Challenging the Negative Image of Destinations at Pre-visit Stage Using Food and Food Events as an Educational Tool: The Case of Romania

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Abstract
Destinations with a negative image struggle to attract tourists (Alvarez and Campo, 2014). Research addressing the issues of these destinations remains limited. Séraphin, Butcher and Korstanje (2016) have provided evidence that the education of tourists at pre-visit stage using visual online learning materials can contribute to improve the image of a destination. As for this paper, it provides evidence that off line resources like food and food events can play an important role in the chain of marketing actions to put in place to improve the image of a destination. Food and food events appear as efficient tryvertising and educational tools at pre-visit stage. From an academic point of view, this research paper contributes to the meta-literature in the field of marketing, tourism and food research as it introduce the DRA model as a way to gauge the efficiency of a tryvertising tool.

Keywords: Marketing; tourism; food; Romania; image.

JEL classification: M31

1. Introduction
Political instability, economic crisis, natural disasters, outbreak diseases are examples of factors that can negatively impact on the performance of a destination (Ritchie, Dorrell, Miller & Miller, 2004). As a result of the impacts of these factors, some destinations can become less popular or totally disappear from the tourism map (Seddighi, Nuttal & Theocharous, 2001). In order to overcome the consequences of the above listed factors, some destinations have opted for aggressive marketing strategies, but they have proven to be ineffective (Alvarez & Campo, 2014; Seddighi et al, 2001), hence the reason why in this paper we have opted for a softer approach, namely 'education' of tourists at pre-visit stage. Indeed, 'existing research on tourists' education focuses on the visit itself, but generally neglects the pre-visit stage' (Séraphin, Butcher & Korstanje, 2016:2). That said, Séraphin, Butcher and Korstanje (2016) have provided evidence that the education of tourists at pre-visit stage using visual online learning materials can contribute to improve the image of a destination. Adopting an ambidextrous approach, the objective of this paper is to show that off line resources like food and food events could be very effective tryvertising and educational tools. Quite often there is a gap between how the destination is perceived by tourists and the reality. This discrepancy has

been identified as 'blind spot' (Séraphin, Gowreesunkar & Ambaye, 2016). Based on the latter, it becomes obvious that the education of tourists at pre-visit stage is all the more important for destinations with a negative image. Because food tells the narrative (social and economic) of a country and its people (Privitera & Nesci, 2015); because food as a fashion aspect (Henderson, 2000); because authenticity is considered as the most important criterion for the development of heritage tourism (Park, 2014); and finally because events have the potential to develop social capital, that is to say the inclusion of an individual in a range of networks, structures or groups that allow them to develop and gain this capital (Miller, McTavish, 2013; Bladen, Kennel, Emma & Wide, 2012; Foley, McGillivray, McPherson, 2012), we are claiming that food and food events can contribute to improve the image of destination with a negative image. The focus of this paper is on Romania, but the findings will have a wider applicability for destination with a similar profile. We picked Romania for many reasons. Among these are: (1) Romania as a tourist destination is poorly researched from an academic point of view. In *Tourism Management*, there is no paper with 'Romania' in the title. In Annals of Tourism Research, there are four papers with 'Romania' in the title. As for *Journal of Travel Research*, there are none. It is important to emphasise the fact that *Tourism Management*, *Annals of Tourism Research* and the *Journal of Travel Research, '*are the three premier outlets for tourism research (…) as they are acknowledged to represent the vanguard of thought leadership within the tourism discipline' (McKercher, Law & Lam, 2006 cited in Keating, Huang, Kriz & Heung, 2015).

