




Research Article

# Tourism and national identity in multicultural cities: Romanian and Hungarian representations of Cluj-Napoca in guidebooks

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## Abstract

The study explores the relationship between geopolitics and tourism through the case of Cluj-Napoca, with a focus on processes of subject formation. The site was selected for two reasons: (1) the city is currently located in Romania but was part of Hungary before 1920 and remains ethnically divided between a Romanian majority and a Hungarian minority; (2) it has transformed from a post-communist industrial centre into a neoliberal IT hub. Through an analysis of Romanian and Hungarian-language guidebooks published over the past 100+ years (11 guidebooks, 1903–2018), I conducted a discourse analysis of both narrative and visual content, focusing on explicit nationalist elements, discursive contestations over historical heritage, and representations of communist ideology. The findings indicate that while Hungarian-language materials have remained unchanged in their portrayal of the city's identity, Romanian-language materials have shifted markedly from nation-building narratives toward more multicultural and inclusive framings. This discursive transformation is accompanied, however, by what Simon Harrison terms the symbolic appropriation of cultural heritage. The study argues that Hungarian tourists from Hungary emphasize Cluj's heritage as part of the Hungarian nation; while Romanian tourists historically emphasized ethnic character under national communism, more recently they focus on integrating the city into a European, multicultural civil identity.



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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, research on the relationship between geopolitics and tourism has regained momentum. Although there is a growing demand for theoretical and conceptual clarification (Gillen and Mostafanezhad 2019; Huang and Liu 2024), historical investigations of this field remain scarce. Eastern Europe offers an excellent setting for such inquiries, as the new borders established by the major peace treaties of the 20th century often left substantial national minority populations behind, posing challenges of (geopolitical) subject formation for both the “mother country” and the newly formed states, as well as for the minority group itself (Brubaker et al. 2006). Furthermore, the Cold War, the regime change of the 1990s, and European integration brought profound geopolitical and ideological transformations, which also reshaped tourism, turning it into an instrument (among others) for constructing geopolitical identities.

In cultural terms, tourism can become a tool for shaping consciousness and identity politics, that is, it can contribute to the formation of geopolitical subjectivity. By geopolitical subject formation, we can primarily understand the (re) construction of the tourist's geopolitical imaginaries and ideologies. This process involves both state and local discourses related to the given destination, as well as the tourist's concrete experiences. In this study, I focus primarily on how different discourses contribute to this process. Traveling also means the consumption, experience, reinforcement, or rewriting of spatial imagination. Tourism can serve to reinforce an existing identity in cases where irredentist ideologies motivate the tourist. Tourism is also a kind of praxis through which existing (nationalist) fantasies and emotions can be experienced within the social space of a given place. These experiences contribute to the evaluation and valorisation of locations (Frenzel 2017; Frenzel and Frisch 2022). In such cases, a nationalist "pilgrimage" to former state territories, the "lost lands", takes place, during which tourists discover the romantic topography of national ideologies. Tourism can also play a role in linking national consciousness with a new territory, such as Chinese tourism to the Nansha Islands (Huang and Suliman 2023), where tourists begin to interpret the disputed territory as their own, as part of the national terrain.

One of the most compelling cases in this regard is Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), the most important city in Transylvania, Romania. The region is ethnically highly heterogeneous and remained part of the Kingdom of Hungary until World War I, after which it became the largest region of Romania. Due to its disproportionate territorial, cultural, and economic weight relative to the size of each nation-state, the historical geography of the city has become a key reference point in the nationalisms and historical politics of both countries. After the First World War, the Treaty of Trianon (which resulted in an almost two-thirds loss of the territory of the former Hungarian Kingdom, including Transylvania) caused a fundamental rupture in the national consciousness, which became one of the most important factors of the modern Hungarian national identity. Thus, Transylvania came to occupy a central role in the Hungarian geographical imagination as a space imagined as preserving an authentic Hungarian character (Feischmidt 2008). In Romanian symbolic geography, Transylvania is the emblem of the country's and the nation's great (albeit still incomplete) unification. Although, according to census data, those identifying as Romanian had already become the majority in the region prior to unification, this trend rarely extended to large urban centres.

