Transylvania, and moreover the city of Bran is strategically positioned in this aisle with steep slopes, while the castle is located so that it can watch the whole area.

Iannis (age 38, from Serbia, tourist at Bran Castle)

A castle you really must visit! Known for the legend of Dracula, it is a very beautiful Saxon fortress built around 1377. Built on a large rock with a medieval architecture, the castle is a landmark and a great attraction in Romania!

Achieving research objectives has been hampered by the lack of statistical data on earnings. The increase in the local population's income is recorded, but we can not say with accuracy how much it rises.

CONCLUSION

The development of tourism, especially of cultural tourism, is visible today in many geographical areas of Romania. Bran is one of the positive examples in this respect. Interesting are several elements that allowed or led to its tourist development. The Bran Castle is the central point of the attraction and the touristic story of Bran. It is the central element, on which there has developed everything that means today the tourist area of Bran. The castle, in a historical sense, has nothing to do with what Dracula is all about. The connection between the place and the character is just a myth. In recent years, this myth has made a perfect fusion between place and product, attracting a growing number of visitors. Dracula enthusiasts are looking for places where the character and landscape described are in full resonance or close to their imagination. Thus, the Bran Castle and its

position in the mountainous area can offer all this. Economically, Dracula is the brand that brings a modest income for the inhabitants of Bran. Our results have demonstrated the importance of a brand for a locality and for the inhabitants' profits. The new products in combination with the traditional products represent a whole economic benefit for the inhabitants. The emergence of this phenomenon that has triggered the brand's attractiveness helps indirectly to the revival and development of local traditions. The products resulting from the sheep breeding (the basic occupation of the inhabitants during the communist period) find their place on the local market much stronger today. These traditional products find themselves more and more in the preference list of Dracula brand consumers. They have even come to own a trading area in the souvenir market. The bran has undergone visible functional mutations. In a rural setting, the number of accommodation and public catering facilities is quite high. At the same time, the results prove significant progress in studies related to what a tourist destination in a rural locality may mean. The center of attention/ interest core in this case is the Bran Castle, a castle that we may say that certainly sustains the whole locality.

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NOTES ON THE AUTHORS

PhD. **Camelia TEODORESCU** - University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography, Department Of Human and Economic Geography, Research Centre for Integrated Analysis and Territorial Management, Bd. Nicolae Bălcescu, Sector 1, 0100411, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: camiteo@yahoo.com

PhD. **Laurentiu Stefan SZEMKOVICS** - Senior Advisor to the National Central Historical Archives, Regina Elisabeta Av., No. 49, postcode 050 013, Sector 5, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: laurszem@gmail.com

Pr. Ph.D. **Vasile POP** - PriestSt. Elefterie Church, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: isalev5@yahoo.com

Prof. gr. I. **Nicoleta BIRA**, Teacher, Middle School "Spiru Haret" Oltenita City, Calarasi, e-mail: nicoletabita@yahoo.com

Stud. **Andrei DUCMAN** – University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography, Research Centre for Integrated Analysis and Territorial Management, Bd. Nicolae Bălcescu, Sector 1, 0100411, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: ducmanandrei@gmail.com

Stud. **Irina-Valentina RADOI**- University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography, Research Centre for Integrated Analysis and Territorial Management, Bd. Nicolae Bălcescu, Sector 1, 0100411, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: i.radoi@yahoo.com