Who came first – Dracula or the Tourist?

New Perspectives on Dracula Tourism at Bran Castle

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Abstract

The emergence of the Dracula figure within popular culture has caused strong associations to vampire myths with the Romanian region of Transylvania. Bran Castle, set on the southern borders to Walachia has somewhat become a centre for 'Dracula Tourism', being connected not only to the fictional Dracula, but increasingly also to the historical legend of the 'Dracul' Vlad. In her study, Banyai (2010) examined post visitors' images held of the Castle and the compliance of these images with tour guides on-site interpretations, identifying an imbalance between the images held and interpretations provided. This study takes its point of departure from her qualitative records and attempts a supra-analysis of these by further elaborating upon destination images being influenced by popular culture and by extending upon her framework when discussing visitors' co-creations of experiences at Bran Castle. Findings reinforce the richness and variety of images held by visitors as well as by other stakeholders of tourism. It is furthermore highlighted that the discrepancy of images held may not necessarily need to be addressed since this rather adds to the overall experience and the contested space (some may even refer to this as the 'mystic' space) of Bran Castle. Rather, recommendations are made to better align images and servicescapes originating in the immediate surroundings with those represented at the Castle.

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Introduction

Nourished by popular culture, the central Romanian region of Transylvania constitutes, particularly for international visitors, an imaginative space of vampire myths and legends. Bran Castle, set in the southern Transylvanian city of Bran, has emerged as a key destination for 'Dracula Tourism', surrounding these myths and legends. However, the vampire images held by many of

the visitors have increasingly been critically regarded, above all, because for their fictional origin distorting the 'sincere' history of Bran Castle.

In this regard, a study recently carried out by Banyai (2010) examined images held by post visitors to Bran Castle and by tour guides on-site. For this, she conducted a content analysis of 20 online blogs (14 in text and picture, 6 in

video), relating to narratives of past visitors, and carried out semi-structured interviews with three Castle guides. Her findings illustrate the odd divergence between images held by visitors and interpretations provided by guides. Results show the great influence of popular culture on visitors' perceptions and behaviours and of culture and identity on tour guides' attitudes and performances.

Although Banyai (2010) elaborates well upon perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of visitors and tour guides as well as upon the diverse impacts of external stimuli on intrinsic motivations and values, her collected data still holds some 'unexploited material'. Therefore, this study replicates, re-interprets and attempts to add to her qualitative data by drawing similarly upon theoretical literature of destination image formation influenced by popular culture and by furthermore looking at co-creations of experiences made as described by visitors and tour-guides. In contrast to Banyai (2010), this study does not seek to merely outline tourist images and tour guides' responses to these, but is also determined to provide a better understanding of the variety of images being constructed at Bran Castle itself, evolving apart from the interactions between guides and visitors.

Methods

The re-utilization of existent and already interpreted data may, at times, be regarded as a weak starting point for discussion. Nevertheless, this study attempts to demonstrate the opportunity for multiple outcomes of single data sets when explored by authors with different points of origin and slightly different theoretical approaches. Hence, this supra-analysis opens up for an alternative or new perspective, transcending the focus of Banyai's (2010) study by working within a more reflexive, interpretative epistemological framework (cf. Heaton, 2004).

Although re-analysis' of existing data sets may often lead to new insights, a number of limitations need to be acknowledged. The qualitative records provided by Banyai (2010), and used herein, have been specifically collected in reference to her framework. The fit

and applicability of these records can therefore not be ensured. Infrequent assumptions were made regarding the context of questions asked to tour guides or concerning the approach of the content analysis of the online blogs. At the same time, it needs to be mentioned that interpretations may be slightly falsified, as the author was not present when data was collected, i.e. neither when conducting the interviews, nor when eliciting the written records (cf. Heaton, 2004; Parry & Mauthner, 2005). However, this distance could also be regarded as positive, allowing for a more dualistic and objective approach in which "knower and known are independent" (Heaton, 2004, p. 56).