In terms of tourism performance, it is a mid-table destination as it is ranked 68/136 in the league table of Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017 (WEF, 2017 [Online]), meaning that there is still room for the improvement of the performance of the destination; (2) Among the Balkans and Eastern European destinations, Romania is ranked 6/12 still according to league table of Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017 (WEF, 2017 [Online]). Romania scores below average for instance, when it comes to prioritisation of travel and tourism. Romania for instance scores 3.8% for this criteria while the average for the Balkans and Eastern European is 4.2% (WEF, 2017 [Online]). Worldwide, Romania is ranked 108/136 for this criteria (WEF, 2017 [Online]). The organisation and support of food festivals could be an alternative solution for the Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) to show its interest in the tourism industry while promoting areas where the country is quite competitive like natural resources (3% while the average in Eastern Europe/Balkans is 2.7%); cultural resources and business travel (2.3% Vs 1.7%). In this research paper, our research question is as follow: How can food and food related events contribute to educate tourists at pre-visit stage about Romania? In terms of structure, this paper will be articulated around tree main sections: (1) the literature review is going to cover Romania and its tourism industry; the process of image formation of Romania; the educational potential of food. (2) In the method section, the research protocol will be explained, and finally, (3) the results, discussions and conclusions section is going to discuss the findings of the paper.

2. Contextual framework

2.1 Romania and its tourism industry

Tourism in Central and Eastern Europe has mirrored the physical and cultural geography of the regions. Capital cities and historic centers were the main attractions for tourist flows. Even Romania was not excluded from important tourist activities, before the birth of post-war socialist regimes, the thermal baths and extensive beaches over 250km on the Black Sea coasts were flourishing tourists resorts mostly frequented by elite tourism.

The socio-political changes that took place since the Second World War then radically changed economic activities related to tourism. In fact, special forms of internal tourism were developed, always on a collective basis, in line with the socialist settings in which the state was the only promoter and implementer of national tourism. A tourism that had the functions of rest, health of citizens, and not least the knowledge of their country, thus complying with the Marxist propaganda, so international tourists were virtually absent, with strong contractions in the hotel and transport sectors.

After the period of control of the socialist state, with the collapse of the Marxist regimes, a massive tourist flow of these countries began, which, despite of infrastructural and organizational obstacles, in general, it has seen a growing tourism in Eastern Europe, in particular, in Romania. It is in the last ten years, probably with the entry of some countries in the European Union, Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, that the tourism sector seems to be positively fuelling the balance of tourist payments, with good prospects for economic growth and tourism, in particular (Infomercatiesteri, 2017).

Romania is today a very exciting tourist destination for foreigners, rich in natural and artistic attractions, although the tourism potential of the country is not sufficiently developed (Cipollari, 2007).

According to the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INSSE) in 2016, there were 4.643 accommodation facilities in Romania. Accommodation facilities can be classified in hotels, tourist villas, bungalows, tourist pensions, farm houses, campsites, holiday villages, nursery schools and campsites for students, tourist camps and passenger ships. In 2016, agri-tourism intercepts 28% of the total, followed by hotels (25.3%), tourist pensions (25.3%), villas and bungalows (8.2%). Tourists who have stayed in Romania's tourist accommodations have recorded an increase of 64% between 2006 and 2016 (Infomercatiesteri, 2017).

