

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC  
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**DOCTORAL THESIS**

**TOURISM PROMOTION OF ROMANIA IN THE DOCUMENTARY FILM  
AND ITS ROLE IN THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE COUNTRY BRAND**

**- SUMMARY -**

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## **Introduction and structure of the thesis**

The country brand is an up-to-date theme at international level, being a subject for analysis in numerous specialized studies. Some opinions sustain that mainly the governments are the ones that should involve themselves in the strategy of country branding, as well as the civil society. The brand ambassadors and the diaspora play an essential role in creating the country brand image and in attracting the investors as stakeholders. The work presents a series of case studies, with relevant examples of country (re)branding for such countries like Greece, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and even Iceland. The majority put their trust in the communication through social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, etc.) and became tourist attractions in quite a short time.

The thesis also presents the situation from Romania when it comes to branding campaigns. I noticed that, with the exception of certain academic initiatives, the country brand wasn't debated enough. Instead, there was a bigger preoccupation for the controversies behind the branding campaigns than for finding some solutions to create the proper strategy to promote the national brand. At the moment, the destination brand, launched in 2010, is still available in its initial form and will remain the same until 2020, as stated by the Ministry of Tourism. But still, there haven't been any significant improvements in the last years when it comes to the promotion in the mass media; on the contrary, the main references were about the degradation of the historical monuments, the lack of funds for the infrastructure in the rural zones and about the neglected important tourist attractions, such as the Danube Delta or the Romanian seaside. Moreover, the massive deforestation is a national problem, which can affect, over the time, also the tourism practiced in the Carpathian Mountains.

A unitary, original, creative and innovative vision is more than necessary in these important years for Romania. The culture and history should have more visibility, as well as the spiritual side of the Romanian people. In fact, we can say that this doctoral thesis is welcoming the representative events for our country in 2018 that will mark the Great Union Centennial from December 1<sup>st</sup> 1918. On this occasion, it would be appropriate to have a vast research about how we shape our national identity and how we present our country image outside. Therefore, this work, which tackles in parallel aspects specific to branding and to the tourism promotion through the audiovisual, can be seen as a first step in this direction.

The thesis consists of seven chapters, which begin, in Chapter 1, from theoretizations of the concepts of 'brand' and 'branding' (see Aaker, J. 1997; O'Cass & Lim, 2001; Holt, 2004; Nandan,

2005; Olins, 2006; Stern, 2006; Lau & Phau, 2007; Khan & Bamber, 2008; Dinnie, 2008; Batey, 2008; Power & Hauge, 2008), then developing, in Chapters 2 and 3, key concepts like ‘country branding’, ‘nation branding’ and ‘destination branding’, presented comparatively, as there are certain similarities, but also some important distinctions (see Anholt, 2006a; Hankinson, 2005; Morgan & Pritchard, 2005; Dinnie, 2008; Szondi, 2008; Hudson & Ritchie, 2009; Herstein, 2011; Melkumyan, 2012). For instance, the second chapter, “The new forms of branding and their role in promoting places, countries and nations”, presents conceptual delimitations between place brand, nation brand and country brand and it contains indexes used in the evaluation of the countries (Nation Brands Index and Good Country Index, by Simon Anholt, Country Brand Index, by FutureBrand). Here are also included references to public diplomacy, perceptions and stereotypes that influence the image of countries and nations, how they are seen in the exterior and the reputation they have in the public’s eyes (see Szondi, 2007; Anholt, 2006b; Anholt, 2007; White, 2012; Jordan, 2013; Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015). Furthermore, in Chapter 3, “Promoting the country brand through tourism. Destination branding”, several examples of country (re)branding are analysed, but it is also brought into discussion an interesting study about the brand of Europe.

As the work focuses on aspects related to tourism promotion, Chapter 4 reveals the new tendencies in tourism, such as rural tourism, ecotourism and cultural tourism, which complete the film- and television-induced tourism. The audiovisual productions represent useful tools to promote the brands, no matter if we talk about the classical products and services or about countries, nations or tourist destinations. All of them benefit from visibility and accessibility if they are presented in audio-video spots, television programmes or motion pictures, and Chapter 5 develops the means in which especially the tourist destinations can be promoted through film and television. There are discussed the most recent and relevant specialized studies in the field (see Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; O’Connor, 2011; Croy, 2011; Basáñez & Ingram, 2013; Busby & Haines, 2013; Özdemir & Adan, 2014; Sakellari, 2014; Gong & Tung, 2016; Yen & Croy, 2016), film- and television-induced tourism still being a subject of interest in international academic research.

