

## THE REENACTMENT AS TOURISM EXPLOITATION THROUGH HERITAGE INTERPRETATION OF HERITAGE SITES IN TRANSYLVANIA

MIHAELA ZOTICA<sup>1</sup>, SIMONA MĂLĂESCU<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT.** – **The Reenactment as Tourism Exploitation through Heritage Interpretation of Heritage Sites in Transylvania.** Beside the need of reviewing up to date the theoretical progress in the field, we aimed at reviewing the challenges the reenactment performances in Romania have to face as presented in the literature. Another aim of this paper was to furnish an inventory of all tourism objectives in Transylvania where heritage interpretation in the form of reenactment is performed as a form of tourism exploitation of numerous sites. Another objective of this paper was to investigate the main issues of audience's expectations regarding the performance of reenactment at Romanian historical tourism sites and issues practitioners have to challenge in their relatively recent activity. No theoretical meta-analysis or literature review paper on theoretical progress was found. The theoretical preoccupations for unifying the terminology and conceptualization seems to date since the Gotteborg (2012) Conference *Re/theorisation of Heritage Studies*, but from 2012 the interest in theorization was increasing, being visible in the number of papers published per year in peer-reviewed indexed journals. The results on the Romanian context were consistent with previous works stating that audience's expectations, in their nature and information content, were very diverse. Half of the subjects investigated through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires assessing the expected level of satisfaction with the reenactment performance and the actual level of satisfaction after the performance showed positive differences. The (historical) reenactment represents a viable modality of heritage interpretation in Romania and an efficient mean of tourism exploitation with positive results especially for the citadels in Transylvania.

**Keywords:** *reenactment, heritage interpretation, live interpretation, heritage tourism, cultural heritage*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing adaptation of heritage interpretation in exploiting heritage tourism resources is paramount in order to meet the expectations of the new generations of tourism consumers like the Millennials, "the C Generation" (but not limited to). The (simplistic) direct contact between heritage artefacts from ancient civilizations and tourists do not accomplish the expected transfer of knowledge about the cultural value, the

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<sup>1</sup> Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

<sup>2</sup> Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, 400006 Cluj-Napoca, Romania, e-mail: smalaescu@geografie.ubbcluj.ro

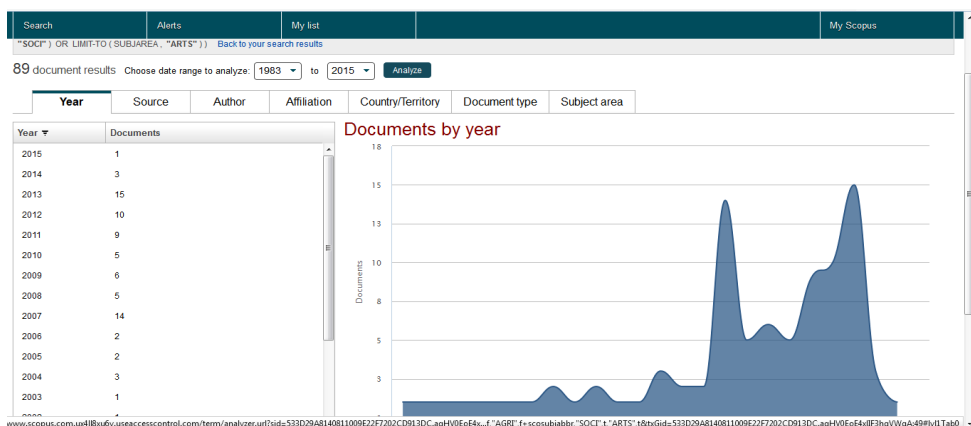
grandiosity, the symbolism that usually the interpretation facilitates (Mălăescu, 2014). This is especially the case in mass tourism, with the so-called "accidental cultural tourist" and "the occasional cultural tourist" (McKercher and Du Cros, 2002, p.33) visiting significant heritage sites. This imperative was dramatically acknowledged not just by the heritage sites administrators, but also by museum administrations and even larger organizations and institutions. For example for a country with a very complex cultural heritage like Canada the simple transfer of knowledge about the historical various contexts and multiple cultural backgrounds to the younger generations became a challenge that probably made them sphere head in heritage interpretation good practices. Facing the new context with visitors highly embedded in technology and visual arts the heritage interpretation diversified rapidly. The so called designed heritage interpretation moved to multimedia equipment in order to recreate various historical contexts, then switched to augmented reality equipment and SP applications, virtual 3D representations, video-guides and audio-guides using GPS determination of visitor' position in a site (Liberty-guide type). Each year the developers of new heritage interpretation software meet with interested parties like site and museum administrators in order to increase the intensity of visitors' tourism experiences in a heritage site during the annual event of Mediterranean Exchange of Archaeological Tourism (BMTA).

