

The Three-dimensional Model for Operationalization and Measurement of the Destination Image in Case of Transylvania. A Theoretical Approach Based on Tourism Resources

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ABSTRACT: As conceptual frameworks for this paper, we specify the tourist destination literature, tourist image, and cultural tourism. We are talking about Transylvania as an ex-province of Romania and a current geographical and historical region which encompasses maximum 10 counties: Alba, Bistrița, Braşov, Cluj, Covasna, Mureş, Harghita, Hunedoara, Sălaj, Sibiu. Because of the multitude and the variety of tourism resources, complementarity the most specific attribute for the tourist attractiveness of this multicultural region. The predominance of Transylvania's tourist resources is composed of the anthropic ones, which bear the mark of the 3 great cohabitant ethnic groups: the Romanians, the Hungarians and the Germans. The natural tourism resources assure the background for the anthropic ones. Regarding the research methodology used in this study, we mention the documentation consisting in studying specialized tourism bibliography – various studies and articles on tourist destination image –, and romanian geographical literature. Another kind of documentation consisted in studying the manner of presenting and describing the natural and anthropic resources in guides and promotional materials about Transylvania as the most attractive Romania's destination. For this paper we also did the prospection of Transylvania's most important, famous and valuable tourism resources, both natural and anthropic. Finally, we chose the three-dimensional model imagined and proposed by Echtner and Ritchie – one of the most well-known conceptual models in this field – for applying it as an efficient instrument in operationalizing and measurement of Transylvania's image as a tourist destination.

KEY WORDS: Transylvania, destination image, anthropic tourism resources, natural tourism resources.

1. Introduction

This paper, headed as mentioned above, establishes itself through its fundamental function as a component of the geographical framework and tourist research background for the PhD thesis entitled *The Tourist Image of Transylvania*.

Within this large scientific study, this work falls within the inventory phase of tourism resources and analyzing their conjugate role in the highly complex equation of Transylvania's tourist image.

The premises and the assumptions we have started out from in establishing the decisive role of tourism resources have in sketching a personalised image of Transylvania are the following:

- *Complementarity* – the majority of Transylvanian tourism resources is represented by those of anthropic origin, which bear the personal mark of the three great coinhabiting ethnicities: Romanians, Hungarians and Germans. Not in the least inferior, the natural tourism resources confer a legitimate and natural background to the former.

- When you say Transylvania, you say *multiculturalism*, this organic attribute which is so specific to the region under scrutiny exhibiting itself in the guise of admirably complex and varied mosaicking landscapes.

- Given the virtually unchanged perpetual state of affairs of the Transylvanian landscape ensemble, one should not be surprised by the perennial character of the mythical/legendary aura which has been accompanying this land for over one hundred years in the dissemination of its fame, which has led to this macabre halo being deeply rooted in the international collective mind-set with the strength of the archetype/stereotype.

- Grafted and embroidered upon such a combination of varied, yet harmoniously intertwined tourism resources, the notion of *Transylvanian tourism-oriented imagery* appears as what is likely the most complex dimension of the perception of this space. The panoply of elements of attractiveness demand the formation of a faithful, simple, dense and responsible tourist-oriented image imperatively, an image which should take into account the vastness of attractive resources it needs to engulf, to synthesise them by representing and identifying with each and every one of them and which should feel a different type of multiplying effect on behalf of tourism, that of the limitless potential of "capabilities" of perception. Perception, as a fundamental, unique and complex means of sensory knowledge and, simultaneously, a means of propagating impressions, cannot be anything but profoundly subjective.

- Furthermore, the tourism-oriented image of Transylvania needs to be planned and based on the triad *desired image – natively experienced image – perceived image* (Lefebvre, H., 1991), out of which only the last distinguishes itself as imagery understood in the sense of tourist perception, of reflection upon the collective mind-set of those who do not live there. That very triad, as a unitary ensemble, considerably complicates the attempts at investigating and operationalizing a concept that is already "hard", qualitative by its own definition and thus multidimensional – ***the image***.

2. Territorial framing

The privileged localization of Transylvania in the center of Romania's national territory – rightly called "the Heart of the Country" – taking advantage of the presence of Carpathians all-around its territory, thanks to what in the Romanian geographical literature is called "the Carpathian Ring", or "the Carpathian Arch". Transylvania is also figuratively called „The Citadel of Mountains" (Vâlsan, G., 1940), being well-known the decisive role held by Carpathians in its whole history. We consider the aforementioned argument entitle us to call and define Transylvania as a „mountain macroregion".

