Dracula and Dictators: Changes in Tourism in Romania After the Fall of Communism

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Abstract

The fall of communism in December 1989 in Romania left the country in turmoil, reaching all aspects of life. This paper argues that the tourism sector, specifically, has felt changes in development, identity and legacy. The tourism sector was just one of those many areas in which communism had its effect before and after its demise. The reign of communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, the historical context in which tourism has developed through communism and post-socialist democracy and the identity of the Romanian people today are discussed in this paper. From brutality to chaos; slow economic growth to introduction of the European Union; embracing mythological characters like Dracula and not mentioning Dracula exists at ‘Dracula’s Castle: Romanian tourism is developing a tourism industry based upon history and struggle. In response, these changes to tourism in Romania have been slow and stagnated. Embracing Dracula for theme parks was shot down by the public and government entities alike; investment into hotels and restaurants has lagged; Romanian citizens cry out for sustainable and ‘real’ tourism. Romanian people today are debating what it is to be Romanian, and how they represent their culture to new visitors. Development of natural and historic treasures is important to some, while others are struggling to make a living in an agrarian lifestyle. European Union and foreign investment has been slow. Political conflicts in the region affect the view that foreign visitors have about Romania, and in turn are slow to make Romania a ‘go-to’ destination. The changes in tourism in Romania after the fall of communism are tangible. What is unclear are the ways in which Romania will use its vast tourism resources to begin a new chapter in the identity of the real Romania.
Introduction

The fall of communism in 1989 has changed Romania and Romanian identity of its place in the world. Some of these changes are directly related to the opening of their borders to new visitors, which has resulted in a flood of new tourism opportunities. Dracula, Transylvania, and Nicolae Ceausescu are synonymous with Romania today, however these are new ideas, based in part on real events and characteristics, and are also part of a manufactured idea about place. Tourism brings in new economic opportunities, increased foreign ideas, environmental consequences and more, changing the Romanian landscape and the distinctiveness of Romania as a destination. Author Gina-Ionela Butnaru states that over a half of Romania’s surface has potential to be tourist attraction, and nearly 24% is over ‘high or great value’ for tourist potential (Butnaru, 2011). Yet, with all of this potential, the growth of the Romanian tourist industry is stagnated at best. The reasons for this stagnation and how the tourism sector has evolved are linked to the fall of communism in 1989. This paper will discuss how the fall of communism has impacted tourism, and how these changes have affected both Romanians and the national identity that is now present.

Romanian tourism has changed since the fall of communism in 1989. While tourism was limited prior to the fall of Communism, it is now based on homage to a discredited leader and the architectural follies he built such as the Casa Poporului, the largest administrative building in the world after the Pentagon. Tourism demand is also growing and changing with a reconstructed legend represented by the Dracula stands on the side of the road. The effects of these tourism
changes have provided an economic benefit to Romanians, as well as stirred debate about what is ‘truly’ Romania.

Whether they are embracing the turbulent past of brutal dictatorship of Ceausescu, or learning to love the idea of a fictional supernatural character in Dracula, Romanians are changing their tourism industry to meet the expectations of incoming tourists and to reconstruct a national identity at the beginning of the new Romania. How has the fall of communism changed tourism? What are the impacts to Romanians in all generations? What other choices do some Romanians have but to embrace culture that is not based in reality? The struggle between old and new, real and fiction, are the basis of the changes in Romania’s tourism today after the fall of communism. This paper will be looking at three changes that Romanian tourism has been impacted by after the fall of communism. These changes represent the different aspects of the economy, culture, and infrastructure that give Romania its identity today, and how that identity is presented to the world and the visitors to this rich country.

The first change -- how historical context of moving from communism to democracy, accompanied by corruption, confusion and fragmented development-- has impacted the tourism sector and the associated infrastructure: hotels, restaurants, tourism sites and more. The infrastructures of the government and the economy, as well as the infrastructure of the tourism industry have been altered in dramatic ways. After the revolution in 1989, the movement of capital investment in the country’s logistical infrastructure (roads, airports) and tourism development was lacking and not a priority of the Romanian government. The growth of investment into essential infrastructure has limited the development of some areas of tourism of Romania. The tourism industry specifically, has had to cope with less government oversight despite the looting of historically significant sites and the lack of enforcement of laws to protect
such historically and culturally important relics. Also, the limited ability to market tourism to other countries due to continued censorship of written documents, along with poor coordination among government departments in the tourism sector have resulted in stagnated growth in some areas.

As part of these political changes, the economy has changed from communism to a free capitalist society, and many outside visitors have contributed to a growing tourism economy. The changes in infrastructures of tourism including hotels, restaurants and transportation systems of Romania have become an increasingly important contribution to the economy. However, this change has been slow in some sectors due to a number of factors: poor investment in tourism infrastructure, policies that continue to prioritize agriculture, and ongoing political instability and corruption. Tourism infrastructure projects have been spatially diverse. Much investment in the capital city of Bucharest is expected, since it functions as the central place of government. Bucharest is considered a primate city, being the cultural, financial and urban center of Romania (Rosenberg, 2014).

Development of shopping malls with high end retail stores such as Gucci and Armani are prevalent inside the Bucharest city limits. The city boasts an amusement park and a popular water park, along with a diverse selection of historical museums and cultural centers near the city center. Strong access to transportation like rail systems and air travel to other major European destinations give Bucharest an advantage as a tourist hub, not unlike many major cities. While Bucharest residents enjoy the perks of living in the capital city, many Romanians in rural areas have seen limited investment in tourism projects, due to lack of investment by the Romanian government and the Ministry of Tourism. For example, when an idea of a ‘Dracula’ theme park was introduced, the Romanian government decided not to support the project financially because
they felt that it would only attract visitors within 50 km of the park. This area, largely rural, has a median income of approximately €50 per month, and many residents do not even own automobiles. However, the idea presented by the park developers was that visitors would pay an entrance fee of approximately $5, and charge close to $25 for other services once inside the park, virtually eliminating the possibility of local visitor’s ability to enjoy the park for leisure activities (Light, 2012). The overall effects of tourism after the fall of communism on the Romanian infrastructure include the economy and the political system and its evolution through time and its changes to Romanians in rural and urban settings throughout Romania.