The following review of literature will provide an overview over destination images, their importance for marketing and their being influenced by popular culture. Since the on-site experiences made and the interpretations of authenticities of pre-existing images held by the stakeholders play a significant role for the image of Bran Castle, a discussion on co-creating values at destinations is being added.

Literature Review

An Introduction to Destination Image and Destination Marketing

Within the scope of growing international tourism flows and the development and creation of present and novel destinations, marketers have increasingly become under pressure in drawing tourists' attentions (UNWTO, 2010). Regarding this, the understanding of images held by tourists before, during and after visitation is found one of the key factors to successfully compete in a marketplace (e.g. Bolan & Williams, 2008; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). The concept of the destination image implies a variety of notions such as perceptions, attitudes or motivations which are being built upon, among others, within positioning, segmentation, decision-making processes or consumer behaviors (cf. S. Pike, 2008). Accordingly, a wide number of models evolved, describing the image formation process (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Gartner, 1996). Commonly, these present either a sequence of

stages including a cognitive (awareness / knowledge), an affective (feelings / emotions) and a conative (action / intended visit) component (Gartner, 1996; Gunn, 1988), or offer a more holistic approach of equally internal and external stimuli influencing the overall image formation (e.g. Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Pike, 2004). Either way, the impact of intrinsic stimuli and extrinsic information impacting on the individual's image construct is acknowledged. The former refers to personal factors (such as motivations or personal characteristics) whereas the latter relates to solicited (e.g. travel brochures) and unsolicited (e.g. through friends and family, movies, newspapers) information resources (Gunn, 1988; N. Morgan & Pritchard, 2001). The image formation process depicts a complex and dynamic construct, challenging marketers to establish a coherence between the perceived 'mental pictures' (Alreck & Settle, 1995, p. 14) held by consumers and those images conveyed (Pike, 2004).

Ideally, marketing strategies and according instruments utilised (e.g. having carefully elaborated upon the destination's position, on whom to target and how to approach) convey the projected image of visitors considering potential or recapturing past travel. Herein, marketers are to reinforce, but also to develop upon existent images held of a destination (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; Morgan, Pritchard, & Pigott, 2003; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). However, this can be quite difficult to achieve, considering the relative intangibility of destinations and its services offered or the uncontrolled information affecting a traveler's image of a place (Bolan & Williams, 2008). Banyai (2010) refers to the three-gap model (cf. Govers, Go, & Kunar, 2007) addressing such difficulties more generally. The model points at three major imbalances which can easily evolve between the marketed and the actual tourist's image, i.e. due to unrealistic expectations held by the visitors or due to a supply failure, and between the marketed image and the market supply. Such 'gaps' have also been emphasised by others. Therakelsen (2003, p. 135) e.g. stresses the importance of the often neglected supply-side factors, stating

that the creation of a destination image is "not only about the imagery universe and demand patterns of the consumer – the inherent resources of the place (e.g. climate, landscape, culture) as well as the strategic plans for tourism development in a given area [...] should also play a role". However, what 'role' this should generally play within the image and who is to determine it, remains vague. In the given case of Romania, Light (2007), for instance, concludes that developments have significantly been influenced by the 'role' played by the government within touristic marketing. Their action has remained relatively static in contrast to visitors' demands, moreover being a principal "actor in the cultural politics of tourism" (2007, p. 760).

The Influence of Literary Works and Popular Culture on the Destination Image and Its Potential Enhancement