2.1. Defining Transylvania spatially

The first variant of the regionym *Transylvania* refers to the macroregion which, during the Middle Ages, was branded as „The Voivodeship of Transylvania” or „The Transylvanian Voivodeship” (etymologically speaking, „the land across the forests”), its surface adding up to approximately 57,000 km². Closely related to this opinion is the view that the term *Transylvania* can also convey a narrower meaning, pertaining strictly to the area flanked by the Carpathians (ie the similarly named Transylvanian Plateau), thus delimited by the Eastern Carpathians („Orientali”), the Southern ones („Meridionali”) and the Western ones („Apuseni”).

The second variant of the term is a more widely encompassing one, also including, at a much greater extent, Crişana, Sătmar, and Maramureş, i.e., the „Western Lands”, or „Partium”, which were added to the historical inner Carpathian nucleus after mid 15th century, together forming the Principality of Transylvania.



Figure 1 The Transylvania’s delimitation used for practical and applied purposes (Source: Adaptation after <http://romanian-tourism.blogspot.ro/>).

Sometimes the name “Transylvania” is postulated with an even wider meaning, being equated with those parts of Romania west of the Eastern Carpathians and north of the Southern Carpathians, thus including Banat as well.

2.2. Administrative organisation

As stated above (Figure 1), it has been agreed, conforming to most points of view, that Transylvania includes 10 counties (Alba, Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Brașov, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita, Hunedoara, Mureș, and Sălaj).

The 10 counties are further divided into 682 local administrative units, with an overall population of 4,300,000 inhabitants. Out of the 76 urban settlements, 23 are cities.

The unofficial, yet unquestioned capital of Transylvania is Cluj-Napoca, its main economic, cultural/artistic and academic centre. Moreover, Cluj-Napoca is also the historical capital of the region.

3. Transylvania's tourism resources: An overview

Transylvania, as a geographical/historical region which manifests itself as a central territorial unit strongly individualised at a national level, was richly endowed by nature with considerable and varied natural resources harmoniously conjugated with the equally considerable anthropic resources.

Proceeding to carry out a small exercise of classification of tourism imagery, with a systemic and didactic purpose, we can consider the overall image of the region as an "umbrella", under the span of which there is a puzzle made up of a variety of lesser images ("sub-images") of the various tangible and intangible components, relevant from the point of view of tourism, each with its own identity, contributing to the formation of the emblematic and prominent image of the area under research, but also benefitting highly from the fame and the promotion brought about by the greater visibility of the former.

The ensemble of tourism resources of this area shows an exceptional variety and complementarity, endowing Transylvania with the privileged status of a complex, yet unitary tourist region, conferred with an indisputable individuality concerning imagery and representation, profoundly inoculated in the collective conscience of tourists.

The objective established for this section is that of offering a brief overview image of the tourism resources of this geographical/historical region.

3.1. The natural tourism resources

The resources of this typology are associated with the natural tourism potential, including the natural frame and all the components belonging to it, in a territory. The natural frame assembly, including elements circumscribed by it, is attracting a segment of real or potential tourists (Ciangă, N., 2007).

As a short overview, we shall enumerate the most significant categories of natural resources in Transylvania. We can thus identify the following natural *tourism resources*:

a) landscape with a scenic value: *glacial or volcanic landscapes, landscapes based on limestone or conglomerates, Carpathian valleys, salt karst;*

b) climatic and bioclimatic resources: *bioclimatic indices, aeroionisation as a physiotherapy factor, climatotherapy, the biological effect of climate, bioclimate;*

c) hydrogeographical resources: *hydrochemical types (carbonated water, salty or chlorosodic water, alkaline water, alkaline earth water, iodinated water, thermomineral water, hydromineral ores), peloids, surface waters, the hydrographical network;*

d) biogeographical resources: *phytogeographical (vegetation) and zoogeographical (fauna, including game and fishes).*

3.2. The anthropic tourism resources

The anthropic heritage tourism function is complementary to that of the natural heritage or derived from this, and it may become dominant in order of capitalization, with multiple beneficial effects for transylvanian communities and environment. As a defining identity attribute, which

marks the studied area, multiculturalism is highly visible in the multiple cultural and ethnographic interferences.

The most noteworthy anthropic tourism resources are the **cultural/historical resources**¹, of which we briefly mention further.