The second area of change this paper considers is how Romanian’s cultural identity is affected by the influx of visitors looking for a Romanian culture that is based on fictional stories from the 1800’s alongside Hollywood visions of blood and garlic. The development of a ‘Dracula’ Theme park was met with such distain by native Romanians, it was scrapped in the early stages of development, yet the castles in nearly every Romanian city advertise that they are somehow connected to the Dracula legend in some form or another. Many rural Romanians have decided to embrace fictional characters such as Dracula in order to capitalize on a popular culture icon and move away from farm work and other agrarian pursuits. This icon, Dracula, while well known in many parts of the Western world, is not based in reality, rather on a fictional character in a book. Many Romanians see these characters as a joke or something to laugh about, but not as a part of their true culture, and would rather they emphasize other national treasures such as outdoor experiences in the Carpathian Mountains. In an effort to cater to a different segment of the tourist market, many Romanian tourist companies are looking to develop alternate identities of Romania, and have intentions to develop sustainable tourism, focusing on the environment, rich culture, exotic foods, and historical architecture. A move
away from Dracula tourism, and towards natural resources like the Carpathian Mountains, provides a new route to economic prosperity that can be exploited by tourism companies.

A third change this paper considers is the legacy of political repression: the brutal regime of Nicolae Ceausescu. Ceausescu’s reign left many Romanians with deep, dark memories of how harsh the living conditions were under the rule of an authoritarian dictator. Many Romanians remember standing in line for hours in order to receive a meager ration of bread, or having to sleep in the cold, as there was no guarantee of electricity or heat at any part of the year. The fall of the dictatorship was one of the bloodiest and most publicized of all of the Eastern European falls from communism. This public record has given rise to foreign visitors flooding into Romania looking for relics of the Ceausescu regime and the vision of what life was like under his control. The opening of the Casa Poporului building to daily public tours was controversial in Romania for many reasons, not the least of which is that it has provided a concrete reminder of what life was like during communism. This is something that many Romanians, especially the older generation, would like to forget. Some researchers are calling this an obsession with ‘death and disaster’ and naming this ‘dark tourism’ which has been a long-established trend in the tourism industry (Light and Young, 2010). The impact of embracing this dark, authoritarian past is being debated in modern Romania and changing the dialogue of tourism amongst Romanians today.

In Duncan Light’s book The Dracula Dilemma, 2012, he states that he believes that whether or not Romanians are facing changes in tourism, their identity as a country and as Romanians is being influenced by tourists arriving and looking for an idea that is not based in reality. As Light argues ‘one means by which a country presents ‘itself’ to ‘others’ is through international tourism, particularly by encouraging visits by foreign tourists as a way of increasing
their knowledge and understanding of the country’ (Light, 2012, p 14). When tourists visit a
country, the country itself is forced to make a choice between ‘identities versus economy’ (Light
and Young, 2010, p 6). Romania is not the first country to face these choices. After the fall of
the Berlin Wall in 1989, Germany was faced with tourism companies arranging tours of key
sites, and allowing visitors to take souvenir pieces of the wall (Light, 2010). These tours resulted
in a 30% rise in passengers on British Airways the week following the collapse of the wall
(Light, 2010).

Making money to feed their children by presenting an altered reality, or developing new
tourist attractions that offer the real Romania, these are the choices faced in Romania today.
Often when visitors arrive they have one idea about Romania, and by the time they leave they
have a completely different perspective. By enticing visitors and embracing popular culture icons
or controversial historical figures, Romanians can introduce the world to the real Romania along
the journey. How Romanians attract visitors, the image they portray to the world and what this
influence has on Romania today is very important when looking at the changes experienced in
Romanian tourism since 1989.

**Methodology**

The research conducted for this paper has been through secondary sources such as
scholarly journal articles, books and essays written by experts in the fields of tourism, politics,
economics, Europe and Romania. Sources also include personal visits to locations and areas in
and around Romania including Hungary, Czech Republic, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy,
and more. These personal visits provide opportunity for anecdotal information, and a further
basis for understanding the culture, history and current identity seen by visitors and residents.
Museum visits, stays at hotels, eating at restaurants and other cultural experiences are first hand experiences and all occurred during March of 2001 and August of 2012. Photographs utilized are personal images from those visits to Romania unless otherwise cited. Some personal interviews with current and former residents of Romania, both during the communism era and post-communism are included. Additional research using tourism websites and tourism websites in Romania are included to ensure rich context and timely information.

Scholarly work regarding geographical context, including landscape changes, historical changes, political influences throughout Eastern Europe from 1989 through 2013, and ideas of tourism and identity provide further context in the overall argument. Popular culture texts give a sense of how the public is treating the ideas of the tourism industry in Romania.

Analyzing change in Romanian tourism after the fall of communism also draws on secondary sources. Statistical information provides hotel accommodation rates, number of visitors each year, and infrastructure information. Much of the information analyzed for current events is provided by newspaper articles accessed online. Translations are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

Romania and the Region

Romania is a small country of approximately 21 million people in Eastern Europe, lying next to the Black Sea (Fig. 1). Romania borders other former communist bloc countries including Ukraine, Moldova, Hungary and Bulgaria, along with the former Yugoslavia country of Serbia. The region has a historically turbulent past, including numerous invasions since the time of the Romans, through the time of the Ottoman Turks, and continuing into the modern era including World War I and World War II (Klepper, 2002). Until the communist government
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gained control in 1945, Romanians had been governed by a family monarchy. With Romania’s entrance in the European Union in 2007, the turbulence of the past has begun to subside, although recent events in Ukraine in 2014 have again raised questions about the stability of the region and influence of the former Soviet power of Russia.

