

# Cultural Identity and Tourist Destination Development. A Case Study of the Land of Bârsa (Romania)

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## Abstract

As the competition for the attraction of tourists has become even more intense, tourist destinations and not individual operators are now the main actors operating on the tourist market. This shift in focus has taken place as the tourism transformed itself from a simple recreational activity into a quest for knowledge and discovery due to the growing complexity of tourist' needs and demands.

Today, culture plays an essential part in tourism as it represents the very object of this quest for knowledge that Auliana Poon defines as the "new tourism". The culture of an area, expressed through the cultural identity of its people can become a tourist attraction in itself, thus contributing to the strengthening of tourist destinations' competitive advantage.

The current paper aims to demonstrate the vital role that cultural identity has in the development and promotion of different destinations, showing that when economic, social and demographic changes lead to a dilution of an area's cultural identity, the competitive advantage that the cultural heritage offers is eroded.

**Keywords:** *cultural identity, cultural heritage, competitive advantage, tourist destination*

## Rezumat. Identitatea culturală și dezvoltarea unei destinații turistice. Studiu de caz: Țara Bârsei (România)

În condițiile unei competiții acerbe pentru atragerea turiștilor, destinațiile turistice și nu operatorii individuali au devenit principalii actori pe piața turistică. Schimbarea de roluri pe piața turistică a avut loc pe măsură ce turismul s-a transformat dintr-o simplă activitate de relaxare într-o adevărată misiune de cunoaștere și descoperire, ca urmare a complexității crescânde a cerințelor și nevoilor turiștilor.

Cultura face astăzi, mai mult ca niciodată, obiectul acestei misiuni de cunoaștere, pe care Auliana Poon a denumit-o "noul turism". Cultura unei zone, exprimată prin identitatea culturală a locuitorilor, poate constitui o atracție turistică de sine stătătoare, contribuind la consolidarea avantajului competitiv al destinațiilor turistice.

Lucrarea de față își propune să demonstreze importanța majoră a identității culturale în promovarea și dezvoltarea diferitelor destinații, arătând că, atunci când schimbările economice, sociale și demografice duc la o diluare a identității culturale, avantajul competitiv pe care cultura și patrimonial cultural al unei destinații turistice îl oferă este erodat.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *identitate culturală, patrimoniu cultural, avantaj competitiv, destinație turistică*

## Introduction

In the current economic environment, natural and man built-tourist attraction are no longer sufficient for ensuring the long-term competitiveness of tourist destinations. Tourists are becoming increasingly sophisticated as their requirements expand beyond the provision of personal services, such as accommodation, dining or entertainment.

More than ever, tourists want to learn, to discover, to face new challenges, to explore new cultures, different from the one they belong to and

identify with. This is the "New Tourism", which has long superseded mass, standardized tourism and which Auliana Poon describes as being increasingly focused on consumers and the environment (Poon, 1994, pp.91).

Thus, tourism is no longer an activity that people undertake to satisfy their need for rest and relaxation; tourism has become a quest for knowledge.

However, this demand for knowledge cannot be easily satisfied by one tourist attraction or economic agent alone, which leads companies in the tourism

industry to adopt a common strategy and behave in a coordinated manner.

### Cultural identity and destination competitiveness

When tourism businesses are located in close proximity to each other, the synergies allow individual tourist attractions to form coherent destinations or tourism clusters. It is therefore fair to say that competition in the tourism industry does not occur between countries and neither between companies or attractions, but between destinations or clusters (Porter, 1998, pp.78-80).

The emergence of destinations and clusters does not occur automatically. In order to behave in a coordinated manner, individual attractions and businesses must share common or at least similar resources. These resources can be either physical – such as landscape, climate, flora and fauna – or cultural.

What most successful destinations have in common is however the cultural background or cultural identity, comprising habits and traditions, social structures and mentalities, local people's way of life and work (Adler, 2002, pp. 365).