Chapter 6, “Branding ideas for Romania”, is dedicated to the country branding campaigns started in the 90’s and that continue at the present time. The destination brand is analysed separately, in the same chapter, in order to make a clear delimitation between the country brand and the destination brand. This chapter also tackles with the current situation of the tourism promotion in Romania, including references to the tools that were used, such as booklets, websites, audio-video spots and documentary films.

In the applicative section of the thesis, it is presented a detailed analysis of the four parts from the British series *Wild Carpathia*, this being also one of the elements of novelty and originality of the work. The correlation of the country brand and of the destination brand with the

audiovisual domain in an academic research is meant to bring a new perspective and maybe more trust in the chances that Romania has to develop a new country branding strategy in the next years, using all the promotion tools at global level, and the documentary film is a tool of this type.

Chapter 7, “Promoting Romania’s country brand in the *Wild Carpathia* series (2011-2016)”, is dedicated to the presentation and interpretation of the data that were revealed by the content analysis of the television series *Wild Carpathia*. The results of the content analysis show some important aspects for the consolidation of the country brand and are elements of originality of this thesis, which focuses on the linkage between the country brand of Romania and the promotion of tourism through the television productions. There are also analysed elements of film and television grammar, technical aspects that are important, too, to evaluate the quality of the documentaries of the British series.

The thesis ends with several conclusions and recommendations for the improvement of the country branding strategy of Romania, some investments in innovative ideas being necessary for the consolidation of the country brand. There are also reminded the forms of tourism that our country should develop in the next years, such as rural tourism, ecotourism and cultural tourism.

Finally, it is also proposed a documentary that is meant to improve the *Wild Carpathia* series and that can be seen also as a recommendation for the future audiovisual productions of tourism promotion.

Therefore, the purpose of the thesis is to bring forward the problem of the country brand of Romania, which should be treated seriously, and the main factor is a unitary and coherent branding strategy, through which it can be created a national identity and a country image that are adapted to the current expectations. Romania is a country of rare beauty, having numerous natural resources, a variety of landforms and wonderful landscapes, which make a complete picture with the national heritage and the authentic lifestyle in the rural zones. That is why our country can be at any time a landmark on the global market, having an important tourism potential that should be capitalized as much as possible in the future.

## **Methodology**

As I have mentioned before, this work aims to bring forward new means to promote the country brand of Romania through the *Wild Carpathia* documentaries, particularly tourism, in all its forms, being the best alternative to create a favourable image for our country, both for the internal and the external publics.

The method of research that I chose to present the characteristics of the documentaries from the *Wild Carpathia* series was the content analysis. Thus, I analyzed each part of the series by reporting it to the characteristics shown in the brand manual from 2011 (the only manual of this type that is available at the moment), so that the visibility of the country brand components can be emphasized and evaluated as accurately as possible. Through this method it can be observed also the preference of the filmmakers of the documentary for one or another approach of the country brand issue, taking into account that the focus is on tourism, one of the main dimensions of a country.

The content analysis grid was based on the brand manual, the Nation Brand Hexagon by Simon Anholt, which includes tourism, exports, culture and heritage, investment, immigration, people and governance, components of the cultural branding (clothing, interior decorations, leisure, entertainment, food, beverage, NGOs, tourist destinations, cities, VIPs and characters) and components of the destination branding (attractions, facilities, activities during the destination, etc.). The grid also consisted of aspects referring to basic concepts derived from “brand”, such as brand personality, categories of differentiation, core values, tangible and intangible attributes, rational and emotional benefits. Each visual element from the documentaries that was considered relevant for the research was analysed through these criteria.

As I have previously reminded, this research aims to presents aspects of the country brand issue seen through the documentary film, which is not only a useful destination marketing tool, but also a good example of film-induced tourism, a new concept which refers to the tourists’ visiting of a location used for the making of a film. But the British documentaries of the *Wild Carpathia* series surpass the limits of a travel film because they present not only attractive tourist destination from Romania, but also difficult problems, like the massive deforestations in the Carpathian Mountains or the lack of investments in the infrastructure in the villages and the restoration of the monuments from the national heritage. *Wild Carpathia* counts on a proactive message when it comes to the protection of the environment. There are presented opinions and possible solutions from Romanian and foreign environmental activists who are preoccupied with the ecosystems in our country, even more because here are rare species of fauna and flora.

An important place belongs to the illustration of the activities of ordinary people in the villages, but also of local businesses of Romanian and foreign entrepreneurs who invested in tourism and agriculture. All these show us that *Wild Carpathia* is a complex production that tackles a multitude of subjects of interest at national and international levels that should be treated more seriously in the future.