Fig. 1: Map of Romania. Source: Ezilon.com.

Romania is currently about 55% urban, in comparison with other Eastern European countries like Hungary and Bulgaria which reach the 74% urban range, resulting in a more rural, agrarian focused economy (PRB.org, 2013). Romania has not only good access to the Black Sea, but it also has large navigable rivers including the Danube which flows from Germany to the Black Sea, and is the longest in the European Union (ICPDR, 2014). The Carpathian Mountains are a large mountain chain running through the country from south to north. These are a physical barrier, however, there are long standing trade routes throughout the mountainous
area and the region has been settled for many centuries. This mountainous zone provides many of the tourist destinations of Romania and is said to be the future basis of sustainable tourism. Some tour operators envision this as the foundation for more nature-based tourism in Romania.

Historical and current events including the Ukrainian-Russian conflict over the Crimea region have hindered foreign travel to Romania due to traveler concern about instability. While for many years there have been few violent conflicts breaking out in the region, there have been some instances of instability. Such conflicts include the war in the former countries of Yugoslavia in the 1990’s, and the Moldova revolution in 2009 (Soare, et al, 2013).

In neighboring Moldova, tense interactions with Russia have brought Romania to the negotiation table several times since the mid-1990’s. Conflicts include issues surrounding the semi-autonomous area of Transnistria, a rouge ‘nation’ that claims independence from Moldova and is governed effectively by a ‘mafia-state’ that is unrecognized by most countries of the world. Russia has a significant military presence in the Transnistria area, and often performs military exercises to stir up debate between the states surrounding it, not unlike its actions in Crimea, Ukraine (Soare, et al, 2013). Russia’s sphere of influence over former Soviet states, like Moldova, Bulgaria and Romania, has significantly hindered Romania and the scrutiny of foreigners, potentially looking for tours and travel opportunities in Eastern Europe. Many of the countries of Eastern Europe are still seen as supporters of or as lingering relics of the former USSR. In fact, many of the Eastern European countries surrounding Romania have a distinct preference for former Russian Soviet politics; Bulgarians and Slovaks had respectively a 78% and 64% positive view of the former Soviet Republic (Soare, et al, 2013). This view of Russia by neighboring countries has affected tourism in Romania, quite apart from the internal politics and ambivalence of Romanian citizens of the current status of their tourist identity.
Ceausescu’s Legacy

The context of the tourism industry in Romania after the fall of communism can be understood by looking at the time of revolution in 1989. Romania has a long and turbulent history in Eastern Europe, but modern Romania is developing out of a brutal communist regime that came into power in 1945 (Gallagher, 2005). With the incorporation into the Soviet bloc a new system of authoritarian rule began and was in full control by 1952 (Klepper, 2002). Citizens were required to be registered; movement between cities and villages was restricted and controlled; every citizen was required to report any other fellow Romanian that was involved in suspicious or illegal activity (Pacepa, 1987).

Following the rise of the communist party were decades of systematic control over its citizens and the gradual implementation of rigid social regulations including the loss of property rights, religion choice and contraception. Meanwhile, a ‘likeable and modest mannered communist’, according to Romanian journalists of the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, named Nicolae Ceausescu was rising in the party ranks, and by 1975 had maneuvered himself into the title of President of Romania (Gallagher, 2005). Ceausescu’s reign from 1975 to 1989 was characterized by a complete and total dictatorship of the Romanian politics, culture, economy and people. Ceausescu came to be known as a brutal and violent man, who implemented a secret police to ensure that all Romanian citizens were watched and controlled at all times. Ceausescu was thought to have a deity complex, and worked to ensure that his legacy remained long after his demise (Pacepa, 1987).

Ceausescu razed large parts of Bucharest in order to build a Soviet style boulevard and surrounding buildings leading up to his crowning achievement in the Casa Poporului, the largest
administrative building in the world after the Pentagon (Figure 2). Much of Ceausescu’s building came at the high cost to the Romanian people and their ability to afford even the basic necessities. Rationing of bread, sugar and other food items and limited quantities of petroleum and electricity were the norm under the Ceausescu regime. At the same time, Ceausescu was building the interior of his palace with gold, marble and the largest hand-stitched rugs ever made at the time, only surpassed by the Shaikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi in 2006 (Swaroop, 2007). The extravagance was immense, while the people were starving, suffering and becoming fed up with his madness.

Fig. 2. Casa Poporului. Source: Joe Kelley, 1998.

Romania’s economy was destroyed over the two decades of Ceausescu’s rule, resulting in a very poor population left without much industry. The tourism industry during the Ceausescu reign was limited to those who were associated with or high ranking in the Communist party, and
was highly controlled. Little to no movement of ordinary citizens was allowed, and when it did occur, it was highly regulated and watched. Many Romanians had family and friends outside of Romania, and were subject to confiscation of letters and denial of requests for visa to travel (Danta, 1993). Some Western visitors were allowed to see the parts of Romania that were dressed up for tours. Ceausescu realized that some tourists would be a good flow of cash, and they could perhaps provide for a more positive look at an authoritarian country; this was a distinct part of his strategy for control over the view of outsiders. Ceausescu’s actions of control were in direct reaction to his looking to build his international credibility. Ceausescu decided to invest in building several large Western style hotels in the 1970’s in areas that were determined to be good tourist locales like the Black Sea Coast and the Poiana, Brasov/Prahova Valley in the Carpathian Mountains (Pop, et al, 2007). These areas saw international tourists from Germany, Hungary, France and Italy. Little of the income generated was invested into the properties, and as the regime became more repressed, tourism became less of a priority and less prevalent.