*A destination's cultural identity is what tourists perceive and remember even after returning home from vacation.* And culture is, indeed, a driving force in multiple forms of tourism: cultural tourism, rural tourism, events tourism, urban tourism (Jelincic, 2002, pp. 3)

Not surprisingly, tourist destinations and ethnographic areas often overlap, Romania making no exception. In fact, the vast majority of Romanian micro-destinations, such as Bucovina, Maramureș, the Prahova Valley, Mărginimea Sibiului, Târnava Mare or the Rucăr-Bran Corridor are actually ethnographic areas with unique cultural backgrounds.

Interesting enough, these are also the destinations known for the practice of sustainable tourism – a tourism which perfectly fits A. Poon's definition. Rural tourism, agritourism, cultural tourism are concepts which place equal emphasis on environmental protection and customer satisfaction.

Although the "new tourism" defined by A. Poon may be developed through the exploitation of both physical and cultural tourist resources, the physical heritage alone is not always enough to satisfy the tourists' permanent desire of knowledge. In this

case, not the physical heritage, but the destination's cultural identity is of primary importance.

This leads us to formulate *Hypothesis 1: between two destinations disposing of equally valuable and diverse physical attractions, a tourist will most likely prefer to visit the destination with the strongest cultural identity.*

Thus, cultural identity is a strong determinant of a destination's medium and long-term competitiveness, directly influencing the direction, frequency and intensity of tourist flows.

Cultural identity cannot however be automatically endorsed by local people within a certain destination. Cultural identity is built and developed in centuries or even millennia of history, as moral values, behavioural patterns and traditions are embraced and reinforced by society.

Similarly, when certain behaviours are no longer perpetuated and when traditions are no longer practiced, cultural identity tends to lose its strength, as local people within a destination no longer identify themselves with the values they once used to hold.

As cultural identity dissipates, as locals no longer consider themselves as belonging to a certain ethnographic area, tourists also tend to lose their interest in the destination's cultural background.

We may thus formulate *Hypothesis 2: An area or community with a weak cultural identity is less likely to be perceived by tourists as a coherent destination but rather as a sum of individual and independent attractions or tourism businesses.*

The destination is, in this case, reduced from an ethnographic area to individual attractions. Ethnographic areas may even cease to exist, as the elements which are fundamental to cultural identity – such as folklore, traditional economic activities or traditions – are forgotten.

### Method

Based on the hypotheses defined above, we will proceed to analyze the case of the Land of Bârsa (in Romanian, Țara Bârsei), a destination which is rarely mentioned in the offers of local tour-operators despite the fact that it encompasses one of the most frequently visited tourist attractions in Romania.

Although a case study alone is not enough to demonstrate the validity of the proposed hypotheses, it does offer a starting point for further

research on the critical success factors of tourist destinations.

Furthermore, we will proceed to present the results of a survey performed in the first half of 2012 on 80 potential consumers of tourism services from the Bucharest-Ilfov development region. The study is supported by statistical data offering an image of the distribution and intensity of tourist flows in the Land of Bârsa in the past few years.

On one hand, the aim is to show that when asked to choose between two or more destinations, a potential buyer will most likely indicate the destination with the strongest cultural identity.

On the other hand, we seek to demonstrate that an area with a weakened cultural identity, such as the Land of Bârsa, is often perceived as a sum of individual tourist attractions or businesses rather than a tourism destination in itself.

This research initiative will most likely continue with further studies on the determinants of destination competitiveness as well as into how cultural identity is measured and perceived.

Thus, we feel that the assumptions on which the current paper is based on are strong enough to set the scene for a much comprehensive analysis of the relation between cultural identity and long-term destination competitiveness.

## **Discussion**

The following sections will thus discuss the challenges faced by an ethnographic area in the south-east of Transylvania in preserving its cultural identity and developing a coherent image on the tourism.

Based on the "Land of Bârsa" case study, we will argue that the way in which a destination and its culture is perceived by its local inhabitants is strongly reflected in the perception that tourist hold about that particular destination.

### **The Land of Bârsa. Historical premises and cultural background**

The Land of Bârsa is the ethnographic area located in the southern sector of the Braşov Basin (in Romanian, Depresiunea Braşovului), in an area of exquisite beauty, being bordered by the Bran-Rucăr corridor and the Piatra Craiului Mountains to the west, the Postăvaru and Piatra Mare Mountains to

the south, the Ciucaş mountains to the south-east, and the Perşani and Baraolt mountains to the north.

