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Codrin Dinu Vasiliu and Ioan Sebastian Bruma

Iași branch of Romanian Academy, ICES „Gh. Zane”, Iași branch of Romanian Academy, ICES „Gh. Zane”

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THE DISCURSIVE BRAND ANALYSIS OF THE ACCOMMODATION UNITS FROM THE TOURISTIC BASIN OF SUCEVIȚA (BUKOVINA REGION, ROMANIA)

CODRIN DINU VASILIU¹,
IOAN SEBASTIAN BRUMĂ²

Abstract: *In the rural areas where there is an economic potential clearly defined by the agricultural or commercial activities, tourism is the business key within reach. Under the circumstances, the socio-economic reflex takes the form of developing projects for tourist services, especially in the places with tourist potential. Further, the local economy, at least with respect to the private initiative, advances towards agritourism.*

In the present study we aim to run a discursive analysis of the presentation messages offered by 54 accommodation units from the touristic basin of Sucevița. Making an inventory of the online messages (own sites and platforms for touristic services) we could identify 24 key concepts (keywords and key phrases) and starting from their occurrences within the identity narratives of the accommodation units we have analysed their relationship with the supra themes and the themes belonging to the local and regional brand. Further on, we have outlined the general profile of the accommodation units and the profile of the target group as they appear in their presentation discourses. The relationship between these two profiles reveals strong brand connections but also shows some fractions which can be mended. To repair these inconsistencies, we provide a few handy recommendations in formulating medium and long-term strategies of development in the rural tourism.

Keywords: *discursive analysis, rural touristic unit, brand, Sucevița, Bukovina*

JEL Classification: *Z32, Z13, M31, O18*

INTRODUCTION

The present study is part of a research enterprise which aims to advance new digital technologies for the brand of the rural touristic unit in the North-East Development Region. The content of this intervening introduces an early research stage defined by the discursive analysis of the identity narrations suggested by the rural touristic units from Sucevița in the hospitality economy. Further we aim to identify the valences and fractures within the identity discourses and the captivation discourses for the beneficiaries 'audience.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In the context of economic analysis and from a methodological point of view, the discursive analysis requires a double reduction. On one side, it closes the interpretation inside a discourse which makes hardly possible to perform the classic economic analysis and, on the other side, it evades any straightforward position related to the socio-economic reality as reference point of the analyzed discourse. On these (guide)lines we cannot avoid the following question: is there any methodological legitimacy for a discursive analysis in the field of an economic analysis? Is it both justified and efficient such an interpretation enterprise/ enterprise of interpretation? In the inter-disciplinary space, we are opening into the field of economic research, the discursive analysis assumes that success in communication generates plus value from an economic point of view too. At least on medium and long term, a socially efficient communication can contribute to the economic growth. This assumption cannot be methodologically overturned/ overtaken and the present paper fully takes responsibility for it. Under the circumstances the enterprise legitimacy is based on its exploratory nature. For a start, the justification is rather more interesting than necessary and sufficient.

Regarding the working space of the research, the identity brand analysis of the touristic units from the region mentioned earlier will have supra reference themes, namely Bukovina regional brand (South Bukovina located on nowadays Romanian territory) Sucevița local brand. Thus, we shall

¹ Codrin Dinu Vasiliu, Senior Researcher, Iași branch of Romanian Academy, ICES „Gh. Zane”, codrindinuvasiliiu@gmail.com

² Ioan Sebastian Brumă, Senior Researcher, Iași branch of Romanian Academy, ICES „Gh. Zane”, sebastianbruma1978@gmail.com

identify the key themes, phrases and concepts starting with the identity discourses as they are promoted in the online on own sites or intermediary platforms for touristic services. However, it should be specified that our intervening is not attempting to certify or deny the validity of the discourses analysed. Our interest is solely based on understanding the paradigm where the rural tourism of Sucevița positions itself, whenever formulating its identity, activity, and touristic offer.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The regional brand of Bukovina. From an identity point of view, Bukovina identifies itself with two main themes: the relationship with the historical region of Moldavia and assuming the influences inherited during the Austro-Hungarian administration (1774 - 1918). In the matter of the former, Bukovina assumes the Moldavian tradition essentially on a spiritual line but also delimitates itself away from the Moldavian lifestyle, especially in matters of private life organization where many Austro-Hungarian influences are still preserved. Thus, Bukovina is nowadays the characteristic discourse of multi-culturalism generating specific identity features. In this connection, the cultural legacy in Bukovina is strongly assumed and seconded by an identity discourse with conservative notes in the sense of preserving and protecting the traditional values.