Popular culture refers to 'new' media such as movies, films or photography, but also to literary works such as novels, appealing to the mass-market (Bolan & Williams, 2008). In past decades, destinations have increasingly drawn upon images originating from popular culture. Well-known examples for adaptations of literary works may be Tolkien's 'Lord of the Rings' in New Zealand or Jane Austen's 'Sense and Sensibility' in Southern England (Bolan & Williams, 2008; Kozak, Gnoth, & Andreu, 2010; Morgan, *et al.*, 2003). Concerning the role of destinations in such works, Butler (1986) distinguishes between four literary adaptations in the tourism context: (1) the homage, i.e. the destination is visited in connection with images held by the reader, (2) the actual representation of a destination specifically named, (3) the icon travel which triggers travel in the footsteps of a specific character, and (4) the creation of a destination through its evolution within the literature. Accordingly, visitation may originate in the reading of novels, the watching of movies or in both, taking a mutual supplementary affect (Banyai, 2010; Bolan & Williams, 2008). Destinations may thereby become the ultimate meeting point of fiction and reality, allowing tourists to enter reality within the 'surreal land' of literary fiction (Banyai, 2010, p. 9). As Busby and Klug (2001,

p. 320) declare, it is the “merging of the real and the imagined which gives literary places [and thereby also destinations] a special meaning”. What positive or negative effects such literary places and popular culture can take upon the image formation process is tried to be explored in the following.

In general, academics (cf. Bolan & Williams, 2008; Busby & Klug, 2001; Butler, 1990; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Morgan, *et al.*, 2003; Pratt, 2010) widely agree that popular culture (including literary works) takes a significant (overall positive) impact on the image formation process and thereby also on the travel decision-making of potential visitors. Popular culture is an external autonomous information source (e.g. Gartner, 1996; Pike, 2004) due to its ‘uncensored’ (i.e. not an image deliberately created/reinforced by marketers) nature. Consumers encounter such induced images less critical, yet granting those more ‘credibility’ than ‘conscious’ promotional materials (Bolan & Williams, 2008; Gartner, 1996; Kim & Richardson, 2003). Hence, popular culture holds also potential advantages for destination marketers such as savings in advertising, increasing tourism flows and ‘enriching’ (Banyai, 2010, p. 9) the existent destination’s image (Bolan & Williams, 2008; Kim & Richardson, 2003; Pratt, 2010). Benefits can furthermore be increased both by enhancing marketing activities before, during and after film or literature releases and by reinforcing pre-existent images of visitors on-site through specific activities or information offered relating to the fictional setting of the movie or the novel. To what extent popular culture takes an effect on the cognitive and affective stages of the image formation of potential visitors has been examined by Kim & Richardson (2003). Herein, they discovered that it is not necessarily a single character of a movie triggering perceptual changes of a place, but that it is rather a number of feelings (such as empathy, ‘the vicarious experience’, or familiarity) being evoked, thereby identifying the travelled destination as the fictional setting (cf. Govers, *et al.*, 2007). Although popular culture has increasingly been paid attention to by academics and practitioners alike, it has not yet

been fully understood why autonomous induced images actually have a strong impact on the overall formation process of individuals and to what degree personal factors may stimulate changes of a destination image (cf. Bolan & Williams, 2008; Kim & Richardson, 2003). Furthermore, it often remains unclear what importance is attached to popular culture origins, i.e. whether there is generally differentiated between ‘Western’ and ‘other’, or ‘modern’ and ‘ancient’ sources.

An Introduction to the Co-Creation of Experiences

The ‘experience’ concept has increasingly gained in importance within the tourism literature of recent years. Andersson (2007, p. 46) describes the experience as the meeting point of the “tourism consumer and the tourism production” wherein ‘co-creations’ of experiences are furthermore stimulated by the provided ‘servicescape’ (cf. Bitner, 1992). Generally, it is sought for a deeper meaning in experiences (Edvardsson, Enquist, & Johnston, 2005; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Wearing, Stevenson, & Young, 2010) which hold tangible (such as the price) as well as intangible (such as emotional) values. On the other hand, a service or service quality is dependent on the communicated unique nature of the experience (Edvardsson, *et al.*, 2005; Joseph, 2010). Pine and Gilmore (1998) interpret the experience by means of a two-dimensional model illustrating an active – passive consumer involvement and an immersion – absorption continuum, leading to the four ‘experience types’ of entertainment, education, esthetic and escape. The former deals with consumers shaping or being involved in an event more actively or passively whereas the latter describes consumers observing or immersing (as in a theme park for instance) into the event/experience. However, academics emphasize that experience, similar to the image, is a construct of the individual self who, in addition to the provider, co-creates and adds value to the servicescape encountered (cf. Andersson, 2007; Gyimothy & Mykletun, 2010; Mossberg, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Wearing, *et al.*, 2010).