Another way of increasing the intensity of visitor's experience with a heritage site, especially when means of designed heritage interpretation like those mentioned before are not available, consists in live heritage interpretation most frequently performed through tourism animation, reenactment or simply heritage interpretation performed by the guide. In this case, the whole challenge of message transmission drops into performers' job description.

The interpretation, in its narrowed sense of interpretation of cultural heritage, could be defined as a way of communicating to visitors the value, the cultural significance and the interest which the heritage in question brings, a learning activity through are communicated the stories and ideas behind the presented heritage, which provoke the audience to think in itself, to form its own understanding of what that heritage means to them (Heritage Lottery Fund, 2013). Hems and Blockley since 2006 draw attention about the fact that the challenge consist in finding ways of recreating and explaining the larger historical context rich in symbolic content behind the formal structures of the monuments, ruins, castles and historical houses or landscapes. The aim is to challenge the a-priori tourists' representations and encourage a more intensive involvement. The means to carry on this desiderate could be temporary ones such an artistic project or community theatre, story-telling or reenactment. These could also constitute manners to acknowledge the existence of visitors' perspectives on the monuments' significance besides those of the archaeologist, the architecture historian and to entangle new ways of understanding the heritage or involving the visitors. (Hems and Blockley, 2006). Interpreting heritage in a cultural site using tour-guides, cultural animators, reenactment performances or community theatre represents the most frequent way of putting in act the so called live heritage interpretation often opposed to "designed interpretation" in order to avoid the pejorative term of "dead interpretation" (Howard, 2003, p.260).

Reenactment (historical reenactment) represents an activity through the participants recreate certain aspects of an (historical) event or a historical period (Guha, 2009). Designed and delivered in the same time as educational activity but also as leisure activity, considering the tourist interest for this heritage interpretation, the reenactment fulfill in the same time the recreational function, but also the implicit educative function of cultural tourism (Mălăescu, 2014). Another conceptualization of reenactment consists in seeing it as an active role-play (Mălăescu, 2014), consisting in the reconstructing certain historical events, as battles or feasts, rituals or living scenes from the past. Historical reenactment needs a certain location, usually a public park used for bringing to life scripts from the past by certain organization called reenactment societies (Hunt, 2004).

Elements of reenactment can be traced back in time since Romans which used to reenact their most important battle fields or conquests during certain public feasts. Continuously until the 18-19<sup>th</sup> century, reenactment was largely present in Europe, with England as sphere head with its Elington Tournament. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the reenactment activities reached a larger popularity, and starting from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reenactment competitions emerged, especially in North America, starting with the Reenactment of The Civil War (eventplan.co.uk). However, despite the large involvement of the practitioners, the theoretical interest in this heritage interpretation branch grew slowly. The EBSCO journals data base listed for the 1941-2014 period a number of 72 peer reviewed journals' articles with *reenactment* in title and *heritage* in abstract. SCOPUS data base, indexing journals just from 1983 returned 89 articles published between 1983-2015 in peer-reviewed journals when searching using *reenactment* and *heritage* and *interpretation* in *title, abstract and keywords* fields (fig. 1). The majority of articles indexed in EBSCO database in august 2015 have an USA university affiliation of the authors (29 articles) followed by RUMB affiliation of the author (11 articles) results consistent with the longest interests of the practitioners in the area. Authors from Australia, Canada and Russian Federation follow with 3 articles per country, the list ending with other country affiliation with less than 3 articles per country. Only one article from Romania (and published in a Romanian journal) was found.