Figure 1 shows the growth trend of tourists visiting Romania, which went from 6,22 million in 2006 to over 10 million in 2016 (INSSE, 2016). Moreover, 93% of foreign tourists visiting Romania came from European countries. 58% of them come from EU countries, with the largest number of tourists coming from Hungary (28.3%), followed by Bulgaria (27.6%), Germany (8.4%), Italy (7%) and Poland (5.5%). The balance of tourist payments is quite positive, with revenues coming mainly from the closest states, whose residents are favored by the reduced distance and the common currency in travelling.
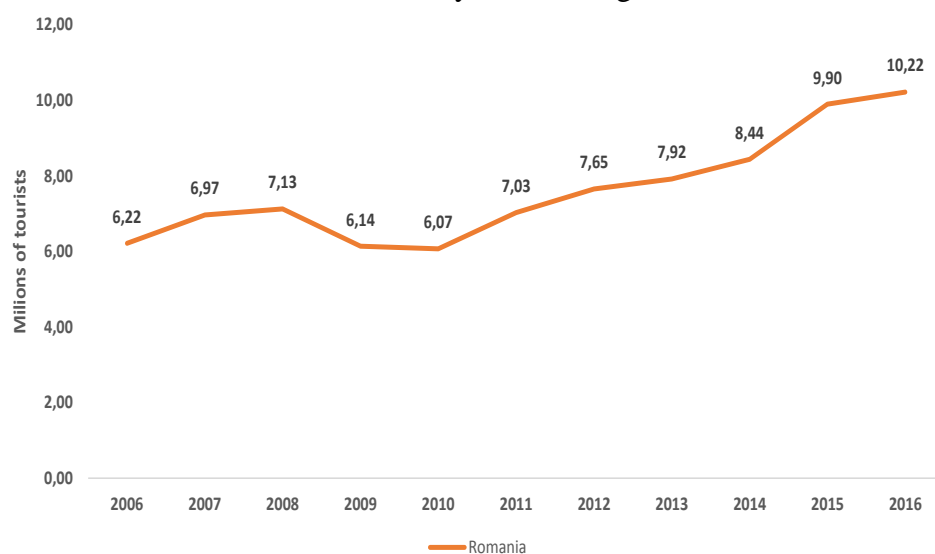
(*) Our elaborations on data from National Institute of Statistics (INSSE).

Figure 1. Evolution of the total number of tourists entered in Romania (2006-2016) (millions)
Source: Our elaboration on data from National Institute of Statistics

In the Balkans and Eastern Europe, Romania remains quite a competitive destination (ranked 6th out of 12 destinations in this area) despite performing slightly below the area average for 'Human Resources Labour Market'; 'ICT Readiness'; 'Prioritisation of T&T'; 'Price Competitiveness' and 'Ground and Port Infrastructure' (WEF, 2017 [Online]). These points could be considered as the weaknesses of the destination. As for the main strengths of the destinations they are as follow: 'International Openness', 'Natural Resources' and particularly 'Cultural Resources and Business Travel' (WEF, 2017 [Online]). At an international level Romania is doing rather well as it is ranked 68/136 for its overall Travel and Tourism Competitiveness (WEF, 2017 [Online]). The data provided in this section presents Romania as a mid table destination (at regional and international level). The same data identified culture as the key strength of the destination and the environment (political, economic, social and technologic context) as a weakness. How are all the above information reflected in the way visitors and potential visitors perceive the destination? This question is very important as sometimes there is a 'blind spot', in other words, a gap between the negative images of the destination perceived by tourists and the optimistic image conveyed by Destination Marketing Organisation (Séraphin, Gowreesunkar & Ambaye, 2016).

2.2 . Romania and the formation of its image

2.2.1. Overview of the theory on the formation of the image of a destination
According to Gartner (2000), the destination image can be defined as *'the attitude, perception, beliefs and ideas one hold about a particular geographic area formed by the cognitive image of a particular destination'* (Gartner, 2000:295). Moreover, it is very important to highlight the fact that:

-The destination image is a simplified version of reality and it affects both an individual's perception of a destination and their choice of destination as the image of the destination is the only evidence that the visitor has of the destination before they visit (Cooper and Hall, 2008: 223).

-The image tourists have of a destination is based upon information acquired either by induced agents (generally controlled by sources external to the individual such as advertisements); organic agents (that are acquired through personal experience and are normally the most trusted source of information); and autonomous agents (are media sources or popular culture such as films or documentaries). They are considered as the most powerful because they can quickly alter a tourist's image of a destination (Gartner, 1993). No matter how the tourist acquired the image of the destination, but from his point of view the perceived image is reality (Cooper and Hall, 2008: 224).

-The image of a destination has some key characteristics among these are the fact that the image changes continuously but slowly; the smaller the destination is, the more likely its image is going to be based on its political situation (Gartner, 1993).