By the late 1980’s Romania’s political and economic stability were at an all-time low, and social unrest became unavoidable. Uprising was imminent, and the Ceausescu regime could do little to stifle the revolution that began on December 21, 1989. Romania’s revolution was one of the most bloody and violent in all of Eastern European countries. When the fall of the Soviet Union finally occurred, there was a quick mock-trial and execution by firing squad of Ceausescu and his wife, Elena just two days later.

**Post-Socialist Tourism**

Romania’s move from a communist-socialist based economy to a free capitalist economy has provided the public with new opportunities to implement well known sites as prominent
tourist attractions that bring visitors to Romania. The Casa Poporului is one of the most important and compelling tourist attractions and is sitting prominently on the top of a small hill, at the end of the Bulevardul Unirii (Unity Boulevard), in central Bucharest. The House of the People, or Palace of the Parliament, as it is sometimes referred to, is the second largest administrative building in the world, behind the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. (Nae, Turnock, 2011). With over 1,000 rooms, and made almost entirely of Romanian resources, such as Romanian white travertine and hand carved walnut and cherry paneling, the building is naturally a major tourist attraction (Vachon, 1993/94).

Atop the central hill, looking like a giant concrete layer cake, with 20 floors taking up nearly 4,000,000 square feet, author Duncan Light compares this building to “The Grand Canyon, The Eiffel Tower and The Millenium Dome” just by its sheer “visual size and physical presence” (Light, 2001, pg 1063). The Casa Poporului was built by Ceausescu in the early 1980’s to legitimize Ceausescu’s power in Romania and on the world stage. Ceausescu utilized Romania’s natural resources, its land and its people to build the Casa Poporului, at the same time Romania was in the midst of starving and Ceausescu was brutalizing the population (Pacepa, 1987). However, behind the grand monstrosity, glory and scandal of such a building lies the history and memories it possesses. After Ceausescu’s death in 1989, Romania has struggled to pull itself out of the deep darkness that was communism under Ceausescu. In the same breath, Romania is embracing this monument to the former socialist government as a tourist attraction and has opened this building to public tours.

In public tours of the Casa Poporului the tour guides do not specifically address the brutality and controversy surrounding the former dictator, rather they emphasize the grandiosity and importance of the ‘Peoples House’ to the country of Romania today, and how the
current government utilizes ‘some’ of the multitude of rooms. It is not until the tour reaches the
deep catacombs of the basement do they begin to discuss earlier issues of violence and terror.
Here in the dark, with only a flashlight to illuminate the concrete walls, a small red poster
emblazoned with the signature hammer and sickle of the communist party, and a faux ‘blood
stain’ on the wall, do we hear about what Ceausescu ‘might have done’ inside the secret
passageways to those who would oppose him(Casa Poporului Tour, 2012). It is curious that such
a stop on the tour exists, however this is how the official Romanian government of today has
chosen to address the complexity of the Ceausescu legacy.

**History of the Dracula Legend**

In addition to the historical context of the communist government, the view of foreigners
of Romania in the 20th and 21st centuries has been shaped by popular culture. Tourist views of
Romania are also shaped by the cultural relics dotting the landscape. Romania has many
historical sites throughout the countryside, including several castles in small mountain villages
that drive the Western myth of vampires. About 172 km north of Bucharest, on a steep hill, sits
an imposing fortress, with a red tiled roof, and pointed spires reaching up the sky. The building,
known as Castle Bran, has a long cultural history linking a monarchy dating to the 12th century
C.E.

Throughout the region and its numerous medieval castles, dark, mythical mountains, the
real life Transylvanian prince, Vlad Tepes, help to contribute to the legend of Dracula that now
persists in Western popular culture. The setting, history and the legend of Vlad Tepes III
provided the perfect basis for the 1898 novel by Bram Stoker titled *Dracula*. Stoker’s novel
involved the story of a Romanian Count that could only come out at night, and drank the blood of young women. While Stoker’s character was fictional, it is said that the character was based on the real-life Vlad Tepes III, also known as Vlad the Impaler, a 13th century Wallachian prince of Romania, see Figure 3.

While Stoker had never actually visited Transylvania, his account of ‘Dracula’ was surprisingly close in setting, and very appealing to Western readers. In contrast, the official Romanian government tourist bureau during the reign of Ceausescu maintained that Stoker’s account of Dracula was entirely and completely the product of Stoker’s imagination, and aggressively attempted to protect the image of Vlad Tepes as a Romanian prince, and nothing more (Light, 2001). Throughout the communist period, Romania made no attempts to promote or associate with the idea of Vampires or Dracula mythology, and anything supernatural was strictly forbidden and censored (Light, 2012). This attitude continued and become even more important to Ceausescu, due, in part, to the increase in Western awareness of his harsh rule. While visiting the U.S. in 1978 Ceausescu was likened to ‘Dracula’ by U.S. protestors at a public event. Throughout the reign of Ceausescu, increases in censorship and outright bans on using the word ‘Dracula’ where implemented, and Romanians were ordered ‘to obey or suffer the consequences’ (Light, 2012). Real-life Prince Vlad Tepes was infamous for his violence and authority over the people of Romania, and was known to have placed his enemies on stakes to die, just outside his dining room window. Not unlike Ceausescu, Tepes’ authoritarian rule was devastating to the people of Romania. Brutality and devastation have shaped the cultural landscape of Romania and developed into their own tourist attraction.
Transylvania is a ‘județ’ or ‘county’ of Romania. It is located in the central-western area of the country and the Carpathian Mountains run directly through from southern Romania. The city of Bran is a major tourist destination, and the chief attraction is Bran Castle. Bran castle is deemed ‘Dracula’s Castle’ by those in and outside of Romania, see Figure 4 (BranCastle.com, 2012). Bram Stoker’s classic novel places the mythical vampire character in search of his home the area of Transylvania.