Before World War I, Cluj's cultural landscape was shaped primarily by Hungarian and German-speaking communities and institutions, while its modern, representative urban centre emerged largely as a result of Magyarization. Architecturally, it reflected the bourgeois classicism typical of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy; politically, it embodied Hungarian national narratives. The newly formed Romanian nation-state saw as its historical task the symbolic re-coding of the city and its integration into the national spatial imagination. From the 1960s onward, Romanian national communism intensified efforts to "Romanianize" the city—one notable example being the addition of the term "Napoca" to the city's name, a reference to the ancient Roman settlement, thereby reinforcing the Daco-Roman continuity narrative. Following the regime change, the city's iconic mayor, Gheorghe Funar, adopted an ethnonationalist symbolic

politics in order to accrue political capital (Brubaker et al. 2006). This further polarized and contested the symbolic urban landscape, overemphasizing its Romanian character while questioning the legitimacy of Hungarian presence.

From the 2000s onward, however, Romania's Euro-Atlantic orientation advanced steadily. Due to the prospect of EU accession and rapid economic development, Romanian cities underwent significant economic and urban transformations (Tătar 2022). The new neoliberal city leadership (Vincze 2017) sought to attract Western capital, which in turn reshaped dominant discourses. As a result, a more tolerant, progressive, and multicultural urban image emerged.

These overlapping processes—imperial transitions, parallel nation-state competition over the region's cultural geography (including tourism), and shifting geopolitical orientations—make it essential to examine, from a historical perspective, how the production of geopolitical subjectivity through tourism has evolved over the past century.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Tourism, as many have already pointed out (Iaquinto et al. 2024), is not merely a risk-free leisure activity but is embedded in a broader cultural, political, and geopolitical framework. In a wider sense, it also has diplomatic, economic policy, and public policy implications. As Stoffelen (2024) also notes, tourism does not only mean the act of traveling, but since it involves crossing borders, it also means significant cross-border connections (in a technical sense, for example, in terms of infrastructure development, destination marketing, economic impact assessment, and tourism data collection). Nilsson et al. (2010) pointed out that economic factors can override but do not exclude political factors in the tourism of border regions, and furthermore, due to European integration policies, the phenomenon of debordering may also be initiated.

One of the most politicized forms of tourism is heritage tourism. The concept of heritage has gradually expanded, coming to encompass an ever-wider range of elements, as heritage status plays a highly valuable role in identity and collective memory formation (Vecco 2010). Although often presented as a universal cultural value, it is embedded in power relations (Harvey 2001) and very often serves explicit memory-political purposes.

For example, museums frequently convey explicit (nationalist) memory narratives (An and Qian 2024), thereby creating a one-sided interpretation of a contested place that favours those in power. Heritage is produced and maintained through discourses, but its experience is place-bound (Ashworth 1994); tourism also builds on these discourses in destination management. For this reason, heritage often functions as a geopolitical tool (Huang and Liu 2024). Eastern Europe provides numerous examples of this situation through the rivalry of national narratives: one of the best-known examples is Gazimestan, where Serbs and Kosovar Albanians compete for symbolic ownership of the memorial site (Pap and Reményi 2020).

In the region, heritage often represents a source of minority-political and geopolitical conflict (Dogramadjieva 2024), especially when local heritage is embedded in nationalist narratives that exclude ethnic/national minorities. Such dynamics often increase the importance of memory politics, generating rivalries in memory politics between ethnic groups (Filep 2016), when the

credibility of the opposing narrative is questioned, while the protection of the perceived own heritage becomes a prioritized political goal (Feischmidt 2008).

Heritage is also symbolic capital in ethnic competition; therefore, from the perspective of competition in geopolitical subject formation, it is especially important to see how the competition for possession has evolved. Harrison (1995) presents the following types of competition and strategies:

- Valuation contests: Rival groups' identity symbols strive to create hierarchical relations, which appear either in the devaluation of rival groups' symbols and/or in the enhancement of their own.
- Proprietary contests: The struggle for possession of a symbol that can be shared among rival groups.
- Innovation contests: Aims to convey the message of the community's excellence. This occurs either by renewing existing symbolic forms or creating new symbols.
- Expansionary contests: The group attempts to replace the rival group's symbols with their own.

According to Harrison, these strategies usually appear combined in reality and follow typical objectives: generally, valuation strategies are chosen by those seeking higher status, innovation strategies by those wanting to create an independent identity, ownership strategies usually legitimize claims to a territory or office, and extension strategies aim to gain political commitment among people.

### 3. Urban development and political turning points of Cluj-Napoca

The current city developed during the Middle Ages, when it belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary. According to the pattern of Hungarian urban development, the majority of the population was initially Saxon and later became Hungarian. The city's growth gained new momentum in the 16th century, when the quasi-independent Principality of Transylvania was established, concentrating important economic, cultural, religious, and political roles in the city.