**Fig. 1.** The dynamics of articles published in SCOPUS indexed peer-reviewed journals regarding reenactment issues during 1963 – 2015 period (SCOPUS Data base analysis, 2015).

No theoretical meta-analysis or literature review paper on theoretical progress was found. The theoretical preoccupations for unifying the terminology and conceptualization seems to date since the Göteborg 2012 Conference *Re/theorisation of Heritage Studies*, although several previous workshops (usually held before or during a practitioners meeting for an reenacting event) announced similar aims: *Symposium on the current state of performance art* (Kassel, 2006), The Fourteenth Civil War Symposium and Reenactment (Cantigny, Illinois, 2011), Civil War Symposium & Reenactment (Cameron, 2013) etc. The increasing interest in theorisation from 2012 was visible also in the number of papers published per year in peer-reviewed indexed journals (Fig. 1).

The majority of scholar papers and handbook on reenactments still pertain about issues regarding the practicalities of the performance like the balance authenticity-tourists' entertainment (Erickson, 2015; D'arcens, 2011; Gapps 2009, Decker, 2009; Dudley, 2009), the impact of different practices and voices interpretation (van Dijk et al., 2012, Crang, 1996), the importance of reenactment groups' ideology and discourse in performance (Hawkey, 2014; Decker, 2009; Norman, 2009; Dudley, 2009), mutations in site interpretation (Hurt, 2010), the roles and functions of material reproductions or substitutes of historic artifacts in reenactment performances (Auslander, 2013) etc. It is relatively easy to observe that the majority of papers pertain to issues of historical accuracy, the group and designer' ideology, discourse analysis - the act of reenactment is in central perspective and not the tourism phenomenon or resource (except for Hurt, 2010). The act of reenactment is rarely seen from a tourism perspective, and, as found in our study on the practices of reenactment in Romania, the majority of the practitioners with academic background, has an historical background. When the reenactment members are not coming from a historic background but from visual arts, architecture, literature studies etc. the declared mobile underpinning their enrollment in reenactment associations is also the passion for history or the historical periods brought to life. The majority of studies shows that interpretation of heritage sites presents monolithic aspects – meaning a single version of a truth, which, sometimes is manipulated and distorted in order to please and to connect with the audience and prevail a certain ideological perspective (Hall, 1994).

The literature regarding the practices of reenactment in Romania is very limited. We found a single academic paper published in journals indexed in international databases or ranked B+, B or C (Cf. UEFISCDI, 2014). The article analyses reenactments of Modern History in Romania “describing the reconstitution of the uniform and firearms of a border soldier from the Romanian 1st Border Infantry Regiment No. 16 in Orlat, as well as the recreation of the clothing, cold weapons and drill training of a Romanian Landsturm fighter, belonging to the Auraria Gemina Legion, active in the 1848-1849 Romanian Revolution in Transylvania” (Briscu, 2012, p.51). However, in reenacting Romania's past the majority of reenactment actions brought to life the Antiquity and medieval history and according to the knowledge of the interviewed practitioners the beginnings of “modern” reenactment (post-communist representations performed by reenacting associations) in Romania dates back to 2000, when numerous associations and reenacting clubs were founded. The beginning of reenacting representations of the Modern History in Romania was established by Briscu (2012) in 2004. In nowadays Romania this form of heritage interpretation is a work in progress and it is still defining itself, with objectives which

the reenactment associations tend to shape firmly in order to create from this momentary experiments (sometimes proved to be a real success) a constant way of increasing the heritage interpretation experiences in Romanian cultural tourism, a way of reeducating the audience (fig. 2 and 3) and the cultural consumer in this newer direction of reenactment and passion for the national and international history.