The mountainous landscape nearby allowed and even facilitated the appearance and development of two of the largest Romanian ski resorts – Poiana Braşov and Predeal – as well as one training base for winter sports competitions, at Râşnov.

However, the natural landscape is not the Land of Bârsa's only asset. The cultural heritage, extremely rich and diverse is equally important.

Social and economic life in the Land of Bârsa gravitates around the town of Braşov (in German, Kronstadt; in Hungarian, Brassó), a community of more than 200,000 inhabitants, developed in the late Middle Ages by the Saxon settlers established in the south and south-east of Transylvania in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

However, the area is also home to numerous other establishments, either urban – Râşnov (in German, Rosenau), Codlea (Zeiden), Săcele (Siebendorfer) and Zărneşti (Sănescht) - or rural, such as Prejmer (Tartlau), Hărman (Honigberg), Cristian (Neustadt) and Ghimbav (Wiedenbach).

Indeed, the Land of Bârsa is home to some of the earliest human communities in the Carpathian area, with establishments dating back to Palaeolithic. However, the Land of Bârsa is better known for its medieval citadels and fortified churches, built between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century by the German settlers brought in by Andrew the 2<sup>nd</sup>. King of Hungary to protect the far-east borders of the Hungarian Empire against the Turkish and Tartar invasions.

The density of the tourist attractions which are part of the cultural heritage is mainly due to the Land of Bârsa's location at the interference of the German and Hungarian colonization areas in the south of Transylvania, superposed over early Romanian communities.

Thus, the Land of Bârsa is "par excellence" a multicultural area, being known in the past centuries as "little Transylvania".

The Saxon or German population has, in fact, played a major role in the social and economic development of the entire area. The German cultural model has long imprinted itself in the local communities' cultural identity, bringing Romanian and German communities alike together in a unique and highly complex cultural landscape.

This multicultural character is perhaps most obvious in Braşov, a town of culture. While its stone

walls, central square and famous gothic cathedral – the Black Church – date back to the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period when the German population flourished as merchandisers and manufacturers grew wealthier, the Romanians played their own part in shaping the town's development.

Indeed, the Romanian neighbourhood, known as "Șchei" was, starting with the Middle Ages, a capital city for orthodox Romanians in the Land of Bârsa. It is home to one of the oldest and largest orthodox churches in Transylvania, the "St. Nicholas" church and, most importantly, to the first Romanian school and one of the earliest printing centres in Transylvania.

The rural and "small town" cultural landscape is dominated by the peasant fortresses and fortified churches built by the Saxons to protect themselves in times of invasion. Some of these still exist today, as proof of the area's tumultuous past.

The most representative peasant fortress is probably the one in Râșnov, which is, in fact, one of the few Transylvanian fortresses that have never been conquered by the Turks or Tartars. Older but otherwise less known is the fortress in Feldioara, which is believed to have been built by the Teuton knights during one of their earliest incursions in southern Transylvania.

Apart from these peasant fortresses, the villages and small towns are home to some of the largest, oldest and most well-preserved Lutheran churches in Romania. Surrounded by thick stone walls, these churches have been places of worships in times of peace and fortresses in times of war. Unique in Europe, the fortified Saxon churches are among Transylvania's most representative cultural landmarks. In fact, one of the fortified churches in the Land of Bârsa – the church in Prejmer – has been included on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

However, after thousands of Germans from the Land of Bârsa were deported to the Russian gulags in the aftermath of World War 2 and other tens of thousands fled to Germany in the late 1980s and early 1990s, most fortified churches experienced a period of neglect and decay.

As the remaining Germans (less than five hundreds) do not have the resources necessary to restore and preserve the built heritage, many churches are now in danger of collapsing. The churches which are still functional are exploited by local authorities as tourist attractions, although none

of them disposes of information points, specialised tour guides or minimal facilities for tourists.

Only the Black Church and the Church of Prejmer dispose of tourist guides which are able to properly explain to the tourists that Lutheran churches represent an important part of the Saxon cultural model, which is why many visitors still consider that fortified churches are actually of Romanian or Hungarian origin and often leave the Land of Bârsa without being aware of the critical role that Germans played in the development of southern Transylvania. .