In the following, we proceed to an stage enumeration, according to the diachronic (historical and chronological) criterion, which refers to the historical periods during which occurred the touristly important resources in the Transylvanian landscape.

The touristly attractive Transylvania's anthropic resources have features and specific meanings according to this geographical location. Therefore, the resources serving as tourist attractions from this geospace meet various specificities that define and share them depending on the historical periods and consisting in their belonging to a period of time or another.

a) Archaeological vestiges pertaining to prehistory and the Dacian and Roman civilisations:

- *Traces of prehistoric habitation;*
- *Traces of the geto-dacian civilization;*
- *Vestiges belonging to roman culture and civilization.*

b) Mediaeval historical/cultural sights:

• *Medieval fortified citadels: the peasant citadels, fortified castles, „vauban” citadels, palaces, aristocratic residences is the haunting castles;*

• *Religious sights: gothic churches and cathedrals, monasteries, hermitages, pilgrimige centres, wooden churches (wooden gothic in Transylvania), orthodox and catholic cathedrals, fortified churches (Kirchenbürgen), jewish synagogues;*

- *Urban architectonic complexes*

c) Cultural sights with tourism functions:

• *Museums and colections: art museums, history and archaeology museums, ethnographic museums, the history of pharmacy colection, science museums (zoological museums, mineralogy museums), botanic gardens, zoological gardens, memorial houses, libraries, historical monuments, parks, universities.*

d) Economic sights dating from the modern and contemporary age, with tourism functions: *hydrotechnical complexes (dam–artificial lake–hydrocentral), viaducts.*

e) Resources belonging to traditional rural culture and civilisation: *mental spaces (lands), traditional households (especially wooden gates), traditional activities (traditional ceramics manufacturing, wood manufacturing – Carpathians wood civilization), sheep breeding, traditional transhumant sheperding, traditional techniques, textile fibres manufacturing, glass painting, traditional gastronomy, traditional festivals and fairs, transylvanian ethnographic areas – The Authentic Transylvanian Village as quintessence of the multicultural culture and civilisation of this geographical and historical region.*

¹These are included in the cultural/historic patrimony with a tourist value foreseen by the specialised legislation, law 41/1995 (in force since September 30 1995), issued by Romanian Parliment for the approval of Government Ordinance no. 68/August261994 on the Protection of National Cultural Patrimony, which establishes the following categories: archaeological monuments and sites; architectural monuments and ensembles; reservations of architecture and urbanism; memorial buildings, monuments and ensembles; monuments of fine art and commemorative monuments; technical monuments; historic places, parks and gardens.

4. Methodology

The increasingly important role of destination image, both in terms of understanding travel behaviour and in designing efficient tourism marketing strategies, requires the necessity to develop methodologies to comprehensively and accurately measure this concept. To accomplish this task, tourism researchers have the benefit of accessing the methodologies which have been developed to measure product image in general. However, because of the more complicated and diverse nature of the tourism product, it may be necessary to develop more specific and more complex conceptual frameworks and methodologies in order to reliably and validly measure destination image (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003).

The literature is limited for the most part to empirical studies in tourism with reference to destination image. Significant study of image has also been undertaken in several other disciplines, except tourism, for example, psychology, marketing and geography.

Because of the large amount of definition of the destination image, given by various authors, most of them incomplete, attribute-based, we do not select any of them and do not cite none of the authors. Instead of a definition, we use the model elaborated by Gunn (1988) to comprehensify the concept. The aforementioned author proposes seven phases of the travel experience:

1. Accumulation of mental images about vacation experiences
2. Modification of those images by further information
3. Decision to take a vacation trip
4. Travel to the destination
5. Participation at the destination
6. Return home
7. Modification of images based on the vacation experience.

Using this model, three states of destination image formation can be identified at Phases 1, 2 and 7. In Phases 1 and 2, destination images are formed based upon secondary sources of information, whereas in Phase 7, actual first hand experience is used to modify the destination's image. Gunn labels the destination image formed in Phase 1 an *organic image*, because the image is based primarily upon information assimilated from non-touristic, non-commercial sources, such as the general media (news reports, magazines, books, movies), education (school courses) and the opinions of family/friends. It is only in Phase 2 that more commercial sources of information, such as travel brochures, travel agents and travel guidebooks, are used. As a result of accessing these additional sources of information, the organic image (Phase 1) may be altered. This modified image, which occurs in Phase 2, is labelled an induced image. In the final phase of destination image formation, Phase 7, actual experience is used to modify the destination's image, and according to the research, as a result of visiting the destination, the tendency of the images is to become more *realistic, complex, fragmented, and differentiated*.