2.2.2. Image formation of Romania based on Gartner (1993) framework
In general, autonomous agent and more specifically the media play a key role in the construction of the image of destinations with a negative image. This is for instance the case of Haiti, a post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destination, depicted as a shantytown, a place to avoid (Séraphin, Gowreesunkar & Ambaye, 2016). In the case of Romania, the negative image of the destination seems to be based mainly on organic agents a pre-visit stage. In France, Romanians (and therefore Romania) have a very negative image; they are often associated with the image of beggars, gipsies, poverty, etc. The truth is that these gipsies are no Romanians. They represent a minority group/community in Romania. This group is outcast in Romania and pretty much wherever they travel to (Medium France [Online]; Observers

[Online]). Because of this situation, it is all the more important for Romania to educate people and potential visitors.

2.3 Education of tourists at pre-visit stage

Séraphin, Butcher and Korstanje (2016) explained that it is very important to educate tourists at pre-visit stage because they very often unfairly judge some destinations. Séraphin, Butcher and Korstanje (2016) also explained that a good pre-visit stage educational tool must be able to provide: (1) potential visitors an experience of the destination before the physical travel (2) a better knowledge of the destination. As a result of these, potential tourists will be turned into active learners and will develop a cognitive, rational and affective approach of the destination. The model below summarises the process of education of tourists a pre-visit stage (figure 2).
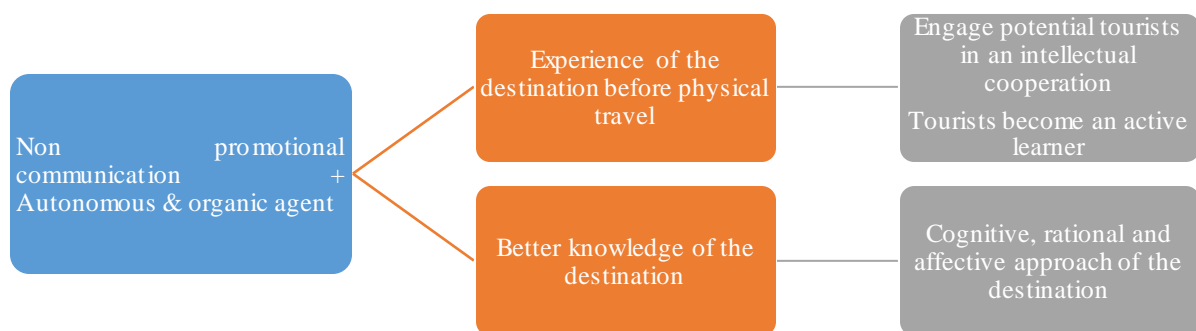

Figure 2. Process of education of tourists a pre-visit stage
Source: Own figure

This study is one of the first attempts to apply this model to food and food events. The purpose of applying this model is first to explore the potential of food and food events to convey potential visitors an experience of the destination before even visiting the destination; second to investigate the potential of food and food events to convey certain knowledge/information about the destination. In *fine*, the objective is to develop an affective link between the potential visitors who experience the food and food events.

3. Food and food events as educational tools

3.1. Overview of existing literature

According to the World Tourism Organisation (2012) food as immaterial cultural heritage can enhance the reputation of destinations worldwide and differentiate locations. For the purpose of this study, it is noteworthy to mention and introduce the well noted definition of Stebbins (1996) who states that "Cultural tourism is a genre of special interest tourism based on the search for and participation in new and deep cultural experiences, whether aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, or psychological." (Stebbins, 1996).

The above mentioned concept is very complex and there is a long debate among scholars about its definition and conceptualisation (Michalkó, 2004; Richards 2005; Shackleford, 2001). It is also interesting to note, that the 2005 report of the European Travel Commission on City Tourism and Culture distinguishes between an inner and outer circle of cultural tourism:

• The inner circle represents the primary elements of cultural tourism which can be divided into two parts, namely heritage tourism (cultural heritage related to artefacts of the past) and arts

tourism (related to contemporary cultural production such as the performing and visual arts, contemporary architecture, literature, etc.).