Scholars stress the importance of aligning the provided servicescape(s) to the expected experiences of the consumer. In regards to this, Bitner (1992) describes the actual interaction stage of market surroundings and buyer (re)actions within a 'stimulus response model', herewith adding to Pine & Gilmore's (1998) concept. The model further exemplifies how physical environments can be consciously manipulated by underlying 'immersion factors', such as sounds or symbols, in order to intensify the consumer's involvement with the immediate surroundings. In addition to these rather functional devices, tour guides can also "facilitate immersion in an experiential context" (Mossberg, 2008, p. 201) through storytelling. Storytelling establishes a dialogue between a teller and a listener, thereby giving "voice [and meaning] to the experience" (Mossberg, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Wearing, *et al.*, 2010, p.48).

Additionally, narratives combining 'fact and fiction' (through e.g. themed exhibitions) within the setting can additionally help to connect reality with the potential imaginations/realities of the consumer (Mossberg, 2008). Generally, suppliers are in need to deliver a consistent servicescape (e.g. exhibited themes should comply with guides' stories) that appeals to senses and that creates memorable and positive coherent cues (such as storytelling and symbols) for consumers while 'experiencing'. Co-creations are then subject to simultaneous stimulation (Edvardsson, *et al.*, 2005; Gyimothy & Mykletun, 2010; Joseph, 2010; Mossberg, 2008; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Discussion

Bran Castle and its Image Influenced by Popular Culture

Bram Stoker's classic novel 'Dracula', set in the Romanian region of Transylvania has received great attention over many decades worldwide, particularly through various film adaptations and book releases. Somewhat described as an act of necessity, Bran Castle, then government-led, has become the 'embodiment' (Banyai, 2010, p. 14) and a landmark for Dracula's activities after the Fall of the Eastern Bloc, resulting in an increase of

tourist arrivals in search for the 'myth' (2010, p. 7). For ('Western') tourists, the Castle is both an homage to Stoker's novel and the vampire setting as well as to its main character, Dracula (cf. Banyai, 2010). Although the Dracula image has attracted many visitors since, the Romanian State has rather remained inactive in enforcing this image, merely tolerating it. However, the development of 'Dracula Tourism' (Hovi, 2008a, p. 78) has also triggered a discourse on the Dracula character and its origin. The historical figure Vlad has evolved who, likewise to his fictional counter-part, cannot be directly related to Bran Castle. Thus, today, the Castle is associated with three different characters evolving from the popular culture: with the 'Hollywood-style' Dracula, with Bram Stoker's 'original' Dracula, as well as with the 'historical Dracul' Vlad (Banyai, 2010; Bran Castle Museum, 2003; Hovi, 2008b; Muresan & Smith, 1998). It appears that all stakeholders (such as tourists, the vendors in the area, tour guides, the management or travel agencies) of Bran Castle are, at least, aware of the 'Hollywood-style' figure. The different characters ascribed to Dracula as well as the various stakeholders' reproductions of these images have led to a development gap between the imposed, the projected and the given image at Bran Castle and its surroundings, adding to a distortion or overlapping of images with the tourist and therefore also to a difficulty to clearly define a marketing strategy.