Pearce (1988, p. 163) points out the strong visual component, or imagery, inherent in destination image – *image* “[...] implies a search of the long term memory for scenes and symbols, panoramas and people”. He points out that the term *image* is often used to describe an overall mental picture – a destination stereotype. Therefore, while each individual can have at some extent unique mental picture of a destination, there also exists a publicly held common mental picture of that destination, or stereotype – this statement is very valuable in the case of Transylvania.

Imagery, or holistic conceptualizations, is a very important related concept for the destination image, close related to it due to its role in describing the image. It has been defined by psychologists as a distinct way of processing and storing multisensory information in working memory. In essence, “imagery processing” depends upon more holistic (gestalt) methods of representing information. This is often described as mental picturing, though sight is not the only sensory dimension that can be included in to imagery processing. Imagery can incorporate any or all of the senses - smell, taste, sight, sound and touch. This is contrasted with “discursive processing” which is characterised by pieces of information on individual features or attributes of the stimuli rather than more holistic impressions (MacInnis and Price, 1987).

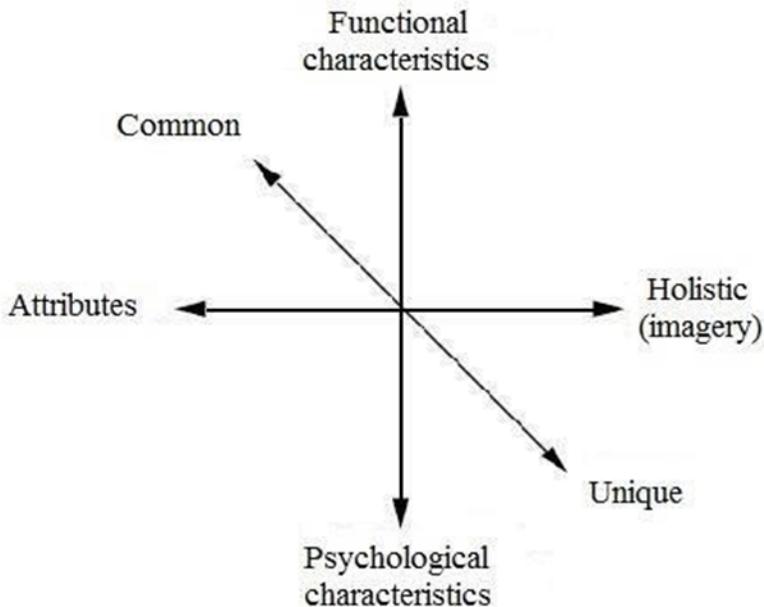


Figure 2 The components of destination image² (Source: Echtner and Ritchie, 2003).

According to Echtner and Ritchie, the destination image could be considered in terms of both an attribute-based component and a holistic component. Some images of tourist destinations could be based upon directly observable or measurable characteristics (scenery, attractions), while others could be based on more abstract, intangible characteristics (atmosphere, safety). Therefore, both notions, *functional* and *psychological characteristics* could be applied to destination images, for a better conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement of this complex construct.

The three-dimensional model imagined and proposed by Echtner and Ritchie is depicted in Figure 2. The common versus unique dimension identifies if image aspects are unique for the specific destination, or shared by others as well.

Explanatory for the model's name is it's requirement to be three-dimensionally envisioned and interpreted. As the authors indicated in Figure 2, images of destinations can range from attributes, or punctual characteristics, to holistic mental pictures (imagery), and from those based on “common” functional and psychological traits to those based on more “unique” features,

² This figure should be envisaged in three dimensions

events, feelings, auras. Thus, on one extreme of the continuum, the image of a destination can be composed of the impressions of a core group of traits on which all destinations are commonly rated and compared. For example, a destination's image can include ratings on certain common functional characteristics, such as price levels, transportation infra-structure, types of accommodation, climate, etc. The destination can also be rated on very commonly considered psychological characteristics: level of friendliness, safety, quality of service expected, fame, etc. (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003). On the other end of the continuum, images of destinations can include unique features and events (functional characteristics) or auras (psychological characteristics).