Through the years Castle Bran has moved from monarchy to monarchy, including to the most recent Princess Ileana of Romania in 1938. Princess Ileana grew up in the Castle, had raised her own children in the castle, and then turned the castle into a hospital during WWII. However, she and her family were ultimately forced into exile by the incoming communist party in the early 1950’s. The communist party later turned the Castle into a museum. In late 2009, the Castle was returned to the royal family, Princess Ileana’s three surviving children. Today, visitors can roam the halls, view the dungeon, and take guided tours to learn about the history of
the building and surrounding areas. However, what generally brings visitors to the castle is the
mythical and fictional idea of ‘Dracula’s Castle’ (BranCastle.com, 2012).

Fig. 4: Bran Castle, Romania. Source: BranCastle.org 2014.

During a tour of ‘Dracula’s Castle’ the Dracula legend is discussed in two brief
sections: once at the torture chamber, where wax statues sit in for what would likely be tortured
bodies are set against the various tools used by those in the medieval days; then again in the
Queen’s bedroom. In the bedroom the discussion surrounds the man who was the original
‘Dracula’. Here, a single poster with pictures explains the myth and legend of ‘Dracula’ and the
man behind the myth, Vlad Tepes is briefly explained. When the tour guide is asked why this is
not discussed more along the tour, she replies ‘Well, the Royal family would like to disassociate
itself with the ‘Dracula’ legend. They would like everyone to know that this house belongs to
them, and that they have struggled to keep it within their family for years’ (Bran Castle Tour, 2012).

For Westerners, Hollywood had been trumping up the idea of Transylvania as a dark, mysterious, forested home of Vampires since the early days of the motion picture. Western visions of castles and coffins, forests and a former ruler who impaled his enemies were only a small part of the foreign idea of Romania. Hollywood grasped onto this fictional character with Universal’s 1931 ‘Dracula’ film starring Bela Lugosi, which only cemented the idealized Romania to Americans. In the 1970’s television shows like ‘Dark Shadows’ reinforced this ideology and many Americans and Western Europeans looked to capitalize with ‘Dracula Tours’ in Romania. While some were granted access to Romania, visitors were very disappointed in the offerings of ‘Dracula’ based tours. With the outright ban on supernatural and specifically ‘Dracula’ related promotion, Romania was faced with a major dilemma. Ceausescu was looking to give his reign legitimacy across the international stage, but embracing ‘Dracula’ myths was fundamentally against his socialist policies.

After the fall of the communist government in 1989, the dilemma persisted for many Romanians. While there was significant opportunity for economic gain, as this was a unique form of tourism, and could not be provided by other Western countries, many Romanians were skeptical about embracing an idea that was fictional and would some ‘compromise Romania’s sense of its own identity and the image it was seeking to project to the rest of the world’ (Light, 2012).
Impacts on Tourism

In order to properly understand the overarching changes to tourism since the fall of communism, one must first look at the idea of tourism in Romania during communism, and how identity and heritage played a significant role in the way in which visitors saw Romania.

‘Although such questions of identity may initially seem to be unrelated to tourism …..the theme of identity is omnipresent within tourism discourse. In particular, one means by which a country presents ‘itself’ to ‘others’ is thorough international tourism, particularly by encouraging visits by foreign tourists as a way of increasing their knowledge and understanding of the country’ (Light and Young, 2001, p 899).

In Romania, the identity presented to the world, prior to the fall of communism in 1989, was one of a dictatorship, run by a volatile and turbulent leader.

Communism left Romania with relics of devastation, including destruction of many national cultural treasures such as the razing of much of historical downtown Bucharest between the years of 1979-1989 (Light and Young, 2001). Much of the communist era from 1947 – 1989 was literally airbrushed out of the history books (Light, 2000). Tourism during communism was available only to political leaders and those whose passports assured they belonged to a country in which communist ideology was supported, such as Libya, Russia or Cuba (Pacepa, 1987).

Communism left Romanians with little to eat, sporadic power, and a country in ruins. Tourism would seem a likely solution to bring foreigners in, to introduce the new Romania. However, the dilemma presented to Romanians is that of embracing ideas of fiction any myth, or working to project a new identity and overcome the stigma of being ‘communist Romania’ or ‘Dracula Romania’. Many Romanians do not see these stereotypes as ‘opportunities’ rather as
stigmatic issues they must overcome and forget. Tourism to Romanians is an opportunity to rebuild and regenerate an identity, but the identity that is being presented is in question.

In response to the opportunity of ‘Dracula’ related tourism opportunities many Romanians have developed Romanian-led programs that directly base tourism on the fictional character. Increasing tourism markets using tours, holiday packages and ‘Dracula’ themed destinations such as Castle Bran and the Coroana de Aur hotel in Bistrita were initiated and began a new way for foreigners to experience Romania’s ‘Dracula’ (a central location in the 1898 Stoker novel was situated at the Golden Crown hotel). In fact there were no legitimate connections to Vlad Tepes in these locations, which resulted in some tour operators to enlist historians to ‘make up’ cultural connections to the famous historical figures at these attractions (Pop, et al. 2007).

The idea of a ‘Dracula’ themed park, somewhat like Disneyland, surfaced in 2001 as an economic opportunity to cash in on the growing ‘Dracula’ myth brought in by tourists. The government initially expressed support, in order to present a ‘forward outlook’ that could bring in much needed economic stimulus. Much of the hype surrounding the idea was brought about by a new Tourism minister who in addition to Dracula Park, had decided to build new resorts at the Black Sea, and believed this could ‘revive Romanian tourism’ (Light, 2012). This project was met with problems from the outset, including the legal rights to the name ‘Dracula’ which had been held by Universal Pictures since the 1930’s (Light, 2012). Despite the name, and other issues surrounding historical legitimacy of the proposed site location, the developers set out to move forward on the $31.5 million project (Light, 2012). Many of the marketing campaigns surrounding the park maintained that the idea of ‘Dracula Park’ was ‘100% Romanian’ and it was meant to bolster the economy and ‘cement the association between Romania and Dracula in
the Western popular imagination arguing that ‘Dracula exists whether we want it or not’’ (Light, 2012). The Romanian public met the project with much skepticism and criticism. Many of the questions asked were: ‘What kind of country are we?’ or ‘How do we want the rest of the world to see us?’ One editorial comment example read ‘who else could become expert in a pleasure park on a horror theme than the people who gave the world Dracula and Nicolae Ceausescu?’ (Light, 2012). Churches, business communities, historians, and the general public continued to express their disgust and disdain for such a project, and then international outcry began.