Another tragic consequence of the German immigration is the loss of folklore. After some villages were left almost deserted in the early 1990s, unique traditions, such as the Fasching or "Roaina"- festivals of pagan origin taking place in early spring, before the beginning of the Easter Fast - seized to exist.

In some villages, the Romanian population made significant efforts to maintain traditional celebration despite the Saxons' disappearance. However, these efforts have been insufficient to close the cultural gap, as dances, singing, wear, and dishes have been forgotten.

Today, the Junes Parade (in Romanian, Parada Junilor) remains one of the few traditions which is still practiced and perpetuated despite the demographic changes and the passing of time. As some historians indicate that the event has its origins in ancient Dacian celebrations of spring and fertility, the parade stands as proof of the Romanian communities' continuity on Transylvanian soil.

However, as the German population left and people from outside his area settled in Brașov and its surroundings, even the Romanian traditions began to dissipate. The new inhabitants do not always value the culture of the area and are therefore less likely to support, preserve and promote this culture.

In this context, tourism plays an extremely significant role, as it offers people – either locals or immigrants - the economic motivation to exploit the tourist heritage in a manner which is both sustainable and profitable.

Indeed, cultural identity is not a rigid concept but rather a complex of shared values and beliefs which permanently develops and adapts to the demographic structure of the local communities.

### Distribution and intensity of tourist flows in the Land of Bârsa

With Braşov as its capital town, the Land of Bârsa attracts a significant number of tourists. In fact, despite the fact that 2009 marked a decrease in the total number of arrivals as a consequence of the generalized economic crisis, 2010 and 2011 were characterized by increasing tourist flows (Fig. 1).

Furthermore, although the land of Bârsa occupies a territory whose surface is less than half of that of Braşov County – a county which also includes the Făgăraş, Bran and Rupea-Cohalm ethnographic areas – it accounts for more than 80 percent of the total number of tourist arrivals in the county.

However, statistical data show that the distribution of tourist flows within the destination is extremely unequal.

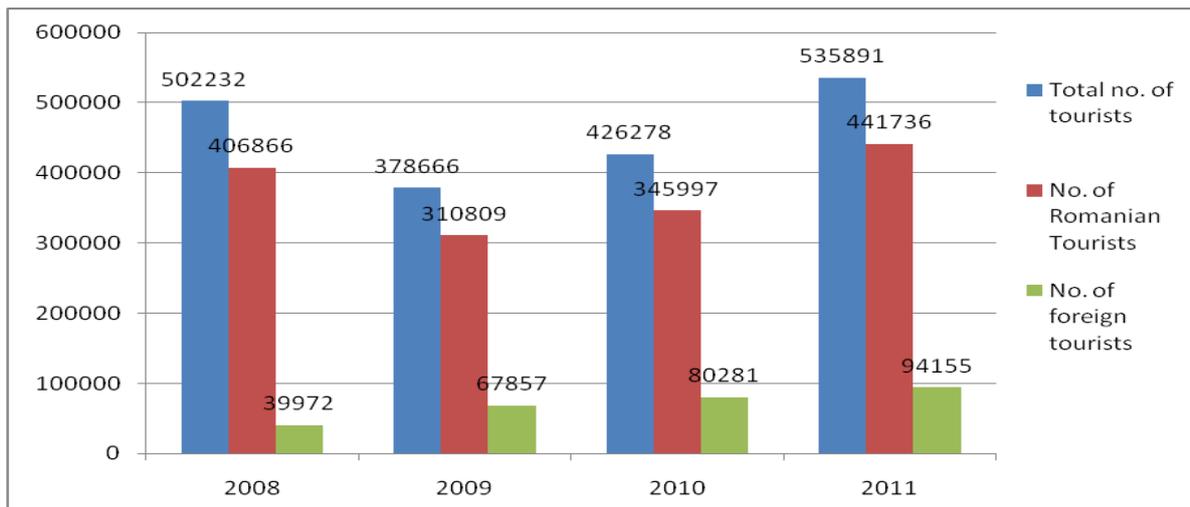


Fig. 1: The evolution of tourist arrivals in the Land of Bârsa, 2008-2011

Source: Braşov County Direction of Statistics, 2012

Thus, out of the 536 thousand tourist arrivals in 2011, approximately 200 thousand (40 percent of all tourist arrivals) were registered in Braşov, the Land of Bârsa’s capital town, while 116 thousand (21 percent) were registered in Poiana Braşov and over 130 thousand (25 percent) in Predeal. Thus, 80 percent of all tourist arrivals in the Land of Bârsa are concentrated in only three localities, two of which are winter resorts.