• The outer circle represents the secondary elements of cultural tourism which can be divided into two elements, namely lifestyle (elements such as beliefs, cuisine, traditions, folklore, etc.) and the creative industries (fashion design, web and graphic design, film, media and entertainment, etc.) (City Tourism and Culture – The European Experience, 2005).

However, it seems that it does not recognise the importance of food and gastronomy as cultural/knowledge dissemination and education. Above all now, where in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List, food has finally received status as a true part of a common heritage.

As Morgan (2010) points out: "Food is vital to human health and well-being in a way that the products of other industries are not, and this remains the quintessential reason as to why we attach such profound significance to it' (Morgan, 2010: 1852). Still according to Morgan (2014), food plays a multi-functional connecting role in society and sustainable food systems are supportive of sustainable communities (Morgan, 2014). In 2012, the European Economic and Social Committee of European Union recognised the importance that food can have in connecting agriculture, crafts, tourism, retailing and the entire rural economy as a whole while developing regional umbrella brands (Cavicchi and Ciampi Stancova, 2016). Furthermore, in 2014, the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament approved a motion for European Parliament Resolution on the "European gastronomic heritage: cultural and educational aspects" (European Parliament, 2014). It recognises the importance of food and gastronomy as artistic and cultural expression and fundamental pillars of family and social relationships (Cavicchi and Ciampi Stancova, 2016). That said, adopting an ambidextrous approach, off line resources like food and food events could be very effective tryvertising and educational tools. In line with this, Séraphin, Butcher and Korstanje (2016) have provided evidence that the education of tourists at pre-visit stage using visual online learning materials can contribute to improve the image of a destination. For these reasons, we are claiming that food and food events can contribute to improve the image of destination with a negative image, in order to convey certain knowledge/information about the destination at international level. In this regard, research reveals that food tourism is worldwide and it is a growing socio-economic key factor. Thus, according to Hall, Sharples, Mitchell, Cambourne & Macionis (2003), food tourism is an experiential trip to a gastronomic region, for recreational or entertainment purposes, which includes visits to primary and secondary producers of food, gastronomic festivals, enogastronomic events/tours, food fairs, events, farmers' markets, cooking shows and demonstrations, tastings of quality food products or any tourism activity related to food, cooking school holidays, dining at famous restaurants in light of their chef's reputation, street food tours (UNWTO, 2012; Cavicchi and Ciampi Stancova, 2016)

Furthermore, Richards (2015) underlines the role that food can play in influencing the overall branding and positioning of a destination: 1) Food is a part of the destination marketing mix, because it helps to give a sense of place and allows tourists to literally taste the destination, coming directly into contact with local culture. 2) Since we eat two or three times a day, gastronomy is the aspect of culture that tourists most frequently come into contact. They literally ingest local culture. 3) Eating habits are differences that immediately become obvious: the time people eat, the way they eat and what they eat all become immediate points of difference upon entering a new culture. 4) Food provides a direct connection with landscape because tourists can recognise origins of food.

Because food tells the narrative (social and economic) of a country and its people (Privitera & Nesci, 2015); because food as a fashion aspect (Henderson, 2000); because authenticity is considered as the most important criterion for the development of heritage tourism (Park,

2014); and finally because events have the potential to develop social capital, that is to say the inclusion of an individual in a range of networks, structures or groups that allow them to develop and gain this capital (Miller, McTavish, 2013; Bladen, Kennel, Emma & Wide, 2012; Foley, McGillivray, McPherson, 2012).