As for the research objectives, these are to highlight the tourism promotion strategies of Romania in the *Wild Carpathia* series referring to the consolidation of the country brand and the

discussion of the positive and deficient aspects of the British documentaries in promoting Romania. At the end is offered also a possible alternative that should improve these documentaries.

The research questions are mainly about aspects that are related to the promotion of the destination brand and the country brand of Romania, which are being discussed together (taking into consideration that Romania has a destination brand, but not also a clear country brand), from the perspective of the *Wild Carpathia* documentaries:

1. What are the dominant elements in the *Wild Carpathia* series?

This research question focuses on the visibility of the brand identity and brand image components of Romania, as they are reflected in the documentaries. Here are brought into discussion key concepts from the brand manual, like brand personality, core values, attributes and benefits. It needs to be mentioned that, even if the brand manual is created for tourism promotion, there are still poignant aspects that are available also in the case of the promotion of the country brand. The visual elements from the documentaries were analysed also through the components of the cultural branding, of the Nation Brand Hexagon, by Simon Anholt, and of the destination branding.

2. What are the limitations of the documentaries from the *Wild Carpathia* series?

This research question aims to discuss deficient aspects and elements that are missing from the documentaries, from a general level, of the themes proposed in the brand manual, and to a particular level, given by the absence of a typology of visual elements. Limitations are also considered the elements that are excessively repeated, becoming clichés that show the lack of originality and of thematic diversity in the making of the documentaries.

3. How can the documentaries from the *Wild Carpathia* series be improved?

For this question, there are presented suggestions for the improvement of the *Wild Carpathia* documentaries, as a consequence of the evaluation of the good and less positive aspects of the production. As there is no intention in continuing the series, the fourth part being the last one, there can be made a documentary that would encompass all the elements that need to be remembered about Romania as a tourist destination and not only.

## **Results and conclusions of the thesis**

The *Wild Carpathia* series in four parts, *Transylvania*, *From the Mountains to the Sea*, *Wild Forever* and *Seasons of Change*, contribute to the creation of a quite coherent and favourable image for Romania. These films have large audiences among the Romanian and foreign people and are

available on the Internet, which facilitates a better dissemination of the filmmakers' messages about important aspects in our country that are mostly related to tourism and investments.

The aim of the content analysis was to see how the country brand of Romania, especially tourism, can be promoted through the documentary film. It is also discussed a new concept, more and more frequently found in the international academic literature, and that is "film tourism" or "film-induced tourism", which refers to the tourists' visit to a place that was used in the making of a motion picture or television production, after watching it in the theatres, on television or on the Internet. In this case, we talk about the British documentaries *Wild Carpathia* that attracted tourists in Romania, particularly in Transylvania, after watching the travel documentaries that were broadcast on different media channels.

As seen previously, the content analysis of the documentaries was mainly based on the brand manual issued in 2011 by the former Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism and it is available online, at [http://www.mdrap.ro/userfiles/brosura\\_manual\\_brand.pdf](http://www.mdrap.ro/userfiles/brosura_manual_brand.pdf). The first finding is that the producers of the television production followed to a great extent the direction proposed in the branding strategy and covered the themes and tourist attractions presented in the brand manual.

The documentaries had their specific traits and were quite different one from another. Thus, if in the first part, the focus was on the region of Transylvania and on attractions like the Alba Ecclesia church and the Sarmizegetusa fortress, both under UNESCO's World Heritage, in the second part, of greater extent when it comes to themes and landscapes, the attention was focused on the Herculane Baths and the Danube Delta. As in the first two parts, the aspects related to spirituality and culture were not sufficiently promoted compared to the wild nature and rural lifestyle, the third part had innumerable images that were filmed in the churches and monasteries in Bukovina and Maramureş (Moldoviţa, Suceviţa, Probota, Dragomirna, etc.), under UNESCO's World Heritage.

It is important to mention that the second and third parts, from 2013, were sponsored directly by the Romanian Government and we can say they were also the best films in the series. Finally, the fourth part was meant to be a reminder of the *Wild Carpathia* series and of the country brand of Romania, with its attractions. This continuation was more than necessary and it was filmed after three years since the previous part. The last documentary came with new ideas that are interesting for tourism promotion and that can be useful for a future tourism branding strategy. Among the proposals are rural tourism, ecotourism and food tourism, which Romania should develop more in the years to come.

