

THE POTENTIAL EFFECT OF VIDEO GAMES ON TOURISM IN ROMANIA. CASE STUDY: RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE

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Abstract: Tourism induced by video games represents a new form of tourism that is emerging as an opportunity for economic development. Due to its particular characteristics, the tourism induced by video games stands out as an attractive form and related to a special category of tourists, namely those who are part of the gaming industry. The purpose of the study is focused on the identification and analysis of Romania's tourist attractiveness elements, within the Resident Evil Village game based on a comparison between the frames presented in the game and frames from reality. At the same time, the development of the study also included the analysis of the evolution of tourism induced by video games by consulting the specialized literature. The main results of the study were highlighted by the identification of multiple elements and locations related to Transylvania within the video game, thus shaping an innovative touristic image of the historical province through the video game. Also, the potential effect of presenting these elements of cultural identity can stimulate tourist motivation.

Keywords: tourism induced by video games, elements of cultural identity, architecture, Vlad the Impaler, Transylvania

1. Introduction

The video game industry has been developing since 1970 and has gained momentum in recent years, standing out for a prosperous market, but also for the multitude of elements it encompasses, such as: the organization of thematic events, the promotion of certain regions or traditions through games, the use of video games in the educational sector, etc. [1, 2]. The tourism induced by video games represents a new form of tourism that directly refers to visiting the places presented through video games, but also to participation in specialized events with high popularity (Comic Con, World Championship-League of Legends, World Esports Championship) [3]. Among the most relevant examples of tourism induced by video games, the following can be highlighted: Assassins Creed, Legends of Catalonia, Resident Evil Village, etc. As a strong point in this industry,

we can also mention the concept of “gamification”, which refers to the use of a game's design for purposes that are not part of the “gaming” area. In the case of tourism, this concept directly materializes in the use of certain playful and game-like elements to maximize the tourist's involvement, loyalty and awareness of the destination [4]. The concept of “gamification” represents a new way to enhance certain activities, among which tourism can be found. Thus, we can recall the fact that, by achieving certain objectives within a thematic game, tourists can receive certain facilities in terms of the tourist purchase process [5]. The gamification, within the tourism process, is emerging as a new form of propulsion of the tourism process in terms of the interaction between the tourist and the real environment, in accordance with a virtual environment. This gamification process enhances the

learning and interaction process in relation to the chosen destination, so by creating a virtual reality of a certain location, tourists can observe certain particular elements that they cannot capture in real life [6].

The purpose of this research is to analyze the potential effect of video games on the tourism in Romania, selecting as a case study the game *Resident Evil Village*.

2. Methodology

2.1. Description of the Case Study

The game *Resident Evil Village* includes multiple images related to various tourist attractions associated with the space of the historical province of Transylvania. This is a survival horror game that was released in the year 2021 as a sequel to 2017's *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard*. The game *Resident Evil 8* is a first-person game, with players controlling the character of Ethan Winter, who is trying to find his kidnapped daughter in a village full of mutant creatures. The game retains certain features from its previous editions, namely: the horror theme, finding certain clues and objects, and managing resources for survival. The action in the game takes place in Eastern Europe, more precisely in a snowy village in Romania, which is described as "being taken directly from the Victorian era" [7].

2.2. Methods

The methods that were the basis of this study include the review of specialized literature on the evolution of tourism induced by video games. The qualitative analysis method was used to extract frames and elements related to Romania from the game *Resident Evil Village*. Also, in order to further enhance the relevance of the study, a comparison was made between the digital elements and their counterpart in reality, so as to emphasize the idea of reference to Romania, particularly to Transylvania.

3. Results

Even before the release of the game, it was known that the game refers to Romania, more specifically to Transylvania, which created a wave of curiosity among fans of the *Resident*

Evil series. Many fans of the game gave a review after testing the game, among which we can specify: "*based on the game design (the architecture), the local currency (the Leu), the name Lady Dimitrescu*", "*I notice many inspirations from Transylvania*"; "*In Resident Evil we can see many characters connected to Dracula. Clearly, the village is in Romania 100%*" [8]. The developers wanted to create a new aesthetic of the game after the stories of the previous games. Thus, bringing warlocks and vampires to the fore, somehow freshened up the narrative thread of the game. They wanted to recreate certain elements from Romania, but these were merged with Western elements to be easily recognizable to the international audience. So we remember the pronunciation of Romanian words with an English accent. To avoid cultural shock, the developers resort to the domestication process of Romania. Thus, it was presented in an easy and stereotypical way to be easier to understand [9].

Among the most obvious references to Romania presented in the game *Resident Evil Village* we can mention: the architecture of the houses, the objects in the houses, the names of the dishes, the currency in the game, the Dimitrescu castle, Lady Dimitrescu.

3.1. House Architecture and Elements of Cultural Identity

Regarding the architecture of the houses, as well as the general design of the village presented in the video game, we can notice a rather large similarity with a village in Romania, respectively in Transylvania. It can be seen that the houses are built of wood and brick and have many characteristics similar to those of a Romanian house (Figure 1).

The architecture of the houses also emphasizes the fact that the action in the video game takes place during a past era, the components of the houses being quite rustic and outdated.