3.2. Recovery nature of food and food events

DRA (Dale Robinson Anderson) is a model created by the authors specifically for this study. This model is the combination of two existing models: The Dale and Robinson (2001) model and the Anderson (2001 – cited in Walters & Mair, 2012) model. Dale and Robinson (2001) forwarded a three-domain model of tourism education and an action plan for its implementation that would meet the needs of all stakeholders (learners, training providers, and employers). They argue that in order for a tourism educational programme to meet the needs of the industry and stakeholders involved (namely learners, education institutions and employers), it needs to: (a) develop interdisciplinary skills for a broad understanding of the industry; (b) provide expertise in a specific area in terms of skills and (c) explore niche markets. As for Anderson (2001 - cited in Walters & Mair, 2012), the art of convincing a target audience relies on three elements: (a) an "ethos" element, based on the credibility and trustworthiness of the source of the message; (b) a "pathos" element, linked with the emotional appeal of the message and finally, (c) a "logos" element, referring to the capacity of the message to inform. "Ethos, logos, and pathos are interconnected, influence each other, and all affect the effectiveness of persuasion" (Walters & Mair, 2012: 95). The figure below (figure 3) provides a visual representation of the model.
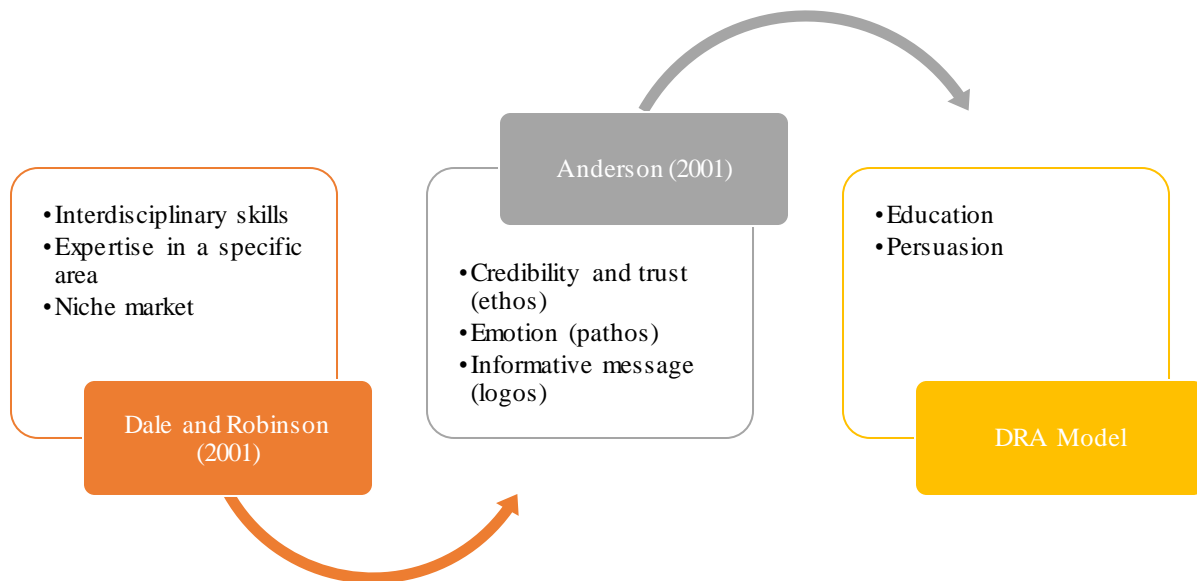

Figure 3. The Dale Robinson Anderson Model (DRA Model)
Source: own figure

In this paper, it is argued that a combination of the two models can provide the most suitable 'recipe' for a tool that can both educate people about a destination that suffers from a negative image, and at the same time, encourage people to visit the destination. Food events, as part of culture (from a theoretical analysis) seem to have the attributes to influence perception as food events rely and convey emotions (pathos) and information (logos) and if well organised, can convey knowledge (education). On that basis, food event could be a contributor to an effective recovery image strategy (Hypothesis). The following section is going to empirically illustrate our hypothesis.