Figure 2 clearly shows that other localities which dispose of an extremely valuable cultural heritage register less than 5 percent of the total number of tourist arrivals in the Land of Bârsa.

In fact, only 780 tourists are accommodated each year in Prejmer, a UNESCO World Heritage site which is one of the last communities in Transylvania still hosting the “Fasching”, a typical Saxon festival which takes place every year, before the beginning of the catholic Easter fast. At the same time, the town of Râşnov, with its famous peasant fortress, registers less than 8000 tourist arrivals per year.

Thus, in spite of its rich and diverse cultural heritage, few tourists in the Land of Bârsa actually visit other tourist attractions except for the town of

Braşov and the Poiana Braşov and Predeal winter resorts.

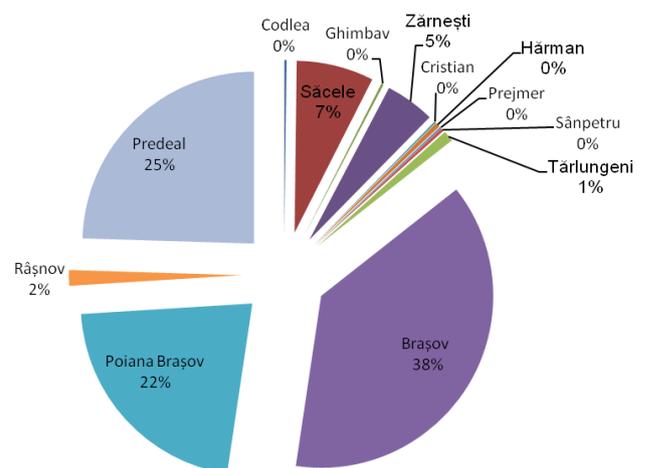


Fig. 2: The distribution of tourist arrivals in the Land of Bârsa, 2011

Source: Braşov County Direction of Statistics, 2012

Even though the number of tourists in the Braşov County and in the town of Braşov is actually increasing, other original attractions

remain largely unknown to many visitors, as the destination's cultural identity is little promoted on the tourism market.

### Cultural identity and tourist perception

On the basis of the two hypothesis introduced in the beginning of the paper, a questionnaire research was conducted on 80 potential tourists from the Bucharest-Ilfov region – a region which represents the area of residence for more than half of the tourists visiting the Land of Bârsa.

The goal of the research was to determine the visitor's perception with regard to the destination's attractiveness, as well as their knowledge of the area's cultural identity and attractions.

When asked to indicate five localities of tourist appeal, most respondents named Brașov (80 respondents), Râșnov (64 respondents), Predeal (40 respondents), Prejmer (32 respondents), which point out that, on one hand, tourist are usually attracted to larger and widely-promoted communities, while on the other hand they are unfamiliar with other localities which – although smaller in size – dispose of a diverse and rich cultural heritage.

In what regards individual tourist attractions, all 80 respondents indicated the Black Church and the Râșnov citadel as the most representative attractions in the Land of Bârsa (Table 1). Other popular points of interest mentioned by respondents are the Brașov Citadel (in Romanian, Cetățuia Brașov), the Council Square (Piața Sfatului) and the Council Hall (Casa Sfatului) and the First Romanian School, which suggests that the attractions located within the town of Brașov tend to prevail in the tourists' preferences with regard to the Land of Bârsa destination.

**Table 1. Most popular tourist attractions in the Land of Bârsa (multiple answers)**

Tourist attraction	No of. respondents
Black Church	80
Râșnov Citadel	80
Brașov Citadel	36
Rope Street (Strada Sforii)	9
Poiana Brasov	18
Council Hall	27
First Romanian School	18
Prejmer fortified church	9

Source: Results obtained by the author after the completion and analysis of questionnaires

In fact, the only tourist attractions situated outside Brașov and which was indicated as of major

importance by more than 5 respondents is the Râșnov Citadel.