Considering the touristic economy, Bukovina has surpassed the subsistence stage of the rural tourism (where the rural household used to supplement its income by running touristic activities without a clear business strategy developed on medium and long term), a situation characteristic of the period between 1990 and 2000. The touristic activities have an increasing enterprising character and are turning into actual business projects. A simple evidence of this state of facts is that accommodation facilities offered involve larger investments than the previous ones.

The local brand of Sucevița. The brand of Sucevița touristic basin is focused on the brand of Sucevița monastery. Sucevița commune is barely visible in the Romanian tourists imaginary due to that fact that Sucevița monastery is one of the most important ones from North Moldavia. Concurrently, compared to other touristic basins in the area, Sucevița commune is not located on an intensively transited route and does not have the modern facilities for outdoor sports (especially, winter sports, as for instance, Gura Humorului possesses). Therefore, the brand's notes are determined by a religious building and by a sense of belonging to Bukovina region characterized by the following features: historical heritage, traditional gastronomy, bucolic natural landscape, and crafts (especially those related to wood crafting and traditional pottery). For running a discursive analysis, it was developed a database with the identity narratives presented by 54 accommodation units from the touristic basin of Sucevița. The units have been identified by using Google maps, their own sites, and online intermediary platforms for touristic service promotion. Within the analysed discourses there have been identified 24 keywords and phrases which conclude the semantics of the identity narratives of the 54 touristic rural units. In the chart below (fig. no. 1), we introduce the frequency of appearance, on a general basis, of these keywords and phrases as decisive notes within the paradigm of the analysed discourses.

Their occurrences generate sufficient justifications for initiating a paradigmatic interpretation of the way rural touristic units choose to formulate their identity discourse and profile of the target group. Hereunder we shall analyse those themes which determine the profile of the rural touristic unit from Sucevița region and the tourist's profile targeted.

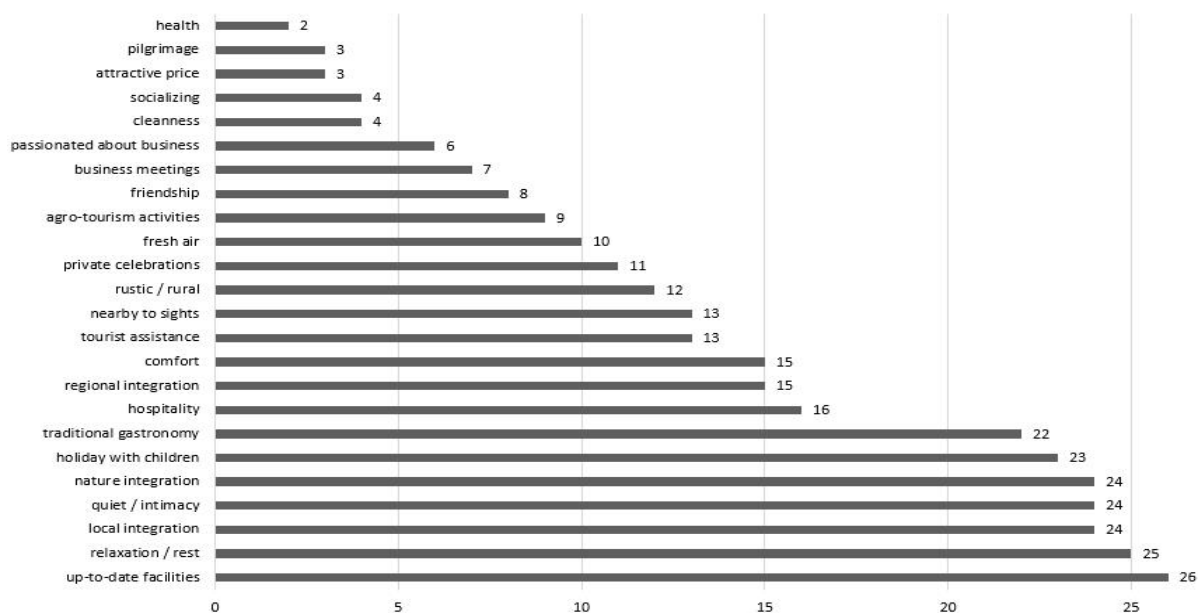


Fig. no. 1. The occurrences of the key phrases for 54 rural guesthouses from the touristic basin of Sucevița (Bukovina - Romania)

