

CONSUMING THE PAST. THE COMMODIFICATION OF HERITAGE IN THE TÂRNAVA MARE REGION

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Background and Objectives

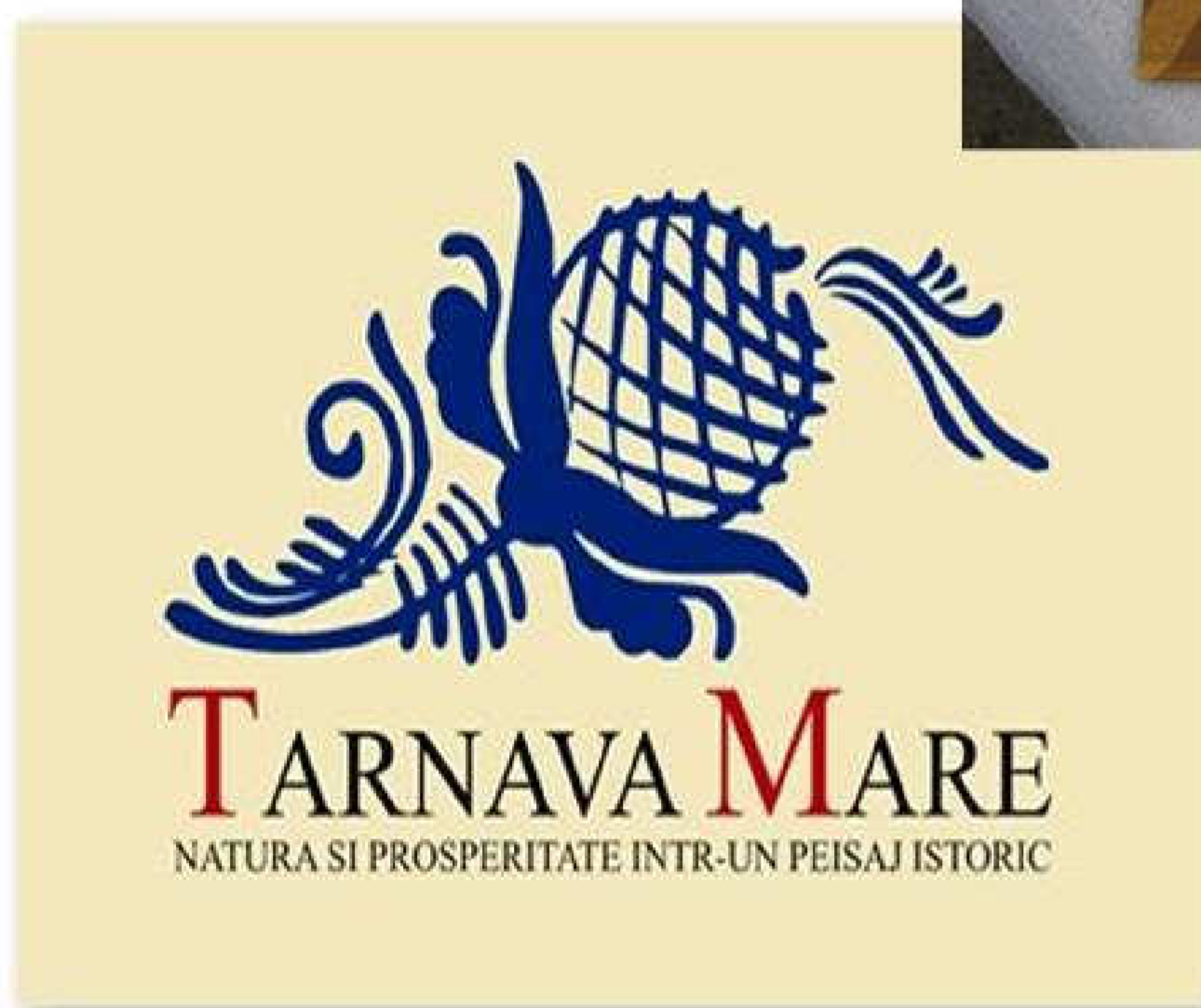


Fig. 1. The Târnava Mare brand logo. The slogan reads "Nature and prosperity in a historical landscape". The featured plant was chosen from the local natural heritage.

The proposed research focuses on the processes of local identity building supporting the emergence of a regional tourism brand, TÂRNAVA MARE, now home to several of Romania's UNESCO World Heritage Sites – the Saxon fortified rural churches (*Kirchenburgen*) – and appreciated as a **cultural landscape** (comparable through its practices with the more consecrated vineyard landscapes).

Argument

The local branding process aggregates a network of stakeholders around the Saxon region, triggered in a national context of public agenda debates on local development, decentralisation, but also national identity, country branding (the post EU accession years).

The research questions reflect on the agents and phenomena contributing to the emergence of a local brand and market for authenticity, past and landscape:

How is the interaction between local and international actors and knowledge fluxes shaping the patrimonialisation process?

How does the added value of Saxonness as symbolic capital contribute to the production and consumption of locality in Târnava Mare?

To what extent do the selection and promotion of landscape, past, experiences and products blend into a regional ethos?

The existence of an observed rhetoric engaging several power themes:

Material landmarks of Saxon heritage (cultural landscapes, gastronomy, handcraft)

Food-related policies and practices (locality, organic/ homemade/traditional/typical products, agro-tourism); Sustainable development

Chorus of political actors: Prince Charles, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, local authorities, international foundations, agro-tourism entrepreneurs, small producers

Several types of tourism in the region (cultural, ethnic and eco-tourism, agro-tourism)

*Beneficiary of the project "Doctoral scholarships supporting research: Competitiveness, quality, and cooperation in the European Higher Education Area", co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

Methods

Ethnographic component

- semi-structured discussions with stakeholders
- direct observation in Târnava Mare on the processes of commodification of heritage
- direct observation the practices of authenticity marketing in Bucharest, especially around traditional or organic fairs (e.g. The Fair of the Romanian Peasant)

Content analysis

- institutional documents (official speeches, local, national and European policies etc.)
- marketing communication (albums, touristic guides, advertisements, websites).



Fig. 2. Saxon Village Preserves, one of the brands supported by Slow Food. The slogan reads: "Discover a taste of Transylvania". Credits: Fundația Adept

Significance and Expected Results

The research benefits from the opportunity to capture the first steps of the aggregation of a **regional identity with market value**. As such, it should provide a solid basis for analogy to a further country brand.

Moreover, the research will explore the potential of Târnava Mare as a **new model of rurality** in Romania.

Thirdly, its aim to provide a **political anthropology account of the cultural production** should contribute to a deeper understanding of the patrimonialisation practices, actors and stakes revolving around ethnicity and authenticity, stemming from a rich source of these meanings such as the cultural history of Transylvania.



Fig. 3. Prince Charles of Great Britain's advocacy and entrepreneurial initiatives of organic agriculture and rural tourism inaugurated and legitimized this model of local development. [Credits: Newsin]

Currently, the Adept Foundation is in the process of acquiring the Târnava Mare trademark from the State Office for Inventions and Brands. Recent complementary initiatives include a network of four eco-museums in Sibiu county, a responsibility agreement on Saxon heritage signed by 16 mayors in Sibiu, the project of a "Siebenbürgen" integrated medieval route and the emergence of gastronomy brands such as the emblematic Saxon Village Preserves.

Acknowledgement

This research project has been supported by a Marie Curie Early Stage Research Training Fellowship of the European Community's Sixth Framework Programme under contract number MEST-CT-2005-020702 within the project European Partnership for Qualitative Research Training (Social Anthropology).