Figure 1: House from the game Resident Evil Village.

Source: [10]

In the game is also featured a wooden church (Figure 2) that contains icons with the character “Mother Miranda” similar to the “Virgin Mary”.



Figure 2: Wooden church from the game Resident Evil Village.

Source: [11]

Regarding the elements of cultural identity, the game Resident Evil Village presents a multitude of objects with Romanian specificity (Figure 3 a, b) through which is further emphasized the idea that the presented place is located in Romania, even if this is not clearly specified.



Figure 3: Folk-inspired tablecloth (a) and elements of cultural identity (b) from the game Resident Evil Village

Source: [12, 13]

Among the most recognizable elements of cultural identity can be mentioned: specific furniture and textile material objects (Figure 3

a), traditional ceramics, and traditional embroidery (Figure 3 b). Thus, making a comparison between the architecture of the houses in the game and the architecture of the houses in reality, a multitude of similarities can be observed regarding the typology of the home, the exterior design and component elements of a typical household (Figure 4).



Figure 4: House from Transylvania - Village Museum in Bucharest.

Source: second author

At the same time, the comparison made between the digitally created image of the wooden churches and the one in reality, but also between the elements of cultural identity, outlines an overall picture in terms of location and cultural references to which the game refers (Figures 5, 6, 7).



Figure 5: The wooden church – Village Museum in Bucharest.

Source: second author



Figure 6: The interior of the traditional Transylvanian house.

Source: [14]



Figure 7: Comparison of furniture in the game and furniture in reality.
Source: [15]

3.2. Dimitrescu Castle versus Peleş Castle

Within the game, emphasis is also placed on the location of some remarkable cultural objects, not only of the type of village in Transylvania. For example, the Peleş Castle is also recreated in digital format (Figure 8). In the game, the Dimitrescu Castle is represented as the residence of the aristocratic vampire named Lady Dimitrescu.



Figure 8: Dimitrescu Castle from the game Resident Evil Village.
Source: [16]



Figure 9: Peleş Castle.
Source: first author

Even if, according to the legends, “Dracula” lived in Bran Castle, by presenting in a virtual environment a reproduction of Peleş Castle (Figure 9) and various architectural and interior design elements, the game further induces the idea that the action takes place in Romania (Figure 10 a, b).



Figure 10: Interior of Dimitrescu Castle (a), Interior of Peleş Castle (b).
Source: [17,18]

Implicitly, the rooms of the Peleş Castle were also reproduced in the game's virtual environment, for example the living room, where it can be seen that many elements have been preserved, such as: the furniture, their positioning, the lighting bodies, the materials from which the pieces of furniture are made (Figures 11, 12).



Figure 11: The living room in the Dimitrescu Castle.
Source: [19]



Figure 12: The dining room in Peleş Castle.
Source: [20]

Also, the reproductions of Peleş Castle and its interior are a tool for tourism promotion.

3.3. Lady Dimitrescu Character

Lady Dimitrescu is the most popular character in the game Resident Evil Village, a character that was created based on the legend “Dracula”. She is represented as an aristocratic vampire. The character plays the

role of a lord, being the ruler of the village near the Dimitrescu Castle. As for the legend of “Dracula”, it can be found in Bram Stoker's homonymous novel, where Vlad the Impaler, the historical inspiration character, is presented as a monster, a vampire [21]. The presentation of the Lady Dimitrescu character, correlated with the legend of “Dracula”, emphasizes even more the fact that the action in the game takes place in Romania (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Lady Dimitrescu character
Source: [22]

3.4. In-Game Currency and Dish Names

The game Resident Evil Village also features a specific language regarding the dishes that the main character can buy from the “duke’s” shop with the in-game currency, the “Leu”. Among the most famous dishes that stand out in the game is “vegetable soup”(Figure 14), being introduced by the wife of the character Ethan Winters as a local recipe.



Figure 14: Presentation of the dish “vegetable soup” in the video game
Source: [23]

Other dishes featured in the game are: *mititei* (grilled minced meat rolls), *pork soup*, *pilaf*, *chicken stew*, *cabbage rolls with fish*.

4. Conclusions

Following the results obtained, it is noted that elements related to Romania can be found in the video game selected as the case study. This fact adds value to the nascent development of video game-induced tourism. The video games are a new form of promotion for many fields, including tourism. In this context, it can be highlighted that many games present in digital format certain locations, traditions and cultural elements that constitute a tool for the tourism development of a region with a large scale of coverage in correlation with the age group of tourists, gender, their hobbies, as well as the field in which they work.

The potential effect of video games on the tourism industry in Romania spreads directly to the gaming industry at the global level, respectively an industry in continuous development. Through video games, a series of tourism motivations resulting from game testing by direct participants in this industry are stimulated.

At the same time, the studies in which this theme was addressed reflect the importance of this form of tourism. At the same time, tourism induced by video games presents a special potential for development, taking into account the large number of players, even more so as video games present a challenging way of communication. This fact justifies an additional exploration, considering the substantial implications of the tourism induced by video games from an economic point of view: the superior valorization of some tourist destinations, the increase in the income obtained from tourism, the increase in the tourist attractiveness of some areas with less known tourist potential.

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