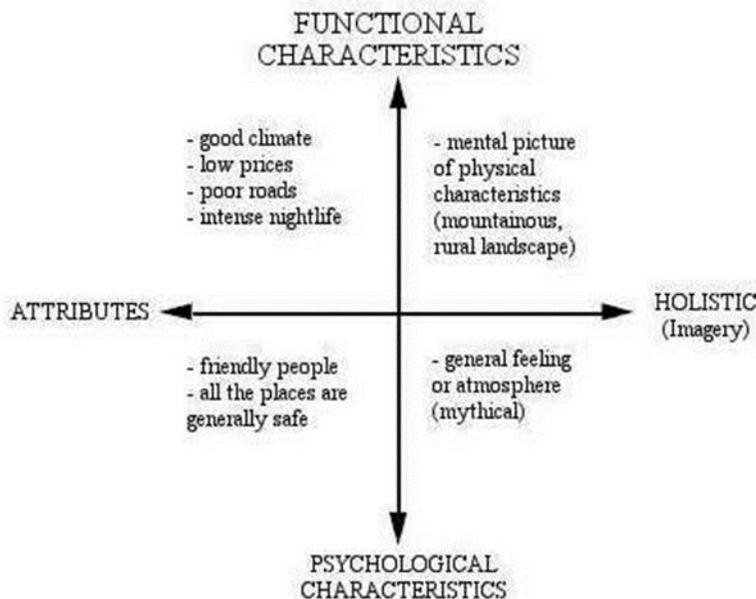


Figure 3 An exemple of applying the three-dimensional model of measuring the destination image in case of Transylvania (Source: Adaptation after Echtner and Ritchie, 2003).

The model presented above could be used as a foundation, or a framework, for conceptualizing any destination image. Figure 3 presents this conceptualization using the geographical and historical region of Transylvania as an example. In this scenario, the image of Transylvania as a travel destination is not only based on the perceptions and ratings of various functional and psychological attributes but also on the more holistic mental pictures, or imagery, evoked.

According to the three-dimensional model structure, a complete operationalisation of Transylvania's destination image involves measuring both attributes and holistic impressions. Each of these components should be measured in terms of functional and psychological characteristics. Moreover, in the process of measuring destination image, consideration should be given not only to obtaining information on traits common to all destinations but also to capturing those unique features or auras which distinguish Transylvania as a particular destination.

For Transylvania, examples of truly unique features are easy to provide, according to the variety and multitude of tourist resources, both natural and anthropic, in the context of an existing worldwide public perception, or holistic mental picture, mostly stereotypical, which almost exclusively assigns a mythical aura to this tourist destination. A good exemple might be *the rural transylvanian landscape*, very divers and complex, based on resources belonging to traditional

rural culture and civilisation of the authentic transylvanian village: *mental spaces (lands), traditional households (wooden gates), traditional activities (traditional ceramics manufacturing, wood manufacturing), sheep breeding, traditional transhumant sheperding, traditional techniques, textile fibres manufacturing and traditional clothing, glass painting, traditional gastronomy, festivals and fairs, transylvanian ethnographic areas, etc.* Another exemple of unique feature would be *the traces of the geto-dacian civilization.*

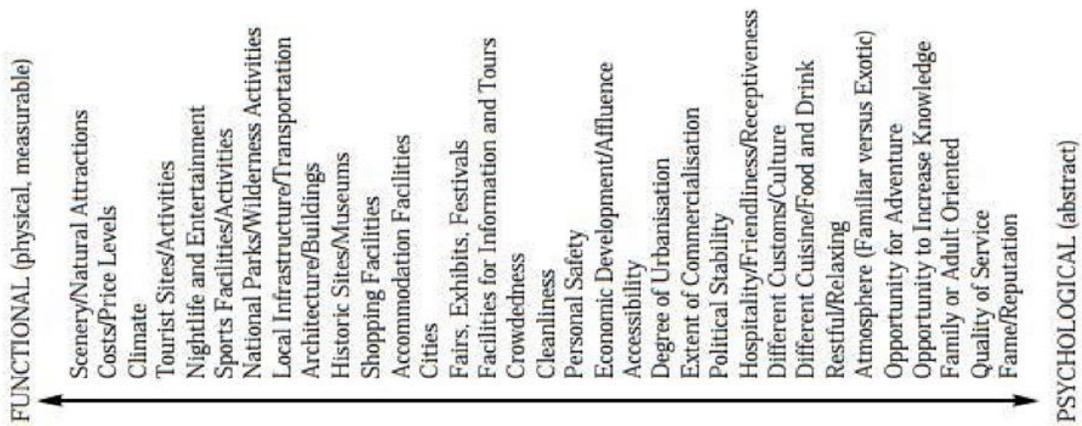


Figure 4 The summary of relevant attributes in measuring the destination image of Transylvania (Source: Adaptation after Echner and Ritchie, 2003).