UNESCO, Greenpeace International and even England’s Prince Charles all spoke out about the project stating that this development would have negative cultural, historical and environmental impacts on Romania and would ‘destroy the character of these areas of Romania’ and they could not support such an idea (Light, 2012).

By 2002, the government had received so much opposition to the Dracula theme park project, it had labeled it a ‘scandal’ and stated that it ‘brought about more publicity than anything the tourism industry itself could have done’ (Light, 2012, p 149). In 2004, the project got new attention, a new location and a new price tag at upwards of €70 million, and they had decided to rename the project ‘Snagov Tourism and Pleasure Park,’ which insinuated that it had no connection to Dracula whatsoever. It was discovered that the development project was being managed by a commercial company with close ties to government officials, and it was intended to be a project to ‘enrich the ruling elite’; after subsequent legal determinations they ‘formally annulled’ the project by 2006 (Light, 2012).

The Dracula theme park project is a prime example of the complex issues surrounding today’s tourism sector in Romania. Issues of government corruption, international pressure in the environmental and cultural heritage realms, in addition to the opposing opinions of the public
make it difficult for Romania to both embrace the innovative economic opportunity that the ‘Dracula’ myth may provide, in a way that is more compatible with Romanian cultural identity. Other countries around the world, including Colombia, Italy, South Africa and Germany have developed tourism surrounding disturbing methods of torture methods, controversial historical figures fictional characters and questionable historic events. In Cartagena, Colombia, the Palace of the Inquisition is a regular stop for cruise ship passengers; in Berlin, Germany most visitors make it a point to visit the Berlin Wall memorial or the Holocaust Museum. In South Africa, the unnerving trend of ‘Slum’ tourism, specifically in Soweto, a township outside of Johannesburg has taken shape. ‘Slum’ tourism involves the controversial action of shuttling bus-loads of visitors through the shanty towns of Soweto allowing the foreign tourists to see what it’s like to live in the poorest areas of South Africa. Some argue that this is beneficial for South Africans, as it allows people to see the problems; while other argue that this only turns the South African poor areas into the new type of ‘poverty safari’ (Briedenhann, et al.,2006). Each of these places and types of tourism may be intrinsically morbid or seemingly depressing, however these countries have embraced otherwise negative history and allowed for visitors to view and experience this area of their culture. Many of these countries have many other places to provide a contrasting view of their culture, which allows for a broader tourism experience. It would not seem out of the question for Romania to both embrace the negative aspects of their culture, while also developing new and innovative ways to introduce their cultural identity to visitors.

**Economic Changes**

Tourism in Romania has been low on the priority list of many of the post-communist governments in power in Romania since the ousting of Ceausescu in 1989. Making an effort to maintain social order without destroying the economy has been the central concern, and the
investment into tourism sectors has been minimal. Some of the policies post-1989 have resulted in delay in privatization of accommodations and underinvestment in accommodations, restaurants, basic roads, lack of sufficient airport and road infrastructure to support tourists in the outlying areas of the country. For example, by 2002 only 53 percent of hotels were privately owned in some capacity, and most were neglected to the point of having few or no Western visitors (Light, 2012). A general policy of privatization was implemented, but the change was slow to take place (Table 1). The building of the first major highway system outside of Bucharest was only started in the mid 2000’s and did not fully get funded until 2007 when the European Union provided money to the Romanian transportation fund. Much of the A3 highway system, the Autostrada highway linking Transylvania to Bucharest and other regions to the major population centers, will not be started until late 2014 (Adevarul, 2013).

<table>
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<th>State owned hotels</th>
<th>2000</th>
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<td>406</td>
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<td>176</td>
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<tr>
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<td>35063</td>
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<tr>
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<td>423</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>719</td>
<td>794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corresponding bed places</td>
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<td>69773</td>
<td>72596</td>
<td>129107</td>
<td>125307</td>
<td>128460</td>
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Overall, Romania has lagged behind in tourism in all measurements when compared to other well-known tourist destinations across Europe. In Romania, fewer than 5 million visitors were recorded in arrivals at accommodation sites, as compared with France, Spain, Italy and the U.K. which averaged between 20-45 million visitors between the years of 1993-2005 (Figure 5) (Pop, et al. 2007).
The hotel and restaurant industry represented less than 2% of the investments in Romania for the last 16 years, despite special financing programs provided by the European Union and other international banks (Pop, et al, 2007). The overall contribution of the hotel and restaurant sector to the Romanian GDP has declined steadily between 1995 and 2005, from approximately 3.4% to approximately 2.4% of the total GDP, represented as total inflows and gross added value (Figure 6). Since 1991, hotel and restaurant investment has represented less than 2% of the total economy of Romania, capping at approximately 1.69% (Figure 7).
The development of the tourist industry has been widely ignored, and is evident in the lack of marketing of the potential tourism of Romania. In 2007, Romania ranked 111th in the
world by the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness report, showing a lack of power to reach foreign visitors (Pop, et al., 2007). Some sectors state that the ability to overcome the ‘previous tainted images’ is difficult, and lack of proper management by the Ministry of Tourism has led to neglected opportunities in marketing Romania abroad (Pop, et al., 2007). The political instability of the government has also added to the barriers Romania’s tourism sector faces. In 2007, a complete dissolution of the government coalition, followed by the downgrading of the political status of the Ministry of Tourism and the increase in VAT taxes for the tourism sector to nearly 17% has been seen as a sign that investment into tourism is of little consequence to the Romanian government (Pop, et al., 2007).