The first objective when designing the reenactment moment as live heritage interpretation is represented, in the perspective of many reenactment societies, by the authenticity, the preoccupation for reproducing as most accurate as possible, the script, the language, the materials and costumes near to accurate (if not identical) to the period reenacted. In reenacting, more than in other situations, the need that heritage interpretation manifests itself as an art is more concrete, and as Tilden (1967, 1977) stressed out, in the same manner could be taught or transferred further on.

Analyzing what visitors expect to experience at heritage interpretation through reenactment activities, several authors emphasized the fact that audience's expectations, in their nature and information content, were very diverse (Azoulay 1993, Bruner 1996, Austin 2002 in Poria et al., 2009). Authors classifying heritage sites considering their geographical identity (Howard, 2003) underline the fact that a geographical space possesses multiple cultural identities from different history periods, multiple storytelling perspectives and to reveal the truth and the different "place's spirits". In this respect a monolithic presentation is not enough to cover the different cultural aspects of a site, the truths inside and also not enough for the visitor's expectations. A space possesses a range of multiple significances which deserve to be presented in order to create a complete and genuine vision of that particular space. This argument and this identified need to design and deliver an interpretation which contains different perspective stems from the people's different need to learn about different historical aspects of that particular place.

An experiment conducted in 1997 by Beeho and Prentince in the case of New Lank World Heritage Village (Scotland), conducting interviews with visitors showed that visitors' motivation, expectances and desires were completely different. For example some visitors expected that their visit contain more educational elements, in the same time others expected to feel a more profound emotional experience, an experience to keep them interested without implicating the cognitive component of the entire interpretation (Beeho and Prentince, 1997).

Poria et al. (2003, p.239) classified the audience considering their expectations regarding the interpretation in a heritage site as:

- a. Visitors expecting to have an emotional reaction (to feel a connection with the place, the history, the culture, the place's spirit to feel a emotional reaction to the received information).
- b. Visitors expecting to learn something, to enrich their cultural knowledge, to enlarge their accurate and relevant information about the visited site.
- c. Visitors with other types of expectations.

Beside the need of reviewing up to date the theoretical progress in the field of reenactment in Romania, one aim of this paper was to furnish an inventory of all tourism objectives in Transylvania where heritage interpretation in the form of reenactment is