Bran Castle depicts an interesting example of popular culture's significant impact on a destination's image and its marketing, moreover so, when considering that Bram Stoker himself has never visited Romania and that his knowledge and the connection of his fictional Dracula and of Vlad are yet unknown (e.g. Bran Castle Museum, 2003; Hovi, 2008b). The associations made between the fictional Dracula and Bran Castle are accepted since these are recognized to generate tourism flows and income (cf. Pratt, 2010). Both the novel and the film applications have not only considerably stereotyped the Castle, but the whole Transylvanian region. However, it is noticeable that this has also prompted a return

to medieval Romanian cultural heritage in form of Vlad, a Romanian 'legend' who once defended the Valahian Principality against the Ottomans, and who was widely known for his cruel punishments (Banyai, 2010; Blain, *et al.*, 2005; Bran Castle Museum, 2003). Dracula is a contested image and it is herein that destination marketers' major challenge lays. Autonomous popular culture appears to foster the development of competing images.

Co-Creation of Consumers and Suppliers of the Dracula Myth

Bran Castle could easily be characterized as the place where fiction, myth and history meet reality. Banyai (2010) affirms this assumption in her study on ('Western') tourist blogs of post-visitors to the Castle and in interviews taken with tour guides on-site. From her analysis of web-blogs derived three major 'experience' tourist groups. The first group (1) predominantly seeks historical facts and the landscape surrounding the Castle. Banyai (2010) points out that this tourist type is foremost interested in the historical Dracula (Vlad), although acknowledging that the Castle has been 'only' proven a former home to aristocrats. Tourists within this dimension demonstrate little involvement in the Dracula myth, holding an objective, realistic perspective towards the Castle. The second group (2) seeks to experience the fictional Dracula, hence, the myth evolved from the popular culture. Although images of the Hollywood-Dracula, of Stoker's Dracula and that of Vampire myths seem to partly overlap, visitors do precisely 'envision' (Banyai, 2010, p. 13) 'their' Dracula by enactments or imitations of 'their' icons (the different imaginations of Dracula). They demonstrate strong empathy, 'vicariously experiencing' Dracula (Kim & Richardson, 2003). Hence, these tourists show high involvement in the myth, seeking 'real' substance within role-play and interpretations, thereby somewhat romanticizing the horror genre for themselves. By doing so, the intangible may become tangible for these visitors while still "stepping out [...] from social reality" (Wearing, *et al.*, 2010, p. 42). The "power of [their] constructed reality is likely to dominate any sense of objective reality" (Kim & Richardson, 2003; Morgan & Pritchard, 1998,

p. 219). This is even upheld after the actual visit, reinforcing their imagery construct by e.g. underlying videos taped with sounds and music referring to the Dracula myth. The high involvement is also partly enhanced by the interaction amongst tour group members themselves (cf. e.g. the Italian group in Banyai, 2010). The remaining tourist group (3), likewise to the preceding visitor type, seeks the experience referring to the fictional Dracula when visiting Bran Castle. However, this group is highly disappointed by the Castle's physical attributes and by the commodification of the Dracula myth. Some tourists within this dimension undergo a transformation from a disillusion to an acceptance stage where consumption, in the end, represents an 'all right' buy-off of the experience. Nevertheless, these visitors are, by far, less stimulated by the setting in comparison to the former group immersing into a 'hyperreality' (Bolan & Williams, 2008, p. 387), and rather remain within the borders of their 'pre-envisioned' construct (cf. Edvardsson, *et al.*, 2005).

Overall, although it is assumed that all tourist groups as identified by Banyai (2010) are aware of the fictional Dracula, they take different points of departure for visiting Bran Castle. Accordingly, all these types co-create the Dracula myth distinctively or not at all (like supposedly partially group 1). Hence, images prior to travel appear to take a major impact on the later involvement with the myth. In reference to the literature reviewed and to Pine & Gilmore's (1998) experience continuums, the realist type (1) highly values education (actively absorbing) and co-creates his own myth, not that of Dracula, but that of Bran Castle, due to high interaction with tour guides and additional information material. The idealist (2) seems to have created the strongest 'experiencescape', fitting into the escapist category (actively immersing). This tourist type holds not a 'human dialogue', but rather a tacit dialogue with the own pre-existent image immersing particularly with the smallest symbols, icons and signs provided at the Castle referring to movie or literature descriptions. The last visitor type (3) can be ascribed to the entertainment dimension (passively absorbing). This group of

visitors goes through a transformation while visiting, and then co-creates personal value of the experience by consuming memorabilia (cf. Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

However, it should also be noticed that tourist groups may also overlap and that it cannot be clearly distinguished between e.g. traveler types (such as independent or organized travel) or cultural backgrounds, except for generalising the tourist as the 'Western'.