Regional integration (15 occurrences). The integration in the regional brand is achieved by simple references without engaging into a discursive relationship of reciprocal transfer of semantics and rhetorical value. At the same time, the nowadays context of touristic economy is barely visible. Although the Romanian tourists manifest a growing interest in the zones with an already known brand but less previously visited (Maramureș, Bukovina and so on), the accommodation units take too little advantage of the regional brands when promoting their own message. There are also some positive aspects. The brand of Bukovina, for instance, is drawing attention again and is not fundamentally determined by its religious component as it is rather defined by its cultural value and the opportunity of relaxation and leisure in bucolic surroundings. However, the touristic basin of Sucevița is not nu a fully -developed zone which could constitute an advantage for a sustainable and lasting tourism.

Local integration (24 occurrences). Although there are many units that tick the box of this theme, the tone used is usually a neutral one and rather informative as the discourse merely specifies the geographical position in Sucevița commune or the directions to the accommodation unit. Only 5 units refer to the local brand of Sucevița (“the beautiful Sucevița”, “the famous Sucevița monastery” and so on). The integration in the local brand is done directly, missing rhetorical devices and a clear recognition of the values included in the Sucevița supra brand.

Up-to-date facilities (26 occurrences). At first sight the value of “up-to-date facilities” should not have thematic features in the case of an identity discourse. We cannot see it under the species of a key phrase coming from an ideological engagement. On the contrary, the appurtenance may look more than ordinary: the “facilities” phrase is used by the digital platforms for touristic services and, consequently, slowly but gradually is gaining ground in the common language of accommodation units. It is about a mimesis phenomenon, a simple imitation. A quasi-standardized grid of utilities under the facilities class is entering the common language of accommodation units by taking the form of a cliché classification and it is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid it or, more creatively, improvise within its limits. The accommodation unit should be careful enough to merely tick the categories which are representative in its case. Thus, we could believe that “facilities” is nothing else but a discursive constant in the concept field and does not involve rhetorical engagement. As a result, “modern facilities” would be a minimal, rather insignificant extension and would refer to the simple fact that the utilities are up-to-date. Yet, the phrase “modern facilities” is becoming interesting by the relationships expressed towards the following key themes, at least: traditional values and return to nature (or to a lifestyle with a high degree of nature integration). Thus, at the very moment the accommodation units (at least, the category 3 of classification: stars or daisies) advertise their modernization, they specify their dedication to the traditional values of the place and

position in the natural surroundings of the region. The identity discourse is keen to make all these additions as a matter of urgency as if there is a question of direct consequence or successful adjustment. On the other hand, within the same context, the tourist units under category 3 subsidiarily state the modern state of their facilities by resorting to concepts of close semantics (comfort, cleanness) or by supplementary messages (“everything is at your disposal”, “you will not miss one thing”). In return, the same units rely on the rustic feature understood as direct access to tradition and nature integration. The conclusion is not too far from the idea that tourist units conceptualize a type of tourism capable of high-standard comfort demanded by the modern guest but related to a tourism capital made available by the access to tradition and integration within natural environment. This philosophy may appear a small paradox to some extent (and it is itself that rejects some purist categories of tourists). But it can also generate significant economic effects because it mainly addresses to those “always on a rush from the big cities” who can bring important financial resources in the tourist basin of Sucevița.