In other tourist sectors, including natural scenic and cultural heritage sites, Romania’s attractions have ranked high, however overall tourism is still low according to European tourism review sites like The Observer Escape (Pop, et al, 2007). Natural tourism sites include 234 natural monuments, three biosphere reservations, and 26 natural parks. Romania’s natural wildlife is abundant: it has half of Europe’s bear population and one-third of the wolf and lynx population (Pop, et al., 2007). Romania boasts seven UNESCO World Heritage registered sites and in 2007 the city of Sibiu was designated as the World Cultural Capital (RomaniaTourism.Org, 2013). Other attractions that bring in major visitor populations include The Black Sea region, which sees overcrowding in the busy season and spa tourism in the mountains which is a popular health related activity for many Europeans.

The Romanian culture of ‘hospitality’ is a tradition, and is felt by visitors throughout the country as well as by those living outside of the country and having experiences with native Romanians. This ‘hospitality’ factor is interesting because the general level of quality of service is measured as extremely low in Romania, and seen as a major complaint by foreign tourists.
according to the Romanian National Authority for Tourism studies conducted in 2004 (Pop, et al. 2007). This low level of quality results in fewer visitors and visitor dollars. The contradiction between a traditional cultural norm amongst Romanian’s and the view of foreign visitors is perplexing. One reason why such poor service quality is seen by foreign visitors may lie in the overall attitude of the Romanian government towards tourism as ‘not important’, and the lack of action to change attitudes and actions among government officials is non-existent. Romanian tour companies, hotel and restaurant managers and the general population often see hospitality as important, but their idea of what that hospitality really is, or should be, is not the same as the Western idea of service. For example, when visiting the Hilton Hotel in Sibiu in August of 2012, arriving at 12 a.m., my family and I were notified during check-in that the water to the hotel was completely shut off. There were no working toilets; showers and drinking water were not available. When discussing the situation with the hotel staff there was little to no compassion from the employees, and no estimated time of repair was indicated. When we decided not to stay at the hotel, there was no response from the employees, rather, a distinct disconnect from service and disregard for the situation the hotel was in. This response was shocking from a large, international chain hotel; however upon subsequent stays in the same chain within Romania, it seemed to be the regular occurrence. The opposite was true in Hilton branded hotels in Germany, Czech Republic and Hungary, where we were treated with exceptional service by all employees and managers throughout the hotels.

Often when conversing with Romanian citizens, and those in the service industry specifically, the idea of hospitality is regarded as ‘feeding people and making sure they know where the facilities are,’ as stated by Elina Daniela a Romanian citizen until 2005. In Western culture, hospitality is deemed as ‘warm, friendly, courteous service to guests’; however in
Romanian culture the simple act of providing a meal is considered being ‘hospitable.’ On a recent trip to Cluj-Napoca, a city in northwestern Romania, a group of travelers, all originally from Romania, arrived at a restaurant. When the waiter provided a menu, each of the guests chose their food items, and proceeded to order. When the order was taken, each person was told “we don’t have that item today.” When the guests asked, “well, then, what do you have?” , the waiter replied: “We only have soup and bread.” The guests asked: “why did you give us a menu then?” The waiter said: “If you don’t want to order, then get out of the restaurant. What do I look like? I am not going to go cook you whatever you want!” (Ragalie, 2012)

These kinds of interactions between visitors and Romanian’s are only a small proportion of the daily interactions represented in Romanian tourism. However, it is clear that the Romanian idea of presenting the nature of Romania, and how the visitor perceives Romania are very different. New marketing campaigns aimed at revising the general reputation seen by foreign travelers have been implemented in recent years. The 2004 slogan ‘Romania, simply surprising’ was introduced and is just now entering the market and many tourism companies are hoping that it will overcome Romania’s issues of service quality and negative history (Pop, et al, 2007). Other new marketing and tourism branding opportunities, including the 2007 distinction of Sibiu as the Cultural Capital of Europe, are also helping to drive tourism and provide an alternative image of Romania as a tourist destination (Pop, et al, 2007).

Conclusions

Romania has changed in many ways since the fall of communism in 1989. Struggling to overcome new political and economic freedoms, working alongside Western European countries after joining the European Union in 2007, and overcoming a brutal and devastating past, are just
a few of the challenges facing Romania today. In Casa Poporului, the Dracula legend, and other popular historical and cultural sites, Romania has opportunity to develop a tourism industry on their own terms. The development of the tourism industry has lagged for many reasons, but there is an opportunity for Romanians. Tourism development has also brought visitors in by exploiting history and cultural identity with tours of controversial sites like the Casa Poporului or Bran Castle. In order to understand how the recent fall of communism in Romania, government restructure, economic development, and broader integration into Western culture have impacted the tourism industry in Romania, it is important to look at the historical context of the government and how the new economic system has affected the tourist industry. The infrastructure has been slow to develop, which makes the development of tourism infrastructure difficult. Building and maintaining hotels, restaurants and marketing to foreign visitors is not a priority for the Romanian government. Often Romanians, with little opportunity for work elsewhere, have decided to embrace these controversial attractions and embrace the opportunity for increasing revenue. The pressure that tourists put on Romanians to provide attractions that show them legends like Dracula only make the importance of allowing a ‘true Romanian experience’ more difficult. Romanians are proud of their true history and do want to share that with the world. However, the current discourse of public opinion about how to accomplish their presentation to the world is wide and contradictory.

Many Romanian’s argue that these opportunities are exactly what are needed to move Romania into a prosperous economic arena; while others argue that these opportunities are purely exploitative and shouldn’t be the basis of economic opportunity for Romania today. This gap is seen widely between the young and old generations. While the older generations have experienced much of the past, including terrible conditions under Ceausescu, the younger
generations are exposed to the ideas and opportunities presented by Western visitors and popular culture. Romanians who lived under Ceausescu’s oppressive conditions make note of the brutality they suffered and how hard many of them worked to get themselves out from under communism. The idea of taking a tour of Ceausescu’s palace brings back too many bad memories they are hoping to forget (Daniela, 2012). There are others who think it is a good idea to let everyone know what happened under Ceausescu’s rule, and share it with the world, so that they can inform people and hopefully it won’t be repeated (Ragalie, 2012).