Similar to the visitors of Bran Castle, tourism providers co-creations are also manifold. In her study, Banyai (2010) foremost focuses on tour guides leading tourists through Bran Castle. Generally, these show homogeneity not only in their opinion on what the Castle is to represent, but also on how this is conveyed to its visitors. Primarily, it is regarded as a centre and a symbol of Romanian history. Linkages made by tourists between Bran Castle and the fictional Dracula myth are merely recognized and clarified as externally imposed, neither representing 'truth' nor 'reality'. Bearing this in mind, tour guides try to 'balance history and myth' in order to comply with expectations held by those tourists interested in the heritage of Bran Castle and those inspired for a visit by popular culture (cf. Banyai, 2010). Hence, the presentation of only historical facts fosters the incongruence between the fictional Dracula and the legends/stories told about the historical ('true') Dracula, Vlad, and his potential, but not fact-proven, connection to the Castle and the area.

Besides the inside of Bran Castle, experiences of the myth are created in its surroundings. Wholesalers in Bran are described to sell a wide range of products referring to the myth, commodifying symbols and icons related to the fictional Dracula. Accommodation providers utilise signified markers such as 'Dracula' or 'Vampire' to evoke associations and to attract potential guests, being named 'Vampire Camping'. At last, it is also the tourism agencies, assumingly, primarily promoting the image evolved through popular culture to customers. The actual holiday/tour booking could be a critical point of reinforcing expectations projected by potential visitors onto

Bran Castle. The co-creation of the fictional Dracula myth experience from a supplier perspective takes predominantly place outside of the actual 'experience room' of Bran Castle. This seems not only to partly confuse the visitor, but foremost also the tour guides themselves, being caught up between the produced images. With the local guides shaping the major (human) interaction platform, this distortion could also be critical for the co-creation of experience amongst tourists.

The 'Experience Gap'

Whilst delineating tourist segments and tourist providers' co-creations to the overall experience of the Dracula myth, a number of critical issues arose. Foremost, this concerns the partial friction between the given experience room and the tourist's anticipated experience as well as the incoherence of servicescapes created within and outside of Bran Castle by a variety of tourism providers. As pointed out by the interviewed tour guides, visitors predominantly seek the (fictional) Dracula experience and find Bran Castle. The Castle does, in fact, offer a 'narrative space' (Hovi, 2008a, p. 80), but this seems to diverge from the expectations of the majority of visitors (primarily of tourist group 2 and 3). Exhibited artifacts neither refer to the fictional nor to the historical Dracula and, accordingly, there are no memorabilia provided referring to these characters (cf. Banyai, 2010; Muresan & Smith, 1998). Bran Castle physically dissociates itself from the fictional image by presenting artifacts (arts and furniture) symbolising the Medieval times of the Castle, therefore not encouraging any emotions with the consumer (e.g. "It's not a least bit spooky", Banyai, 2010, 12). Recently visiting the website does, however, impart a mix of stories, including also the fictional and the historical Dracula. Unfortunately, the time of release of this information on the homepage remains vague (Bran Castle Museum, 2003).

Tour guides clearly distance themselves verbally from the fictional character. On the one hand, this is done more indirectly by underscoring the distinction between them as 'knowledgeable' guides and 'they' as the 'Western' tourists stigmatised by popular culture. Nevertheless, guides are "trying to

satisfy tourists' curiosity and demands for vampiristic myths with historical facts and [storytelling of] local legends [foremost of Vlad]" (Banyai, 2010, p. 19). Whether this could have been predominantly enforced by the earlier management (before May 2009) persistently suppressing the fictional associations made, is not explicitly identifiable. On the other hand, it remains questionable whether 'local legend' stories can truly satisfy tourist expectations. In reference to e.g. the escape (2) or (transformed) entertainment (3) seeker, storytelling then somewhat turns from a dialogue into a monologue. Detached storytelling and referencing to the 'other' may add to the confusion what the experience at Bran Castle actually is supposed to be or just is.