Thematically, the four parts of the *Wild Carpathia* series tackled with environmental activism, the preservation of the ecosystems, but also with problems related to local businesses, like investments in the production and commercialization of honey and wines, that can be successfully

exported so that such businesses with authentic Romanian products can have the potential to contribute to the consolidation of the country brand of Romania.

The promotion of the country brand of Romania can be done also with the help of the brand ambassadors, prominent figures in different domains that can convey important messages about Romania to the foreign publics. In each documentary from the *Wild Carpathia* series, several public persons, important actors in the promotion of the country brand, offered interviews to the host of the programme, Charlie Ottley, he himself a brand ambassador for Romania. Among the personalities that were interviewed were the Prince of Wales, Princess Margareta of Romania, artists Loredana Groza and Grigore Leșe, canoeist Ivan Patzaichin and alpinist Alex Găvan, but there were also interviewed less known persons, Romanians and foreigners, who talked about their investments in Transylvania.

If we were to make a synthesis of the main characteristics of the documentaries, we can say that the first one is that, besides being a destination marketing tool that is extremely valuable for the Romanian tourism, the films emphasize also aspects of country brand, that include, aside from tourism, some references to investments, culture and heritage, environmental activism, infrastructure in the rural areas, etc.

Another characteristic that is specific to all the *Wild Carpathia* documentaries is the predominance of the non-human elements in comparison to the human elements. There were promoted especially the components of the natural and rural landscapes – forests, mountains, hills, houses, etc. It was attempted to highlight the idea that in the Romanian villages in the Carpathian Mountains, the perfect communion between man and nature is extremely important. As for the human elements, in all the four parts there were particularly presented local inhabitants, tourists, artists and environmental activists, some of them being interviewed by Charlie Ottley.

A common feature for all the documentaries is given also by the high frequency of the landscape dimension, particularly of the wild and rural ones, again being highlighted the idea of the perfect communion between man and nature.

As for the specific branding elements, the analysis of the documentaries revealed that the main brand personality trait of Romania is “authenticity”, no matter if we talk about places, objects or travel experiences. The image of Romania in the *Wild Carpathia* documentaries is that of a unique, special place, with virgin forests, with an authentic lifestyle and with ancient traditions and customs that are still kept in the villages, with a Latin-Byzantine and Germanic culture, owing to the geographical position of our country, as a border between the Orient and the Occident, but also with new tourist attractions, such as the Hotel of Ice in Bâlea Lac.

Another dominant element that I found in the documentaries is given by the high visibility of two main categories of differentiation, the intact nature and the authentic lifestyle in the rural

areas, which shows that the British series focused on the idea that in Romania the villages and the nature are key factors for highlighting the country brand.

An important characteristic that is common to all the *Wild Carpathia* documentaries is also given by the core values. The main core value that was revealed by the content analysis was “exploration”, which is accurate with the branding strategy proposed by the former Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, that was referring to the theme of exploration (and the slogan “Explore the Carpathian Garden”) and to the explorer tourist that is in search for adventure and unusual experiences in different places in Romania. Another important core value was “good, simple life”, which can be correlated to the idealized image of the Romanian village, seen as a wonderful, quiet place, where one can escape and make all sorts of things at a slow and healthier pace.

When it comes to attributes and benefits of the brand, I observed certain differences between the *Wild Carpathia* documentaries, because each one of them had its particularity. Generally, “the intact nature and wild landscapes” was the tangible attribute with the highest visibility in all the four documentaries, even if it wasn’t the most visible every time. Other important tangible attributes were “the Delta and a big part of the Danube” and “the traditions”, this attribute being especially illustrated in different cultural and religious contexts in the rural and urban areas, such as the Christmas holiday. The intangible attribute with the highest visibility in all the four films was “authenticity/originality”.

As for the brand benefits, the main emotional benefit was “positive surprises”. The films tried to provide a positive, optimistic image of Romania and its tourist attractions, no matter if we talk about visiting cultural places, going for a ride in the nature or practicing outdoor sports. The rational benefits with the highest visibility were “discovery/relaxation” and “escape and slowdown”, which were specific to the tourist areas that were illustrated in the films, such as the Carpathian Mountains, the Romanian villages in Transylvania, Maramureş and Bukovina, and the Danube Delta.

When it comes to cultural branding, the main component was “tourist destinations”, because the documentaries of the British series are travel documentaries that promote travel destinations. Moreover, we can say that *Wild Carpathia* is a good example of film-induced tourism, because after watching the series the tourists became increasingly interested in visiting the places that were used for the filming, such as the Transylvanian villages and the mountain resorts.