Integration in nature (24 occurrences), **Relaxation / Rest** (25 occurrences), **Quiet/ Intimacy** (24 occurrences). The analysed discourses support a rustic or bucolic type of integration within the natural environment. Whenever nature is subject of discussion, these discourses refer to an unaltered world where the human factor blends in a sustainable and lasting manner. The discourses have, most of the time, an arty sentimental tone and resort to a certain idyllic naïve language which reminds of the wooden language used for nature integration: “the murmur of water”, “the rustle of woods”, “a fairylike location”, “a slice of heaven”, “at the foot of the forest”, promising “a dreamlike stay”, “away from the hustle and bustle of the city”. The theme is also supported by the invitation to “relaxation”/ “rest” (25 occurrences) and “quiet”/ “intimacy” (24 occurrences). These key concepts are closely connected to the theme of remoteness far from the madding crowd and city turmoil. Thus, the tourist units suggest a recuperation tourism with little reference to outdoor activities and fully employing the resources of relaxation which provide integration in nature and the rustic monotonous character of the area. Concurrently, it cannot go unnoticed that merely 10 discourses refer to “fresh air” and other two mention “health”. These concepts contain an energy of concept reinforcement of nature integration but are barely used.

Holiday with children (23 occurrences). The theme often appears in the case of tourist units of 1 and 2 classification (stars or daisies). These units mostly target groups (families or friends) with children. Nevertheless, only 8 units specify their availability for agro-tourism activities which also contain an educative element.

Traditional gastronomy (22 occurrences). Although 22 units refer to traditional gastronomy, merely 4 of them specify explicitly the categories, recipes, or names of local traditional gastronomical products. The discourse is rather general, lacking examples and auxiliary media materials.

Hospitality (16 occurrences). The hospitality is stated by 16 accommodation units and usually associated with the soul of a place. The rhetorical discourse customarily appeals to the friendship semantics and proves that the target group is mainly constituted by tourists who are potentially coming back in the area.

Pilgrimage (3 occurrences). Although the tourist zone of Sucevița serves as a pole for religious tourism, few guesthouses have a pro-active promotion of the religious tourism. A certain hold-back can be sensed regarding their affiliation (especially agro-tourism guesthouses) with this type of tourism. Surprisingly, a secularization phenomenon of the relationship between tourism business and religious life emerges in Bukovina. A possible explanation lies in the limited economic possibilities traded by the common pilgrim in the region, either due to a frugal alimentary behaviour (pilgrims usually fast) or because most pilgrims are engaged in a transitory tourism. Another explanation lies in the fact that during local the feasts of titular saints the zone becomes overcrowded and advertising this segment proves unnecessary. The pilgrim is no longer the very tourist of the tourist basin of Sucevița, although one of the most significant visitation pivots is represented by Sucevița monastery. The target group belongs to the middle class of young age and scarcely sensitive to the religious connotation of the place but open to discover the secular identity of the place. To that

purpose, 13 units state their activity on tourist assistance for visitation and the same number specifies their near-by location to the important tourist sights in the region.

Attractive price (3 occurrences). The price is not exactly a theme employed in the rhetoric of the promotion discourses. Only 3 tourist units advertise the idea of a good deal. This position can be interpreted in view of two perspectives. Either the tourist unit believes that it offers quality services at a fair price or the target group of limited financial resources is not taken into consideration.

CONCLUSIONS

Starting from the above-mentioned interpretations, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. The guesthouses come up with a socio-reality with the following configuration: a remote place apart from the artificial life of daily life from the urban environment, a timeless capsule open to nature, monasteries and other sights, a bubble filled with positive energy that operates a transfer of vitality to the tourist.

2. The pivot concepts for the introduction discourse of the accommodation units from rural tourism in Sucevița are as follows:

- The up-to-date status of the accommodation facilities with reference to the quality of services, comfort and hospitality.
- The rest and relaxation as opposed to the daily city life burdened by stress and work.
- The integration in the special geography of the place with reference to the cultural aspects, sights, and beauty of the landscape.
- The nature integration of the guesthouse either by location (a remote natural place) or by immediate access to such zones.
- The quiet with reference to isolation and intimacy in contrast with the daily city life.
- The traditional gastronomy as important tourist resource.
- Family holiday with plenty of fun opportunities for children as well.

3. In contrast, the most least interesting aspects of the identity discourse of the guesthouses are as follows:

- The price presentation as an attractive deal.
- The explicit integration within the pilgrimage phenomenon. Although there are many references to monasteries and phrases of the place integration in the monasteries' area, they are often rhetorically capitalized as cultural historical sights and less as religious destinations.