However, the guides vehemently defend their image of what Bran Castle, the region, or even Romania should epitomise to tourists, i.e. Medieval and pompous heritage, but also a succinct and defining history standing in contrast to fictional vampire figures. They do slightly differentiate between those visitors interested in the history of the Castle and those interested in the myth. Yet, since all destination consumers are aware of the fictional Dracula as characterised in popular culture, they remain, in the end, the 'Western tourist' (Banyai, 2010; Bolan & Williams, 2008). By articulating that 'they believe' and 'they expect' (Banyai, 2010, p. 16), tour guides consciously underline their distance. They indirectly somehow claim 'reality' of the Castle and its history and define 'a tolerance limit' for others, justifying this with their 'moral obligation' to preserve the historical 'truth' (Banyai, 2010, p. 17). In turn, isn't this also an imposition of own beliefs and expectations? Within the discourse of the Dracula myth, they seem to somewhat seek for their own identity by referring to their cultural heritage (cf. Banyai, 2010; Muresan & Smith, 1998) and by challenging the powers of the "binary oppositions" (Wearing, *et al.*, 2010, p. 122) at the same time. In a broader sense, this is not necessarily only a struggle of personal identity, but that of Romania (with Bran Castle managed by the government until May 2009). Since the opening of the country and the Eastern bloc, a form of Occidentalism,

or more specifically in reference to Romania that of 'Balkanism' (cf. Light, 2007, p. 479), has evolved in which the South-Eastern 'periphery' is in search for a 'new' identity lying somewhere between the European Union and post-communism. For successful integration, the 'Otherness', i.e. neither the myth and mystery implied by Dracula, nor the evoked associations drawn between Vlad as the (socialistic) hero and that of the bloodthirsty Dracula, are overtly desired (Hovi, 2008a; Light, 2007).

However, the interviewed tour guides (cf. Banyai, 2010) also make some indications for possibilities that come along with the increase of tourism arrivals. On the one hand, this explicitly refers to economic benefits and to the change in ownership of the Castle, potentially leading to further investments and to better adaptations to visitors' demands (whether it is related to demands of enforcing the fictional Dracula myth or other is not known) (Banyai, 2010; Hovi, 2008b). On the other hand, the confrontation with the 'Other' (cultures and images) leads to a partial reconciliation of the own heritage. This has also been shown within the (although abandoned) Dracula theme park project (cf. Banyai, 2010; Hovi, 2008b; Light, 2007). Thus, it should not necessarily be concluded that tour guides "try to eliminate the fictional vampire image associated with the destination" (Banyai, 2010, p. 19), but rather that tour guides themselves may be captured between two worlds, not as tourists between fiction and fact, but as individuals between a heritage and a modern identity. The incoherence of experience offers of the (formerly) government-led Bran Castle and of other private tourism stakeholders then overall seems to represent 'Romania's distorted self-image' (Light, 2007, p. 746).

Overall, wholesalers and accommodation of the fictional Dracula providers though willingly serve the image of the fictional (assumably likewise that of the historical). Although this is to some extent also critically regarded (particularly by the tourist group 3), the commodification as well as signs (in form of hotel names) of the myth at least appear to be

an acceptable 'clutch at straws'. Experiences pre-offered by tourist agencies considerable fuelling expectations held by tourists of the fictional Dracula, though, contribute to the imposition of images onto Bran Castle.