As for the Nation Brand Hexagon by Simon Anholt, “tourism” was the most visible component, owing to the fact that the principal aim of the *Wild Carpathia* documentaries was the tourism promotion of Romania.

When discussing the destination branding, “the attractions” was the most visible component in all the four films, the natural attractions being more emphasized at the visual level than the cultural or social ones, because there were numerous examples of outdoor attractions, from visiting the wonders of nature, some of them with a great sense of spirituality and religion, to practicing sports, tours and adventures in the Carpathian Mountains and on the Danube.

Concerning the limitations of the documentaries, we can say that a first less favourable aspect is the insufficient promotion of the national patrimony, of the culture and Romanian cultural heritage. The only documentary that valued these aspects and the mystery and spiritual facets was *Wild Forever*. The brief presentation of some important monuments in Romania and the lack of presentation of other monuments in the national patrimony, such as the sculptural ensemble Brâncuși, make these documentaries quite superficial in approaching the great Romanian cultural and artistic accomplishments.

Another limitation of the documentary is the low visibility of the urban landscape. In each documentary there were images filmed in various cities and towns, like Braşov, Sibiu, Sighișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Călărași or Tulcea, but they were much less promoted than the villages in Transylvania, Maramureş, Bukovina and Dobrogea.

Also, a limitation of the documentaries is the insufficient presentation of the Romanian cuisine, as the food and beverage were more visible in the second and fourth parts. It is known that the traditional Romanian food is very much appreciated but, even so, it doesn't hold a sufficiently visible place in the documentaries, while other countries promote themselves through culinary tourism.

Before concluding the discussion about the limitations of the documentaries, we can say that it would be necessary to provide much more examples referring to the local administration, investments and exports, like in the case of the authentic Romanian products that would shape a better image for Romania in terms of business and regional development.

It would be necessary to mention also the fact that the title of the series itself, *Wild Carpathia*, limits quite a lot the thematic area, being focused on the Carpathian Mountains and in accordance with the slogan “Explore the Carpathian Garden”.

When it comes to the improvement of the *Wild Carpathia* documentaries, we can say that it would be preferable to make a documentary that would reflect a unitary image of Romania as a tourist destination, and not a fragmented one, in several parts. The solution would be a 90-minute documentary that would encompass the most important tourist attractions of Romania in all the regions, not just Transylvania, which is excessively presented in *Wild Carpathia*, making the impression that Transylvania is itself a country inside of Romania. The proposed documentary should be helpful in promoting better the emblematic cities and monuments in Romania, so that the

country brand wouldn't be represented merely by tourism, but also by culture, education and investments. Moreover, in the future the Romanian people, with their traditions and customs, history and culture, should be much more promoted, even more now, when we are going to celebrate the Great Union Centennial from December 1<sup>st</sup> 1918. All these elements together with those presented in the *Wild Carpathia* series, can create a complex and complete image of the country brand of Romania.

To conclude the entire analysis, we can say that tourism is an essential component of the country brand, and film- and television-induced tourism is a modern form of expressing this key characteristic. In this case, the *Wild Carpathia* documentaries visibly enrich the image of Romania in the world and also bring interesting alternatives, like rural tourism and ecotourism that can be part of a future branding strategy for our country.

The *Wild Carpathia* documentaries have international recognition, as well, and they help, to some extent, the promotion of Romania as a tourist destination. Furthermore, they have a significant role in the consolidation of the country brand, by shaping an image that would be favourably perceived by the publics, the stakeholders. In this case, the brand ambassadors, some of them shown in the British series, have a crucial role, as they can convey in an even more credible manner the favourable messages about Romania.

Therefore, we can say that a country like Romania that benefits from a variety of landscapes and cultural diversity can be more efficiently promoted through the television productions like the documentary film, because the key is the image. Of course, the Internet and the new media play an important role, so that the Facebook and YouTube pages are the main channels to transmit the audiovisual information. The *Wild Carpathia* documentaries are available on the Internet, too, for the public from the entire world, which automatically brings a popularization of them, and that explains their capacity to reach quickly to the target audience, no matter if we talk about tourists, entrepreneurs, environmental activists or people who want to come to Romania in the long term.

Film-induced tourism is a useful destination marketing tool and it also promotes the country brand. Romania has a lot to show and to offer to the tourists and it is also a place where life can be lived in a different way, especially if we think about the already popular Transylvanian villages and the cultural and religious sites from Maramureş and Bukovina, as we have seen in the *Wild Carpathia* series. That is why a good documentary film that is uploaded on the Internet for all the audiences can attract tourists and investors and it can improve the image of Romania in the exterior, counteracting the negative examples in the press.

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