As far as the cultural events are concerned, 60 percent of all respondents were not able to indicate any cultural event taking place in the Land of Bârsa, which leads us to believe that local cultural events – although unique – remain largely unknown outside the Brașov County.

Out of the 32 respondents (40%) which did indicate a cultural event, 30 mentioned the Junes Parade (in Romanian, Parada Junilor), while one respondent indicated the GHOST festival in Râșnov and another one a music festival.

Although the Brașov Metropolitan Development Agency and the Brașov Sustainable Development Agency are currently implementing two projects with the aim of promoting the cultural tourist heritage in the Land of Bârsa – each having a budget of approximately 1 million Euros - only 5 out of the 80 respondents are familiar with these projects.

The results of the research clearly show that few potential tourists and visitors are familiar with attractions such as the fortified churches or with the traditions and customs typical to communities in the Land of Bârsa. Of course, this problem may be attributed to numerous causes.

We can argue however that a factor of major importance is that locals within the Land of Bârsa do not identify themselves anymore with the destination's cultural heritage. Taking into account the historical premises described in the previous section, we may argue that due to the fact that a large part of this cultural heritage was built and developed by the German community in the south of Transylvania, the disappearance of this community had lead to the weakening of the destination's cultural identity.

Inevitably, the current inhabitants of the Land of Bârsa do not feel culturally connected to many of the tourist attractions within the destination and therefore do not have an intrinsic motivation to promote or exploit them in any way. This is particularly true for the fortified churches, which, in spite of their unique character and historical values remain unknown to many Romanian tourists.

Furthermore, more than half of the respondents claimed that although they did visit Brașov, they were not aware of the fact that the town and its surroundings are part of an ethnographic area known as the Land of Bârsa. In fact, 57 of the 80 respondents (71%) consider that the Land of Bârsa does not have a

coherent image on the tourism market, as it is not yet perceived as a destination in itself, but rather as a collection of unrelated attractions.

Therefore, we feel that the Land of Bârsa does confirm our second hypothesis: *an area with a weakened cultural identity is likely to be perceived by tourists not as an independent destination, but rather as a sum of individual tourist attractions or tourism businesses.*

Last but not least, one goal of the research was to determine the comparative advantage of the Land of Bârsa. Respondents were provided with four pairs of destinations – each destination located at relatively similar distances from the Bucharest-Ilfov region – and were asked to vote or to select from each pair one destination they would like to spend their vacation in. The results are provided in Table 2.

**Table 2 Comparative advantage of tourist destinations**

Pair of destinations	No. of votes	
	Land of Bârsa	Destination 2
Land of Bârsa – Bran-Rucăr corridor	48	32
Land of Bârsa – North Oltenia	62	18
Land of Bârsa – Târnava Mare (Sighișoara-Viscri area)	34	46
Land of Bârsa – Prahova Valley	55	25
Land of Bârsa – Sibiu and its surroundings (Mărginimea Sibiului)	33	47

Source: Results obtained by the author after the completion and analysis of questionnaires

Thus, if faced with the situation of choosing between two tourist destinations, most tourists would choose the Land of Bârsa over the Bran-Rucăr area, Prahova Valley and North Oltenia, but not over Târnava Mare and Sibiu and its surroundings. Not surprisingly, these later destinations are particularly well-known for their cultural heritage and for their well-preserved traditional life-style, cultural events, shared values and beliefs.

The Târnava Mare area is particularly important as it emerged on the national and European tourism market relatively recently, due to the efforts of two non-governmental organizations functioning under the patronage of HRH Prince Charles. However, not Prince Charles' contribution is surprising, but the fact that the area managed to revive itself out of its own ashes.

Despite the fact that the number of Saxon inhabitants in Târnava Mare significantly decreased in the past two decades, the remaining population understood that the exploitation of the cultural heritage is the only chance they have for ensuring the community's survival and development. As a consequence, locals reaffirmed their culinary traditions, their songs and dances, their traditions and values in an effort to attract tourists, both national and foreign.