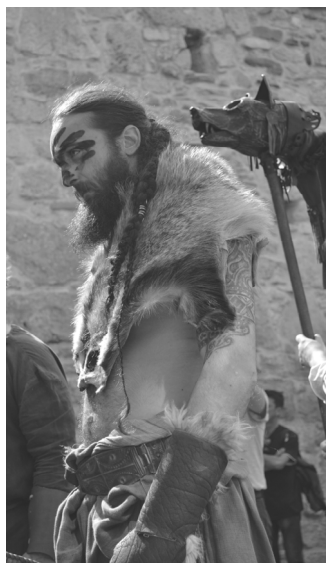
performed as a form of tourism exploitation of the site. We have limited the research to Transylvania for the reason of its Middle Age and Antiquity heritage not covered by previous papers and its sphere head practices of reenactment. Another objective of this paper was to investigate the main issues of audience's expectations regarding the performance of reenactment at Romanian historical tourism sites and issues practitioners have to challenge in their relatively recent activity.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to make an inventory of all tourism sites in Transylvania where the practice of live heritage interpretation is carried through means of reenactment we included in the research all sites where the reenactment activity was more constant than occasionally. For example, if an objective registered one single reenactment performance like in the case of an inauguration of one tourism cultural thematic trail on which it was included, was excluded from the analysis. All data were triangulated by the analysis of three types of data source: internet sites of cultural/historic sites, internet sites and Facebook pages of reenactment associations inventoried in Romania, internet sites and Facebook pages of the events and also field data (from interviewed practitioners, tourists and site administrators). Table 1 describes the location with periodical reenactment performances, the main events with reenactment activities, the principal reenactment association performing at the event and the type of heritage interpretation involved. The events captured in Table 1 are not exclusively linked to the mentioned location because in many cases the same event is held in different locations in Transylvania but due to their periodical character. Also the reenactment associations or group mentioned in column 3 is generic due to the fact that the same event is reenacted by different reenactors, and in one event and location usually performs more than one reenactment association. In order to collect visitors' opinion about the added value reenactment activity brings to heritage interpretation of a particular historical tourism site in Transylvania we have interviewed 15 subjects during the *Academic Historic Festival „In the Name of the Rose”*. We have chosen this particular event to make our study case considering its declared international reenactment character (*“International Historic Reenactment Festival”*) comparing to other cultural/historic manifestations in Transylvania registering reenactment performances (table 1). The semi-structured interviews were conducted after visitors attended a reenactment performance and represented a follow up of an exploratory before-performance short questionnaire assessing their expectations regarding the level of satisfaction with the performance. The same instrument was applied after the reenactment performance in order to compare the expected level of satisfaction with the performance with the actual level of satisfaction experienced.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 brings evidence of the lately considerable enthusiasm manifested (by both reenactors and visitors) for recreating historical and cultural events through reenactment in Transylvania: numerous locations, various events in the same heritage site and a large considerable number of reenactment association founded in Transylvania.



**Fig. 2.** The reenactment of the confrontation with Quinta Macaedonica Roman Legion during a Roman campaign (*Napoca Days*, Cluj-Napoca, 2015 - when Cluj-Napoca City held the title of *European Youth Capital*).



**Fig. 3.** The reenactment of an antique ritual to Mars during *Alba Carolina Citadel Roman Festival* (Alba Iulia).

Obviously, the audience manifests a positive attitude towards this manifestations, reenactment groups specialize themselves in narrow historical periods they reproduce, diversifying in interpretation, interactive activities, equipment and performances – representing factors of progress in this heritage interpretation form in Romania and proof of aspiration to the professionalism, the level and dedication of the reenactment association with a longer tradition mentioned before at the international level.

Interviews revealed the issues raised by Beeho and Prentince (1997) and Poria et al. (2003): audience expect different things from attending reenactment performances. Although qualitative in its nature the exploratory comparison of level of satisfaction expected-delivered showed that 1/3 of subjects interviewed expected different things from the performance and, as a consequence, were less satisfied with the reenactment performance. Half of the subjects interviewed were or became familiar with the concept of reenactment and what this sort of activities entangles. They considered that the reenactment of a historical period or event is important in heritage interpretation is paramount and represents a way of educating the audience and a manner of conserving the tangible but mostly intangible heritage.

They represents the audience that anticipates and recognize activities through the reenactment performance understanding their significance and cultural and historical importance. Those respondents registered expectations or developed during the reenactment performance a sense of belonging, amusement, empathy, interest or the

surprise of a unique cultural experience, they declared that they were part of a cultural activity both useful and pleasant in the same time. The majority of subjects that declared a positive difference between their expectations and the actual experience declared themselves highly enthusiast afterwards.

