Marketing Heritage Tourism Destinations: A Rejoinder

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Since the creation of the fictional character in the 19th century, Dracula has constantly inspired popular culture, influencing the desire and adoption of Dracula tourism. Yet, few studies have focused on the impact of fictional Dracula on tourists' expectations and demands, and how these have shaped Romanian tourism providers. The original article "*Dracula's image in tourism: Western bloggers versus tour guides*" was the first study to examine tourists' impressions and perceptions of Dracula as a tourism experience, and to explore and bring forward the Bran Castle tour guides' experiences with visiting tourists.

Huebner, in her article "*Who came first – Dracula or the Tourist? New Perspectives on Dracula Tourism at Bran Castle*" complemented the original article in her theoretical discussion of the impacts of popular culture on the images held about a destination, and the co-creation of experiences. As Britton (1991) argued, tourism experiences are produced by various production systems represented by the economic activities gathered to produce and

sell tourism products; the social groups, cultural features, and physical elements which are incorporated into travel and tourism products as attractions; and the agencies responsible for regulating the commercial behaviour of social externalities associated with such productions. Huebner (2011), in her discussion of the co-creation of experiences, is conscious of the multidimensionality of tourism experiences, noting righteously that these production systems need to be consistent in their promotion of the tourism products in order to create 'memorable and positive coherent cues' for visiting tourists. However, contrary to this theoretical marketing tactic, the stakeholders involved in promoting and selling Dracula as a tourism product are not consistent in their efforts. This is largely due to the duality of Dracula's image, one as a fictional vampire, the other as a national hero.

Nevertheless, it is the practical value of Huebner's paper which is of interest to me. The disparities between the various marketing strategies involving Dracula tourism have been previously studied, and similar frameworks have been proposed (e.g.

Muresan & Smith, 1998; Cosma, Pop & Negrusa, 2007). While the amalgamation of fictional and historical elements to create tourism destinations has proven successful in few instances (e.g. King Arthur's Tintagel Castle in Cornwall, England; Anne of Green Gables' attractions in Cavendish, Prince Edward Island, Canada), these characters and tourism attractions are not viewed as demeaning in that they do not negatively affect the reputation of a valued historical figure or the national heritage of a country. Let's take a very similar example, King Arthur and Tintagel Castle.

A similar, yet different case – King Arthur

King Arthur's image was founded upon historical and factual manuscripts (e.g. *Historia Brittonum*), combined with literary works such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae (History of the Kings of Britain)* written in 1138 (Reno, 1996), poems (e.g. *Sword in the Stone* by Robert de Boron), and films (e.g. *Excalibur*, 1981; *King Arthur*, 2004). Today, the Arthurian tradition, likewise Draculian culture, is fascinating due to the fact that it encompasses a wide range of literary forms from early heroic poems and tales to recent developments of science fiction and screenplays (Thompson, 1990).

The similarities between Arthurian and Draculian tourism are further strengthened by the promotion of Tintagel Castle as the birth place and residence of King Arthur. Most historians doubt the fact that this castle is actually the birth place of King Arthur: "archaeology has failed, in a popular sense, to confirm a connection between Tintagel and Arthur. It has succeeded in revealing a royal Dark Age context, if not of King Arthur then of "King Someone" (Robb, 1998: 592). However, due to tourists' demand, Tintagel castle has become a successful tourism attraction and destination:

Certainly it is Tintagel castle's longstanding association as the birthplace of King Arthur that inspired the development of the whole area as a tourist destination and a site of esoteric pilgrimage. Now, Tintagel, both the village and the castle itself, is a fascinating mix of symbols and images.

The drama of the castle perched on the headland seems to contrast with the tourist kitsch that threatens to overwhelm the village" (Hale, 2003:208).

The representation of the historical and mythical King Arthur is mixed in Tintagel, offering tourists the opportunity to experience both historical facts and also immerse themselves into a world of fantasy. Tourists can spend the night in King Arthur's Castle Hotel; go to Excali-bar, or "visit shops, museums, restaurants and hotels, at least half which bear the names such as Merlin's cave, Excalibur Restaurant and Tea Room, King Arthur Bookshop, King Arthur's Arms..." (Sklar, and Hoffman, 2002: 37). Thus, the similarities between Dracula and King Arthur, and Bran and Tintagel Castles are clear. The duality of both characters as historical heroes and literary characters has created two similar yet different tourism destinations – Bran and Tintagel Castle.