The results have been more than positive. Largely unknown until 2005, Târnava Mare became a competitive tourist destination, highly recognised and appreciated for its cultural heritage – which, in fact, stood at the heart of the “Wild Carpathia” 2011 documentary.

Giving the fact that the Land of Bârsa, the Târnava Mare plateau and the Sibiu basin dispose of similar cultural resources – medieval Saxon burghs, fortified churches, picturesque villages and diverse traditions – the results of the research point to a comparative disadvantage that the Land of Bârsa holds with respect to its main competitors.

We may therefore conclude that in the case of the Land of Bârsa, the first hypothesis also proves valid. *Between two destinations disposing of equally valuable and diverse physical attractions, a tourist will most likely prefer to visit the destination with the strongest cultural identity.*

## Conclusion

The discussion above points to the fact that the loss of a destination's cultural identity may lead to a decrease in the area's competitiveness on the tourism market. Although this loss might be inevitable in some cases, being caused by major demographic changes or changes in a population's cultural model, it is not necessarily irreversible. In fact, the Târnava Mare area stands as a clear proof of the fact that cultural identity can be rediscovered, redeveloped, redefined and reaffirmed, both internally as well as externally.

However, cultural identity cannot strengthen itself automatically. Action needs to be taken on multiple levels, within a close partnership between local state tourism agencies, private enterprises and civil society representatives.

One measure towards the redefining of the Land of Bârsa's cultural identity would be the promotion under a single brand of all the cultural attractions

within the destination. This idea is not new however, as it has already been proposed by the Braşov Metropolitan Development Agency, which is currently working to develop the brand "Legends of the Land of Bârsa".

But although the projects is in its third year of implementation, only 3 out of the 80 respondents taking part in our study were familiar with this brand, which draws attention to the efficacy and efficiency of promotion efforts.

Not surprisingly, very few respondents were able to identify cultural events taking place in the Land of Bârsa; as a matter of fact, except for the Junes Parade, no other festival is promoted online and offline to potential tourists. Celebrations, such as the Fasching in Prejmer, Roaina in Cristian or the Shooting of the Cock in Apața are not promoted to potential tourists in Romania and abroad and are therefore known only locally.

Thus, a coherent and comprehensive promotion strategy is highly needed. An important step in the implementation of this strategy would be the creation and development of tourist information and promotion centres in the proximity of cultural tourist attractions.

This need is considerably stringent as the Land of Bârsa currently disposes of only 4 information centres, of which two are located in Braşov, one in Predeal and the other one in the Râşnov Citadel.

There is no information centre in the Prejmer area – despite of the existing UNESCO World Heritage site – and not even an information point in localities such as Sânpetru, Hărman or Cristian, which encompass some of the most complex and valuable fortified churches in the south of Transylvania.

One role that these tourist information and promotion centres could have is the development of thematic trails and tourist products.

For example, in the Land of Bârsa, thematic trails focusing on the exploitation of the local cultural identity could be the Fortified Churches Trail, the Spring Festivals Trail or the Peasant Fortresses Trail (the later could encompass the Râşnov Citadel and Feldioara fortress, but also the Rupea fortress and the Bran castle so as to offer tourists a more comprehensive image on the local inhabitants' life in the Middle Ages).

Furthermore, tourists and information centres can work with local incoming travel agencies to develop and promote cultural tours. In the case of the Land of Bârsa, the surface of the area is small enough to allow the development of one-day cultural tours, complementary to other forms of tourism, such as winter sports tourism, adventure tourism or even business tourism.

These tours are the so-called "optional programmes" which are highly demanded in southern and Western Europe but little promoted in emerging countries. One condition that needs to be satisfied in order for these programmes to positively contribute to the revival of a destination's cultural identity is to actively involve local inhabitants, offering them a real long-term motivation for preserving their traditions, wear and architecture.

It is thus apparent that although the loss of cultural identity might have negative consequences on a destination's competitiveness, this loss is not irreversible. In fact, if the culture and cultural heritage of an area or community is properly promoted and exploited, it can become a driving force of the new, sustainable tourism and a source of long-term competitive advantage.

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