The authors of the aforementioned model accomplished the hard task of identifying and generating the destination image list of attributes of destination image used up to now in various studies engaging structured methodologies.

The list is a result of the putting together attributes used by the diverse researchers into categories; as an example, incorporated under the attribute of scenery: beautiful scenery, physical geography, scenic beauty, etc. This master list of attributes has also been arranged within the functional/psychological continuum. Some items (costs/price levels) are functional, others are psychological (friendliness), and certain of them could be consider either, and for this reason they are positioned in the middle of the continuum (cleanliness).

The work of inventorying and classifying these attributes, both functional and psychological, has stated the high importance of using the two categories for improving the exactness of the measurement result in the research process.

In Figure 4 we illustrate an adaptation after the master list of attributes, considering them a useful instrument appropriate for the purpose of measuring Transylvania's destination image.

The application of the three-dimensional model requires two basic approaches, structured and unstructured, each using general techniques for measuring image. One of the most common mistakes the tourist researchers made in measuring the destination image was measuring only functional attributes using exclusively structured (quantitative) methodologies. Unstructured methodologies are the alternate form of measurement used in product image research. The advantage of unstructured methodologies is using free form descriptions to measure image. Using this approach, the attributes of image are not specified at the onset of the research. Rather, the respondent is allowed to more freely describe his/her impressions of a product. Data is gathered from a sample of respondents through such methods as focus groups or open-ended survey questions. Content analysis and various sorting and categorisation techniques are then used to

determine the image dimensions. In this manner, unstructured methodologies are more conducive to measuring the holistic components of product image and also to capturing unique features and auras (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003).

Regarding the unstructured methodologies, it was already tested the questioning technique by asking open-ended questions to allow respondents to describe, in their own words, images of the region. By combining the most common descriptions, a mental picture, or stereotypical holistic impression, would be possible to be drawn for Transylvania. Included in this overview image should be the functional and psychological attributes (Figure 3). While some of these attributes, the functional ones, such a standardised format would have eliminated some of the unique imagery produced by the open-ended questions.

It is evident that in order to capture in a suitable manner the components of destination image as conceptualised in Figure 2, the methodologies used cannot be exclusively structured or unstructured. The most complete measure of destination image should include both types of methodologies; for example, standardised scales to measure the perceptions of functional and psychological attributes, in conjunction with open-ended questions to determine the holistic impressions and to capture unique features and auras. Thus, there is necessary to elaborate a complex and effective system of measurement, incorporating both structured and unstructured methodologies, for an adequate examination of the destination image of Transylvania.

5. Preliminary conclusions

As meant to conclude this paper, it is important to mention the statements below:

- The aim of this paper was to explore how the three-dimensional model imagined and proposed by Echtner and Ritchie can be used as an instrument in operationalizing and measurement of Transylvania's destination image.
- According to the authors of conceptual model under discussion, the destination image of Transylvania should be envisioned as consisting of two main components; those that are attribute based and those that are holistic. Each of these components of destination image contains functional, or more tangible, and psychological, or more abstract, characteristics.
- Images of destinations can also range from those based on "common" functional and psychological features to those based on more distinctive or even unique features, events, feelings, and auras. In order to capture all of these components, a combination of structured and unstructured methodologies should be used to measure destination image.
- In the enterprise of defining a new tourist image of Transylvania, one needs to follow up on the mental individualisation through geographical and historic landmarks, and, moreover, on the natural and anthropic tourism resources of the area.
- Transylvania most probably does not need its legendary and phantasmagorical aura to flourish from the point of tourism. The great importance of the fictional, mythical/legendary component in attracting tourists cannot be denied, not only in case of Transylvania, but anywhere else. The holistic picture, or stereotypical image of the region, evokes worldwide a mythical aura. Based on the multitude of functional and psychological attributes of region's tourist resources, very many uniques, this holistic picture has to be turned from purely fictional into authentic, from stereotypy to originality.

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