**Table 1.**

**Tourism sites with periodic reenactment activities  
in Transylvania (Romania) by type of heritage  
interpretation form**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Association/ reenactors group</b>	<b>Interpretation type (live or designed interpretation)</b>
Alba Carolina Citadel	<i>Roman Apulum Festival, Gemina Legion Days</i>	<i>Garda Cetății Alba Carolina</i>	Live Interpretation (LI) : Guard change ceremony
Cetatea de Baltă	<i>Dacian Citadels' Festival</i>	<i>Virtus Antiqua</i>	Live and designed Interpretation (LI, DI): gladiators' fights, work- shops, religious rituals, dances, slaves fair, equipment' presentations
Sibiu Citadel	<i>Medieval Festival Transylvanian Citadels</i>	<i>Cavalerii Ordinului Transilvaniei</i>	LI: theatre, dances, equipment' presentations, fights
Mediaș Citadel	<i>Mediaș-Medieval Citadel Festival</i>	<i>Anacronism Group</i>	LI: medieval Templars fights, equipment' and costumes presentations (ECP)
Cluj Citadel	<i>Rebirth of the Cita- del Festival, Napoca Days, Antic Napoca</i>	<i>Gladius Dei</i>	LI: medieval sword fights, medieval dances (MD)
Cetatea Fetei	<i>Live History hour</i>	<i>Ordinul Cavalerilor de Mediaș</i>	LI: tournaments, fights, fighting equipment' presentations, MD, interactive workshops (IW)
Porolissum	<i>Porolissum Festival, Roman Porolissum Festival</i>	<i>Ordinul Dragonilor de Transilvania- Cluj</i>	LI, DI: civil and military medieval heritage presentations, medieval, ECP, medieval crafts and gastronomy workshops (MCGW), experimental archaeology (EA)
Râșnov Citadel	<i>International His- toric Reenactment Festival Râșnov</i>	<i>Asociația Terra Dacica Aeterna</i>	LI, DI: EA, medieval fights (MF), Dacians and Romans fights, ECP, MCGW, roll-ups with historical data
Făgăraș Citadel	<i>Medieval Făgăraș Citadel Days</i>	<i>Nimfele Daciei</i>	LI, DI: Dacian rituals and dances, presentation posters
Ulpia Tra- iana Sarmi- zegetusa	<i>Open Gates Day Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa</i>	<i>Străjerii Coroanei din Brașov</i>	LI: MF, ECP, crafts workshops (CW)



<b>Location</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Association/ reenactors group</b>	<b>Interpretation type (live or designed interpretation)</b>
Sighișoara	<i>Medieval Sighișoara Fest</i>	<i>Amicii Muzeului-Zalău: Cohors III Campestris Civium Romanorum Milliaris Eqvitata, Legio VII Gemina Felix Pia Fidelis, Nvmervs Palmyrenorum Porolissensivm Sagittariorvm Civicm, Grupul Daciei, Magna Sarmatia</i>	LI: presentation of military and civic Dacian and Roman costumes, fights, parades, CW, IW
Hunyads Citadel	<i>Antic Hunedoara Festival</i>	<i>Asociația 6 Dorobanți</i>	LI, DI: XIX-XX <sup>th</sup> Romanian army equipment' presentations, parades, honorific guard reenactment, boards, posters and flyers on the historical period
Bârsei Citadel	<i>Medieval Knights' Tournament Festival</i>	<i>Regimentul I Artilerie Carol I</i>	LI: Regiments rituals presentation, equipment' and uniform presentation (EUP), parades
Orăștie	<i>2 R Roman Festival and Renaissance Festival, Roman Festival</i>	<i>Ordinul Cavalerilor din Hunedoara</i>	LI: MF, ECP, MD
Cluj-Napoca	<i>Antic and Medieval Festival</i>	<i>Grupul Regimentului 3 Artilerie 1887</i>	LI: Regiments rituals presentation, EUP, parades
Luna de Sus	<i>Dacian Festival</i>	<i>Deutch Freikorps</i>	LI: soldiers from I WW and II WW commemoration, EUP, parades, battles reenactment (BR)
Sighetul Marmației	<i>Aeternus Maramorosiensis</i>	<i>Cavalerii Cetății Bârsei</i>	LI: ECP, tournaments, MD, CW, MF
Costești	<i>Medieval Citadels Festival</i>	<i>Grupul Tradiția Militară</i>	LI, DI: Romanian Army heroes commemoration, Historical-Military Reenactment, heritage reenactment (warcraft, documents, decorations, etc.), ceremonials, parades, BR, EUP, military instruction
Turda	<i>Terra Dacica Aeterna Festival, Dacian Festival-Under the Wolf Sign</i>	<i>Compania Arrany Griff Rend</i>	LI: MF, EUP, street animation, MD
Bistrița	<i>Dacians Citadels Festivalival, Bistriței Medieval Festival Days, Medieval Camp</i>	<i>Ordinul Cavalerilor Artgotica</i>	LI: MD, knights' fights, pyrotechnics