During the 19th century, the city expanded significantly, with the city centre shifting considerably. During the process of urban bourgeoisification, the city's character adopted the classicizing style typical of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Many representative public institutions, which still define the city today, were established at this time. Furthermore, during the process of Hungarian nation-building, the city's symbolic landscape became markedly Hungarian, with public space names honouring the 19th-century Hungarian cultural elite and key national-liberal politicians. It was also during this period that the Matthias Corvinus statue, which later became the focus of many symbolic struggles, was erected. Matthias, born in the city, was one of the most significant Central European rulers of his time, making him a highly important figure for both Hungarian and Romanian nationalism.

Following the post-World War I settlements, Cluj-Napoca underwent a change of sovereignty and became part of Romania. By then, the Romanian ethnic group had already become the majority in the city; however, this change was not yet strongly reflected in the city's character. The city undertook significant symbolic spatial gestures to shape a Romanian identity: street names were changed to honour Romanian historical figures. During this period, the

monumental Orthodox cathedral was built, and to emphasize the Daco–Roman continuity, a statue of Romulus and Remus, imported from Italy, was erected in the city centre. At the same time, a plaque was placed on the Matthias statue, highlighting Matthias's Romanian origin.

In the later socialist era, the symbolic landscape was further expanded with communist and Romanian national symbols.

After the regime change, the ethnonationalist mayor Gheorghe Funar increased the number of Romanian nationalist elements, primarily aimed at gaining political capital.

#### 4. Methodology

In order to examine these changing dynamics, I obtained the sources from the University libraries of Cluj and, in selecting them, I aimed to include illustrated guidebooks in both languages, ensuring that materials from each historical period were represented. The selection primarily focused on guidebooks dedicated to Cluj-Napoca or Cluj County; therefore, historical accounts, local monographs, and literary works, although these may also be considered part of travel literature, were not included. Consequently, the selection is not comprehensive; instead, I sought to create a historically representative sample. The analysed sample consists of six Romanian (Bortes 1923, Baconsky 1963, Anton 1973, Bogosavlievici - Zmicală 2017, Ciorca 2017, Rusu 2018) and five Hungarian-language (Kelemen 1903, Orosz 1933, Morariu 1965, Gaal 1992, Gaal 2001) travel guides published between 1903 and 2018, including both locally and nationally published editions.

These texts define what the tourist should visit and how to interpret these places. Travel guides provide historical narratives, spatial interpretations and orientations, as well as patterns of spatial perception and navigation. Although usually written in a light style suitable for leisure activities, the historical explanations and selective spatial interpretations carry political significance and contribute substantially to subject formation, the experience of space, and its conceptualization. Today, this is a much more complex process in which the role of travel guides has diminished, but due to the historical and ethnic comparison, travel guides remain the best sources.

During the study, I analysed Romanian and Hungarian-language travel guides using the method called "Discourse Analysis 1" by Gillian Rose (2016). Rose builds on Foucault's concept of discourse. So, the discourse is a system of statements that defines how things are conceptualized and how behaviour is shaped, thus creating subjects of social life. Different social institutions, including tourism, have their own (sometimes competing) discourses, so the tourist is also a subject created by tourism discourses. Two typical systems of discursive statements observable in travel guides are visual language and narrative text.

In the case of discourses created by images, I also analysed the aesthetic and rhetorical devices of visual language that function as persuasive tools of the discourse. In Foucault's terms, persuasive tools mean how the discourse tries to support its own "truth." For travel guides, this refers to the correct way of perceiving the destination and, within the context of memory-political competition, the factual historical truth. Aesthetic devices include the colour scheme and mood of the images, their typical compositions; visual language devices include the thematic content of the images and the typical rhetorical modes

of the assembled discourses (e.g., documentary, illustrative, mood-setting). A similar logic was applied to the texts. I examined the stylistic features and rhetorical forms of the texts (see above).

To avoid ethnic essentialism and to better capture the symbolic contestations within the discourses, I coded the images based on the internal logic of the narratives. For example, King Matthias can simultaneously function as both a Romanian and a Hungarian national symbol. During inductive coding, I separated explicit nationalist contents in the travel guides (national metanarratives and contents referring to national space), and based on historical periods, the medieval and 19th-century bourgeois built heritage, the presentation of infrastructure created by modernizing states in the 20th century, and more recently, contents nostalgically portraying urban lifestyles focusing less on buildings and more on feelings and lifestyles could be distinguished. I examined the internal proportions manifested in the narratives in terms of time and nationality, as well as their relationships to each other and transformations. Thus, I established the following categories (with examples in parentheses):

- Hungarian national symbols (e.g., statue King Matthias, St. Michael's Church).
- Urban life (e.g., transportation, street scenes, atmosphere images).
- Romanian national symbols (e.g., statues of King Matthias, Avram Iancu, Lupoaica).
- Architectural heritage (e.g., representative 19th-century buildings).
- Medieval heritage (e.g., St. Michael's Church, other medieval buildings).