4. Methodology

4.1 Content analysis

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) suggest that to analyse content, the research method should "focus on the characteristics of the language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text". (...) "The goal of content analysis is to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study". This can then enable the researcher to "interpret meaning from the content of text data' to 'discover and describe the focus of individual, group, institutional, or social attention". According to Weber (1990, cited in Stemler, 2001) this type of research can also "examine trends and patterns in documents" and provide evidence for interpretation (Hammond & Wellington, 2013).

4.2 Results

40 feedback of Romanian restaurants in the UK on TripAdvisor (https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g186338-d4043899-r286822822-Crystals_of_London-London_England.html) were analysed (content analysis). The purpose was to find out information regarding our customers felt after the experience. The data collected were analysed using the software *TextStat 3.0* in order to obtain the frequency of each word contained in the website. Only meaningful words related to the topic of this research were kept. The word cloud below summarises our findings (figure 4).

Figure 4. Customer experience of Romanians restaurants in London (Word cloud)
Source: own figure

Eating in a restaurant is not going to change on its own the image of Romania; however, this first experience represents a step toward the education of potential visitors as it gives a slight idea of what the food, the people are like, how authentic and traditional the destination is, etc. Food contributes to the chain of actions to be put in place to improve the image of the destination a pre-visit stage.

4.3 Discussion

Romania is increasingly becoming a container of events, attracting a large number of both national and foreign visitors, and has a strong impact in economic terms and image on the site that hosts it. The idea is to celebrate and bring to the attention of the whole community, the

various enogastronomic and cultural excellences of Romania, recognized all over the world: cuisine and fine wines. Even in Romania, over the last decade, the philosophy of 'Slow food' has been widespread: typical quality productions that protect small farmers, livestock farmers, consumers and the environment. In fact, in Romania there are two presidiums Branza de Burduf cheese from the Bucegi Mountains and the marmalades of the Sassoni villages (OBC Transeuropa, 2017). More importantly, Getz (2008: 305) explains that cultural events are the most suitable form of events to attract tourists as 'cultural events in particular are easily commodified as tourists attractions'. Richards and Palmer (2010: 3) also added: 'Cultural events have become central to processes of urban development and revitalisation, as cultural production becomes a major element of the urban economy, and cultural consumption can dominate both the image of places and urban life in general'. That said, festivals and cultural events are very important for a destination as it gives them the possibility to 'lengthen tourist seasons, extend peak season or introduce a new season into the life of a community (...) address issues of civic design, local pride and identity, heritage, conservation, urban renewal, employment generation, investment and economic development' (Derrett, 2009: 33). Festivals and cultural events are all the more important as some tourists travel specially to gain deeper understanding of a culture or heritage of a destination (Cros & McKercher, 2015).

5. Conclusion

Research addressing the issues of destinations with a negative image, affecting their tourism performance, remains limited. Conversely, over the last decade, scholars, policy makers, practitioners have increasingly stressed the key role that food and food events have in local socio-economic development. The purpose of applying the DRA model was firstly to explore the potential of food and food events to convey potential visitors an experience of the destination before even visiting the destination; secondly to investigate the potential of food and food events to convey certain knowledge/information about the destination. Thirdly, to develop an affective link between the potential visitors who experience the food and food events. Results of the reviews of Romanian restaurants in the UK on TripAdvisor showed that customers are overall very happy with these restaurants. Eating in a restaurant is not going to change on its own the image of Romania; however, this first experience represented a step toward the education of potential visitors as it gives a slight idea of what the food, the people are like, how authentic and traditional the destination is, etc. Furthermore, food contributes to the chain of actions to be put in place to improve the image of the destination a pre-visit stage. This study was one of the first attempts to apply this model to food and food events. Findings revealed a wider applicability for destination with a similar profile. That said, adopting an ambidextrous approach, the objective of this paper was to show that off line resources like food and food events could be very effective tryvertising and educational tools. From an academic point of view, this research paper contributes to the meta-literature in the field of marketing, tourism and food research as it introduce the DRA model as a way to gauge the efficiency of a tryvertising tool.

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