Conclusion

Implications for Future Development of Bran Castle and the Area

So far, time and space of the Dracula myth rather accidentally coincided with the general background of Bran Castle. The fictional and also the historical Dracula though grant the Castle as well as the area a major competitive advantage, or as Banyai (2010, p. 7) puts it, "Transylvania as a destination does not lack fame". Such 'fame' could and should be developed upon in the future. Therefore, Bran Castle should seek and reinforce the discourse of the fictional and the historical Dracula which could be done by introducing three well-defined themed exhibitions separating the three stories, of Vlad, of the fictional Dracula deriving from popular culture as well as of the Castle's own heritage and Queen Mary. Bran Castle should not merely be the physical setting, but could actually be a centre not only of one stereotyped image, but that of a number of images, holding "material and symbolic dimensions" (Wearing, *et al.*, 2010, p. 111). This could be another form of creating positive cues in reference to experiencing Bran Castle as a holistic rather than a simplistic 'mysterious' place. Being able to control such cues, it could also be an advantage to only appoint local tour guides leading tourist groups through the Castle. Furthermore, to enhance the dialogue between the images held by tourists as well as by local tour guides and tourist stakeholders, regular lectures could be given focusing on either one of the Dracula characters, on the heritage of the Castle or even on a mix of these. Interaction and engagement with the 'Other', be it between hosts and guests or between Dracula and the heritage should be facilitated, potentially leading to unknown *Erfahrungen* than to mere *Erlebnissen*. Thereby, this is not only to align to pre-set images, but for tourists as well as for the employees of Bran Castle, to build up on them.

In summary, in contrast to many rural areas 'earmarked by stereotyped countryside images' (rf. Gyimothy & Mykletun, 2010), Bran Castle as well as the area (mainly Transylvania) should take the opportunity to capitalize economically, but also culturally, on the Dracula myth. Bran Castle should not merely be regarded as a place holding a distortion of images, but as a platform of a 'multiplicity' of such (Wearing, *et al.*, 2010, p. 115). Subliminally, these notions are already implied by tour guides, stating that "the truth does not have to be hidden, and the thirst for the sensational should not be rejected" (Banyai, 2010, p. 17). It is that the *Erfahrung* itself, whether that of compliance with the own image or that of a modified one, becomes the co-creation of the overall *Erlebnis*. Hence, in a phase of potential rejuvenation of the destination, the greatest challenges may be the fostering of a mutual understanding of images held by tourists and by tourism stakeholders. Eventually, "Dracula tourism does not have to be real to feel real" (Hovi, 2008b, p. 84).

The Study

This study has attempted to re-analyze existent visitor and tour guide records as provided by Banyai (2010) who examined the destination image held by visitors of Bran Castle and tour guides' responses to these. Banyai's (2010) study provided an important basis for the background of this paper which drew upon similar theoretical frameworks as well as upon her qualitative data. Outcomes illustrate that, by using a slightly different approach as well as by offering perspectives from a second author, existing data sets hold a richness of interpretation possibilities.

Yet, this study also tried to provide a more elaborative framework for the influence of popular culture on images and for the co-creation of experiences. It is argued that it may not necessarily be the variety of authenticities, but the variety of co-creations that prevail at the study setting, since the ultimate truth (in opposition to the 'real') is the 'sincere and present' history of the Castle. It is not fully known, if Banyai (2010,20) describes this as the 'modern view of authenticity'. Furthermore, the analysis showed that it may not be the

image gap between visitors' images and guides (and the Castles') interpretations that are of major concern, since understanding and acceptance are being re-negotiated intrinsically or among these stakeholders. It may rather be the inconsistency of servicescapes presented between the Castle and its surroundings which is critical.

Future Research

Accordingly, future research should seek to examine the images of Bran Castle held by the surrounding stakeholders (such as accommodation providers or souvenir shops). Additionally, further studies could include interviews as well as observations conducted with visitors on-site (instead of online blogs produced afterwards) to reconfirm, refute or extend upon present findings. In order to find out more about the single visitor types as described by Banyai (2010) and herein, focus groups could be established to examine motivations and satisfaction levels more in detail.

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