A part of the less satisfied subjects registered a low level of expected satisfaction with the performance before the representation, declaring a lack of familiarity with the concepts due to their first attendance to such an event or to a declared low interest for this kind of activity.

Others declared in the beginning a considerable amount of expected satisfaction but during the performance, due to subjective factors, their level of actual satisfaction dropped but from high values of expected satisfaction to a reasonable level of actual satisfaction after the performance demonstrating a certain amount of appreciation for the cultural value of the act. The expert-amateur subject was also present – they know what to expect and had high expectation fulfilled by the performance. *"The world is thirsty for history, living history which is delivered by story-telling in active voice, with which they could personally connect but unmediated by the internal subjectivism of neither the historian's, neither the reenactor's, neither of the imposing policy of the ruling politics in the moment of the reenactment."* (A.S. Ionescu, PhD., President of "6 Dorobanți" Reenactment Association, Director of Arts Institute, București, 2014<sup>3</sup>).

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The (historical) reenactment represents a viable modality of heritage interpretation in Romania and an efficient mean of tourism exploitation with positive results especially for the citadels in Transylvania. This form of heritage interpretation obtained in Transylvania's case positive results, with an enthusiast reaction from the audience, festivals which included reenacting performances registered better reactions from tourists. Historical reenactment represents an excellent method of preserving, understanding and promoting the respective heritage. Reenacting certain events in a site like Râșnov Citadel represents a viable way of encreasing tourist's level of satisfaction with the cultural experience of visiting the site, bringing to life sentiments of cultural belonging and a way of honoring the ancestors, being in the same time a living history lesson and a ludic leisure outdoor activity.

The results of this research were consistent with the work of Beeho and Prentince (1997) and Poria et al. (2003) showing that the different expectation from a reenactment audience is also confirmed by the Romanian context: people from the same audience expect different things (from emotional experiences to cognitive involvement) from attending reenactment performances.

In nowadays Romania this form of heritage interpretation is a work in progress and it is still defining itself, with objectives which the reenactment associations tend to shape firmly in order to create from this momentary experiments, a constant way of increasing the heritage interpretation experiences in Romanian cultural tourism, a way of reeducating the audience and the cultural consumer in this newer direction of reenactment and passion for the national and international history.

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<sup>3</sup> Notes from a field interview on the topic of "In the Name of the Rose" Reenactment Festival (Râșnov, 2014).

For increasing this form of tourism exploitation of historical sites, a capital invested in this sector is paramount, professional reenactment associations are also needed, and scholars to design and offer academic expertise in respecting the historical accuracy of the period brought to life are key ingredients for success. The interviewed practitioners declared that from historical perspective, frequently the reenactment performances do not reach the due accuracy in authenticity of historical events reenacted.

However, a multidisciplinary perspective, besides the historical one, is also much needed in order to increase the tourist experience with an historical site. Reenactment performances in a way are already perceived as tourism services but the integration in tourism thematic products where the reenacting performances are key ingredients is still absent. The empowerment of a creative festival tourism industry could create a favorable underpinning platform, when the heritage elements in Transylvania are complex, consistent and well connected with the tourism infrastructure. The necessity of a well promoted tourism product which makes this kind of festivals real successful with continuity and increasing quality in time is also transparent.

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