4. Thus, the profile of the accommodation unit from the tourist basin of Sucevița is the following: generally speaking, we are dealing with a rural guesthouse which pursues a modern approach of the traditional values. It aims to provide, in a hospitable and familiar manner, comfort, quiet, rest and traditional gastronomical experiences in a natural and integrated place within the local particularities for the tourist who comes from urban zones and mostly wishes to take refuge in a place of relaxation and rest.

5. On this line it becomes gradually clearer that the profile of the target group is as follows:

- Adults between 30 and 50 years old
- Persons who mainly come from urban zones with a high economic potential
- Persons with sufficient financial resources not to worry about spending
- Persons who wish to have local cultural experiences
- Persons who are not willing to try outdoor activities
- Persons who are willing to come back to the visited place
- Persons interested in the local traditional gastronomy

In this context, there are a few fractures in the branding strategies of the guesthouses in the region. As long as the profile of the target group is the one mentioned above, we recommend to the managers of the accommodation units a series of medium and long-term actions as follows:

1. to supplement their services;
2. to refine their identity discourses;
3. to improve their techniques of branding and promotion.

Tourist services. A prime issue relates to the diversity of the tourist offer. Generally, guesthouses offer similar services (see chart no.2). The difference resides in the hospitality rhetoric (supported by online reviews and direct advertising by word of mouth), modernism degree of facilities (similarly, supported online by reviews and direct promotion), culinary experience and hazard elements (individual experiences of the tourists influenced by various positive or negative events). There are few exceptions in the matter of offers that convey a high degree of singularity and creativity. The specialized and highly specialized tourism attracting important incomes does not exist here yet. The regional and local brand, due to the fact that are very well-known, generate a sort of inertia that almost forces the local brands to have a captive relation with the traditionalising discourse of the place. At the moment, maybe this aspect is not sensed as a negative one. On the contrary. There are still plenty opportunities of economic capitalization in the discursive capital of the traditional values promoted. However, on medium and long-term things can turn complicated in the case of the guesthouses opposing the offer diversification.

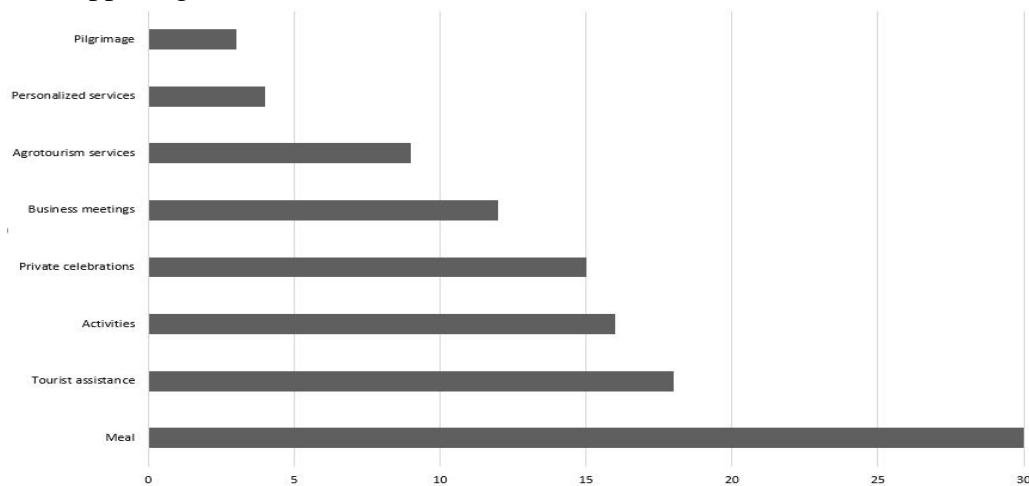


Chart no. 2. The occurrence of the services stated by the 54 accommodation units from the tourist basin of Sucevița

Branding. At least, as it appears online, the introduction discourse of the accommodation units is generally emotionally precious with familiar notes and often resorting to a wooden language (see chart no.3). It also does not have a dynamic and efficient relationship with the local and regional brand. Thus, the local sights should be promoted in an attractive and explicit manner. The same applies to the traditional gastronomy (with reference to the local products and recipes), creative industries, the lifestyle from Bukovina and Sucevița. At the same time, the accommodation units should know they are vectors and catalysers of promotion which are able to connect with local producers and thus develop the short chains of supply. The development of the individual, local and regional brands should take place in an integrated way by reciprocal promotion and by identifying a common addressing discourse. Concurrently, the modernisation of the sites belonging to the accommodation units is a real necessity in view of message (text and online material), applications and design with impact in matters of accessibility and usability.