The combination of literary and historical facts, a framework proposed by Huebner, has worked in the case of King Arthur due to the common story uniting the historical with fictional: a medieval warrior. However, in the case of Count Dracula and Vlad Tepes, there is a complete disconnect between the national hero and the blood-sucking vampire. The gap between the two different characters has created inconsistencies in the marketing efforts of various stakeholders involved in Dracula tourism.

Debating Dracula

Huebner noted that in general, researchers have found that popular culture has a positive impact on the image formation process due to its advantages on marketing and the higher perceived credibility of consumers as compared to traditional promotional materials. This is true in the case of Arthurian tourism as discussed above. Although in Dracula tourism, the impact of popular culture is undeniable and recognized to have positive benefits on the inflow of tourists to Bran and Bran Castle, the perceived negative impacts of Dracula tourism on national heritage linger in the minds of many stakeholders and tourism researchers. Even though in 2002 the

Romanian Ministry of Tourism declared that since Dracula is so popular in the West, "it would be a shame for his own country to miss out on his international fame" (Tanasescu, 2006:164), Romanians were fervent against the promotion of Count Dracula considering it a "bad image" for Romania, attracting undesirable vampire cults (Chelminski, 2003:3). Tanasescu (2006) further argued that even the Orthodox Church opposed the government in their betrayal of a national hero, a fact reinforced by a former Culture minister who believes that promoting a "Western symbol of the Devil in a country that is 87% Orthodox and almost entirely Christian" was an "idiotic" idea (2006: 166). Moreover, international organizations such as Prince Charles' Mihai Eminescu Trust and UNESCO World Heritage Center, Greenpeace and European Parliament, stated that the amusement park, and thus a capitalization on Dracula myth, would be a complete embarrassment for Romania, affecting its international image (Light, 2007; Tanasescu, 2006). To summarize the pros and cons of Dracula-based tourism, Cosma, Pop and Negrusa (2007) compiled a list of arguments in favour and against Dracula brand:

- a. *In favour* – use of Dracula books for literary tourism; use of already established Dracula locations; the fame of Dracula brand; low promotional costs due to international fame
- b. *Against* – the rejection and negative perceptions of Romanians toward Dracula; the problem of the copyright on Dracula name; lack of communication of ideas between various stakeholders; lack of vision, strategy and funds of Romanian authorities.

Thus, the dilemma remains: how to bridge the promotional gap between the various stakeholders involved in Dracula tourism? Huebner argued that the dichotomy of Bran Castle is due to a "struggle of personal identity", however, I would rather see it as struggle between the Western popular culture and Romanian heritage. Given that Bran Castle has been named "Dracula Castle" by the Ministry of Tourism, it has persuaded

visitors and tourism operators to interpret and market the attraction as a literary/fictional tourism site; however, the historical exhibitions at Bran Castle contradict its famous name, promoting the attraction as a heritage site.

Concluding thoughts

Sensitive historical sites become an emotional task combining the expectations and prior knowledge of various visitors with the relationships between the stakeholders who have an invested interest in the site (Austin, 2002). Due to their interest in the site, these stakeholders are "thus enabled to psychologically lay a claim to the site by virtue of the site's symbolism" (Austin, 2002: 454), influencing the packaging of the historical site. However, the primary mission of heritage tourism is of "carrying for the property and maintaining it in as pristine a state as possible, with issues such as financial solvency and public access entering into the decision-making process only as secondary considerations" (Garrod and Fyall, 2000: 684). Thus, the management of Bran Castle should primarily focus on the history of the castle. However, because the historical and literary Dracula cannot be ignored due to popular culture, an exhibition addressing the two should not be excluded. A room at the end of the castle presenting the history of both characters, the fictional and real Dracula, would be a good management and marketing strategy which would satisfy the needs of Dracula seekers, respect the historical heritage of the castle, while at the same time supporting the endeavours of local merchants into Dracula related businesses. To conclude, unlike Huebner's proposed framework for managing Bran Castle and marketing Dracula, this rejoinder argues that "rather than the portrayal of often a confusing mixture of entertainment and education, marketing activities should enable the packaging of the site such that varying levels of opportunities for learning...about the historical essence of the site remains the primary and dominant motivation for visitation" (Austin, 2002: 455).

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