

**BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES**

Council for Doctoral University Studies

Doctoral School of Business Administration

**NEW STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
THEMATIC TOURISM IN ROMANIA**

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Bucharest, 2024

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## ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the development of thematic tourism in Romania, offering a comprehensive approach that begins with an overview of trends in both international and national tourism. The initial chapters explore current trends in tourism and the hospitality industry, emphasizing the evolution of the tourism phenomenon and its relationship with sustainable development. In this context, various forms of tourism are examined, including cultural tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, and dark tourism. The study also investigates the interdependence between tourism and leisure, highlighting the importance of diversifying tourism services to stimulate demand and enhance tourist experiences. This is followed by a detailed analysis of thematic tourism, covering a wide range of categories from cultural tourism to religious tourism and dark tourism. The role of these forms of tourism in the preservation and promotion of cultural and natural heritage is emphasized, along with their potential to offer economic development opportunities for local regions. Regarding dark tourism, the paper discusses attractions based on historical events and places with grim connotations, illustrating how these can become points of interest for tourists both internationally and within Romania. Examples analyzed include Bran Castle and the Memorial to the Victims of Communism, which serve as case studies for the potential of dark tourism in Romania. The quantitative research focused on exploring tourists' perceptions and attitudes toward the ambiance of a thematic hotel. This study used a self-administered questionnaire distributed to tourists who were guests at a thematic hotel, aiming to understand the factors influencing their satisfaction and intention to return. The research revealed that thematic design elements and the hotel's atmosphere play a crucial role in creating a memorable experience for tourists, thereby influencing their recommendations and loyalty. It was also noted that the average income of tourists could impact their experience, with higher-income tourists being more likely to appreciate and recommend thematic hotels. The qualitative research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with tourism experts, with the objective of identifying viable strategies for the development of dark tourism in Romania. The discussions highlighted the considerable potential of this type of tourism, particularly due to the international renown of the Dracula myth. The collected expertise suggests that dark tourism can become a profitable market segment if well-thought-out strategies are implemented, including infrastructure development, the creation of theme parks, and the use of modern technologies to provide immersive experiences. The figure of Dracula was identified as a central element in attracting foreign tourists, but the need to diversify the offerings to meet the requirements of local tourists was also emphasized. The thesis concludes by underscoring the importance of developing well-structured and diversified thematic tourism in Romania, leveraging cultural and natural resources, as well as local myths and legends. Dark tourism presents a unique opportunity for Romania, especially in the context of globalization and the growing interest in niche experiences. The implementation of innovative strategies that integrate elements of cultural authenticity and modern technology can transform Romania into a top destination for thematic tourism. The paper recommends that authorities and entrepreneurs in the field collaborate to develop a coherent national strategy to support this type of tourism. Additionally, it suggests expanding future research on both the demand and supply sides, as well as on the integration of new technologies and their impact on the tourist experience.

**Keywords:** leisure, thematic tourism, dark tourism, trends in international tourism, strategies for Romanian tourism.

## Summary

**Thesis Title:** *New Strategies for the Development of Thematic Tourism in Romania*

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**Year:** 2024

**Institution:** Bucharest University of Economic Studies

The PhD thesis titled "*New Strategies for the Development of Thematic Tourism in Romania*" addresses a highly relevant subject for the development of Romania's tourism sector, offering a comprehensive analysis of the ways to capitalize on the country's natural, cultural, and historical heritage. In an era of globalization, where tourists are seeking unique, personalized, and themed experiences, Romania has the potential to become a top destination if it adapts its tourism resources to the demands of the international market.

The thesis analyzes the potential of thematic tourism in Romania and highlights its importance for increasing the country's attractiveness on the international stage. Additionally, it emphasizes the contribution of thematic tourism to regional economic development, job creation, and the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. The thesis includes a detailed analysis of various forms of thematic tourism – cultural, ecological, adventure, and dark tourism – and proposes innovative solutions for leveraging these resources.

### Context and Research Relevance

In the current context of globalization and economic transformation, thematic tourism plays a crucial role in diversifying the global tourism offer. Tourists are no longer interested only in standardized vacations; they seek authentic experiences that offer them a deep connection with the places they visit. This global trend is also reflected in Europe, where niche tourism destinations based on cultural, historical, or natural themes attract an increasing number of visitors.

Romania, thanks to its varied natural and cultural resources, has the potential to integrate into this international trend. The Dracula myth, medieval castles, mountainous landscapes, and the Danube Delta are unique elements that can be transformed into themed tourist attractions. However, the development of this sector requires a strategic and innovative approach. Despite these resources, thematic tourism remains relatively underdeveloped in Romania compared to other European countries, mainly due to the lack of a coherent strategy and insufficient tourism infrastructure.

### Research Objectives

The thesis aims to offer a series of innovative solutions for the development of thematic tourism in Romania by integrating international experiences and adapting them to local specificities. The main objectives of the research include:

1. **Evaluating the current state of thematic tourism at global and national levels:** The thesis analyzes international trends in the thematic tourism industry and identifies successful models that can be adapted and implemented in Romania. This evaluation is essential for understanding where Romania stands in the global landscape and what growth opportunities exist.
2. **Analyzing the economic impact of thematic tourism:** Another major objective is evaluating how thematic tourism can stimulate the local and regional economy. The research investigates the sector's contribution to job creation, infrastructure development, and increased tourism revenues in various regions of Romania.
3. **Proposing strategies for the sustainable development of thematic tourism:** The thesis offers innovative solutions for developing thematic tourism that integrate modern technologies and promote sustainability. This objective includes the use of virtual reality, mobile applications, and other modern technologies to enhance the tourist experience and create attractive, competitive tourism products.
4. **Researching tourist perceptions of themed experiences:** A central aspect of the thesis is the quantitative research on the perceptions of Romanian and foreign tourists regarding Romania's thematic tourism offer. The quantitative study explores the factors that influence tourist satisfaction and return intentions, especially concerning themed hotels.
5. **Qualitative analysis of dark tourism:** Based on interviews with industry experts, the thesis proposes solutions for leveraging dark tourism in Romania. This segment includes sites with a grim historical connotation, such as Bran Castle and the Memorial to the Victims of Communism, and offers untapped potential for attracting foreign tourists.