The discourse between the old and young is also echoed by the rural and urban populations. The urban population, centered in Bucharest has greater access to infrastructure, investment and other economic opportunities outside of tourism. There are ways in which they can leave the country, receive education, and find better jobs. The rural populations are struggling to move from an oppressive communist regime in an agrarian system. Much of the rural population lost land under communism. Now that they are on their own financially, they are struggling to provide for their families in the country. Moving to the city is only an option for some Romanians; others must stay in the country and make a living. In addition, the geography of Romania is important. In a physical sense, the natural landscape has helped to shape many of the important tourist sites visited today, and many of the rural areas visited by foreigners remain as they have been seen for hundreds of years, unaffected by development or modernization. In many small villages the horse and cart are widely used by locals; the residents use the river for bathing of their cars, clothes, horses and children; homes have dirt floors instead of modern floor coverings; the town mayor’s home serves as the county courthouse, police station and local community gather hole. These local observations give visitors a completely different view of the
country of Romania today, versus having the landscape changed by communism and seen in the city center of Bucharest.

Romanians are varied in their opinions about their cultural identity. Light observes that ‘Romanians are struggling to define themselves on their own terms, while also dealing with an externally-imposed stereotype’ (Light, 2012, p. 14). Some Romanians have developed industries surrounding fictional characters, and allow for fiction to supersede reality in order to entice visitors. The fictional experiences presented to tourists are often be based in the real experiences with communism.

Current experiences with tourists from around the world, that have their own idea of whom and what Romanians are; change the perspective of the Romanians and how they should present their culture and identity. The influences of foreigners have also changed Romania and its own identity and how this is perceived throughout Europe and the world. Wealthy Romanians have opportunity to leave the country and experience the rest of the world and bring back their own experiences; poor Romanians are struggling with conditions at home including the need to feed their families, and make a living.

Current discourse of change in tourism in Romania focuses on the influence of new visitors to Romania, including those from East and SE Asia. Interesting discussion about marketing to these new visitors, including the advertising of ‘Dracula’ to a continental culture that has no knowledge or understanding of the ‘Dracula’ idea is puzzling (Light, 2007). In contrast, other authors argue that some cultures may be ‘selling out’ in order to capitalize, for many reasons, not all of which include monetary gains (Bunten, 2008). Other areas of discussion rely heavily on the internal struggles of the Romanian government, the influences that are felt
from Western Europe and the European Union, and the changes implemented through the introduction of the E.U. in Romania in 2007 (Butnaru, 2011). Butnaru argues that these changes have been beneficial in areas of economic development and investment of Western European companies in Romania. Alternatively, David Turnock (1999) argues that while many of these changes could be potentially positive, they are often met with little response from the Romanian state. When visiting rural areas of Romania, it is clear that many of these changes are rarely in effect in rural Romania.

The increase of Western visitors have forced Romanians to embrace some parts of their culture that they may not agree with – including fictional characters like Dracula, as well as very real and still recent memories of a brutal communist dictatorship in Ceausescu. While the younger generations see this as a positive, and tend to embrace it, the older generations feel as though they are ‘selling out’, and don’t want to have to embrace these ideas to make a living. In some areas however, this is the only way to make a living. Romanians resort to making folk art of Dracula castles and t-shirts stating ‘Transylvania: Where Vampires Live’ in order to feed their families.

While the introduction of the European Union has changed some issues, like the issuance of E.U. visas and passports; it has also created new ones, like the ability to rent a car in one country, and return in in another (Romania does not allow this, creating a logistical nightmare for tourists in the E.U. wanting to pass through Romania). Romanian government investment in development in the tourist sector is minimal. Romanians are left to pick up the pieces of a failed communist government, while trying to make sense of a new system without the help of a well-developed tourist industry. As author Magdalena Zaborowska, et al. states “...many of those, who “after the fall” found themselves ‘strangers to ourselves’, now live post modern lives
between continents, cultures and academic realms….even immigrants in the West must renegotiate their relationships to the ‘Old Country’,” confirming that the identities of the past in Eastern Europe are changing and these citizens are forced to rethink the true culture of who they really are in the new Romania (Zabrorwska, et al. 2004, p 26). These changes impact daily life, economy and the overall identity of Romanians.

Globalization and the ability for foreigners to travel have impacts and consequences to all Romanians, and are also changing the views of outsiders both in Europe and abroad. Increasing tourism dollars are important, but some of the ways in which Romanians can and do utilize their natural and cultural tourism resources is changing. How the Romanians choose to embrace or develop their tourism industry is yet to be seen.

Romanian identity and the tourism industry are linked, and have to be addressed by the government, including economic investment. In addition the tourism companies can benefit and provide opportunities for the Romanian identity to shine. Just as other European countries have struggled in the past -- like Germany after WWII -- Romania will have to change, grow and develop its tourism sector in its own way. Embracing Ceausescu, allowing tour operators to discuss the tragic and horrible conditions that were present under his reign, will also give outsiders a glimpse at what Romanians have experienced and why they are living in their current conditions; or an explanation of the Dracula myth might enlighten a backpacker in Transylvania for the first time. Each experience in Romania will be unique, but the opportunity for Romania to develop and grow its tourism sector is key. Romania boasts a wide diversity of natural and historical tourist sites and activities and has the opportunity to share those treasures with the world. Acceptance of change, reflecting on the past, sharing experience: these are the ways
Romanian identity and the tourism sector will merge in the future Romania and one day we might see Romania as ‘the’ go-to destination in Eastern Europe.
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