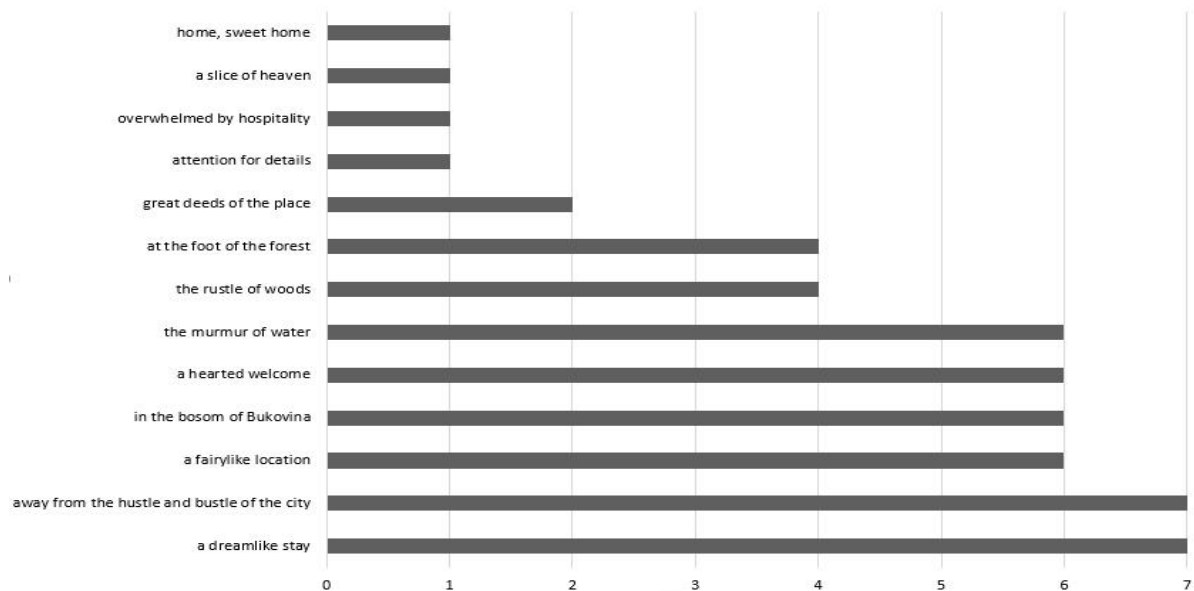


Chart no. 3. The occurrence of the most frequent phrases used in the promotion discourse of the 54 accommodation units from the tourist basin of Sucevița

Digital integration. On the whole, we are dealing with the following deficiencies:

- 36 accommodation units do not have their own site;
- out of the 18 existent sites only 6 use dynamic web solutions;
- only 4 sites are responsive and can be accessed from mobile;
- only 3 have an attractive design and out of them just 1 has a strong media integration;
- only 5 have integration applications for the digital maps;
- only 7 have integration applications for social networks;
- only 6 have applications for multi-linguistic applications;
- none has a HTTPS protocol (for safe accessing);
- only 6 have an optimum accessing speed for desktop devices;
- only 4 have an optimum accessing speed from mobile devices;
- only 6 provide information about contact and proximity in the area;
- only 3 have obtained a high score on performance, accessibility and use of best practice.

The overall digital situation for the 54 accommodation units is catastrophic. There is not a durable and sustainable digital integration. The possible explanations can be substantiated on lack of:

- financial resources for developing high-tech web products,
- identity message, coherent for promotion,
- confidence in the marketing value of their own sites.

However, the target group, as it has been identified in our analysis, is profoundly anchored in the digital world related to accessing information to make decisions. Thus, the message promotion among the tourists belonging to the target group is not an efficient one. Even if the business appears to function under satisfactory parameters, the perspectives of growth are rather limited.

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