### **Thematic Tourism: Opportunities and Challenges in Romania**

Thematic tourism is defined by a focus on a specific theme that connects the entire tourist experience to the destination. This form of tourism has proven to be particularly popular in Europe, where countries have created integrated thematic tourism products capable of attracting tourists from various market segments. For example, France and Italy have successfully developed wine and gastronomic tourism, while Germany has focused on cultural and historical tourism.

In Romania, the opportunities for developing thematic tourism are significant. There is a wealth of cultural and natural resources that can be capitalized on, including picturesque rural landscapes, historical monasteries, traditions, and folk



myths. The Dracula myth is perhaps the most famous legend associated with Romania, yet this resource has been underutilized from a tourism perspective. Additionally, ecotourism and cultural tourism could attract tourists seeking authentic and natural experiences.

**Challenges** faced by Romania in developing thematic tourism are numerous. First, tourism infrastructure is limited, particularly in rural and mountainous areas, where most tourism resources are located. Second, Romania's international promotion as a thematic tourism destination is insufficient, and the country's branding is ineffective. To overcome these challenges, the thesis suggests the creation of a national thematic tourism strategy that integrates all regions and collaborates with the private sector.

### **Quantitative Research: Tourist Perceptions of Themed Hotels**

To better understand tourists' preferences and expectations, a quantitative survey was conducted among tourists staying at themed hotels in Romania. This study identified the factors that influence tourists' satisfaction and return intentions. The main conclusions were:

- **Hotel design and theme:** Most tourists highlighted that the themed design and atmosphere of the hotel had a significant impact on their experience. Authentic elements were also appreciated, and attention to detail was considered an essential factor for creating a pleasant ambiance.
- **Personalization of experiences:** Another important conclusion was related to the importance of personalized services. Tourists appreciated those hotels that managed to offer unique themed experiences tailored to their preferences and needs.
- **Income factor:** Tourists with higher incomes were more likely to positively evaluate themed experiences and recommend them to friends or colleagues. This suggests that themed hotels can attract a premium tourist segment if they manage to improve service quality.

### **Qualitative Research – Dark Tourism in Romania**

Dark tourism, although a relatively new niche in the global tourism industry, offers Romania a unique opportunity to attract foreign tourists by capitalizing on historical and mythological attractions with dark connotations. This form of tourism includes visiting sites associated with death, suffering, and historical tragedies, and Romania has some of the most famous locations in this category.

Bran Castle, internationally known as "Dracula's Castle," is a central point of this type of tourism. Although popular among foreign tourists, the potential of this attraction is not fully exploited. Dark tourism could be expanded and diversified

by including other historical locations, such as the Memorial to the Victims of Communism in Sighet or the Monument in Aiud, which offer an opportunity to attract history-interested tourists.

Interviews with tourism experts highlighted the need to diversify the dark tourism offer. **Dracula as an international brand** is a starting point, but Romania needs to develop a broader offer that includes diverse thematic experiences reflecting the complexity of the country's history and culture. **Technological innovation** can play an essential role in this, using virtual and augmented reality to offer tourists captivating experiences.

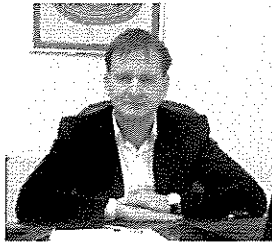
## Conclusions and Recommendations

The thesis concludes that thematic tourism and dark tourism have untapped potential in Romania, which can significantly contribute to the country's economic growth and strengthen its position in the international market. The implementation of clear and coherent strategies can transform Romania into an attractive destination for international tourists, especially in the context of globalization and the growing demand for personalized experiences.

The main recommendations of the thesis include:

1. **Development of tourism infrastructure:** It is necessary to improve infrastructure, especially in rural and mountainous areas, to facilitate tourists' access to thematic attractions and to offer quality services.
2. **Partnerships between the public and private sectors:** Collaboration between local authorities and private operators is essential for the development and promotion of thematic tourism. This can create an integrated offer capable of attracting tourists from various market segments.
3. **Diversification of thematic tourism offers:** Although the Dracula myth remains a central point for dark tourism, it is essential to develop other forms of thematic tourism, such as cultural, ecological, or religious tourism, to attract a broader audience.
4. **Technological innovation:** Using modern technologies such as virtual reality can significantly improve tourist experiences and contribute to the creation of competitive tourism products on the international market.

In conclusion, Romania has all the necessary resources to become a top destination in thematic and dark tourism. However, a well-structured strategy, investments in infrastructure, and proper promotion are needed to achieve this goal.



# Europass Curriculum Vitae

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**Organisational/Managerial Skills**

Understanding and applying leadership concepts.

**Job-Related Skills**

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**Digital Skills**

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**Other Skills**

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Category B

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