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Context of the discourse

Both discourses are fundamentally shaped by national rivalry. One of the basic structures of these discourses is a historically framed argument in dialogue, aiming to prove that the given ethnic group possessed the territory earlier, while the other is only an immigrant, which typically reflects the 20th-century Eastern European nationalisms' competition over primordial claims (Smith 1991). The discourses presented in the books are embedded within these nationalist frameworks as well as within the historical context of the imperium change. At the same time, following Brubaker's theory of nationalism (Brubaker et al. 2006), it is important to emphasize that there exists a local, minority Transylvanian Hungarian discourse that diverges from the earlier Hungarian state narratives. This study primarily approaches the topic from the perspective of the kin-state tourist, while also taking into account, to a limited extent, the perspective of the Transylvanian Hungarian tourist.

Explicit nationalist narrative styles are not characteristic of the Hungarian books. Instead, a kind of ethnic-based symbolic contestations can be observed in the toponymy. The Hungarian-language use of street names appears in all the books, even the most recently published ones, despite the fact that, since the socialist period, most streets have Romanian names and are named after Romanian figures. It is also noticeable that some presented locations fit into the national history where possible—for example, in the case of parliaments. However, these interpretations also carry significant local referentiality, meaning such interpretations do not primarily imply the imposition of an abstract, place-alien nationalist space.

The Romanian nationalist narrative appears most strongly in the 1923 book (Borteş 1923). Based on the Daco–Roman thesis (that the Romanian nation descends from the Roman-era Dacian people), the emphasis is placed on Roman origins. Part of this narrative is also the portrayal of Hungarians as settlers. Furthermore, the book refers to the rapid symbolic spatial occupation after the change of sovereignty, projecting the emergence of the city’s Romanian character and the marginalization of the Hungarian and German characters.

In the travel guides produced during the socialist era, the Daco–Roman continuity (though present) is less dominant as a nationalist element; instead, emphasis is placed on the national space. The 1963 book (Baconsky 1963) begins by introducing the city’s geographical context. The first reference point is Feleac, historically a Romanian majority area. Then, by presenting Ştefan cel Mare and Mihai Eminescu—key figures in the national history—the book integrates Cluj-Napoca into the Romanian national cultural canon. Further geographic reference points include Moldova, Wallachia, and the Balkan regions. Thus, the city is clearly interpreted within the framework of Romania.

Books published after the regime change show the persistence but also significant nuance or critique of the nationalist narrative. Although they reflect on the historical connection between ancient Napoca and Cluj-Napoca, they do so mainly through etymological arguments rather than suggesting population continuity, thus taking a less explicit stance on the Daco–Roman continuity debate. The book from 2018 (Rusu 2018) even directly questions it, pointing to the lack of scientific evidence.

Another significant change is the shift in geographical contextualization. On one hand, the emphasis on the microenvironment increases significantly: the city is primarily situated by describing its own geographical surroundings, thus appearing much more as a local point. Furthermore, connections to Western Europe or Central Europe are mentioned, presenting the city as a kind of bridging place between West and East.

## 5.2. The formation of the visual discourses

In this section, I will show the results of the content analysis of the pictures in the relevant books (I did not display books which do not have images). Figs 1, 2 show the distribution of images in the respective books by thematic categories according to the coding scheme. The bars represent the percentage distribution.

From the perspective of the emergence of the Hungarian-language discourse, the first major publication dates from 1903 (Kelemen 1903). It is worth noting, however, that the volume contained only a limited number of images (ten in total). Half of these depicted 19th-century buildings, while three represented primarily Hungarian national symbols. As illustrated in Fig. 2, these two visual elements continued to dominate the Hungarian-language discourse in the subsequent decades. Hungarian nationalist symbols include Matthias, presented as a Hungarian king, or elements embedded in the narrative of Hungarian national history (such as connections of parliaments of the Hungarian Kingdom or nationally significant events and figures to the given sight).

In the first modern Romanian-language guidebook (Borteş 1923), we can observe that nationalist symbols appear at a much higher rate, making up nearly half of the elements, primarily emphasizing the Daco–Roman continuity. The

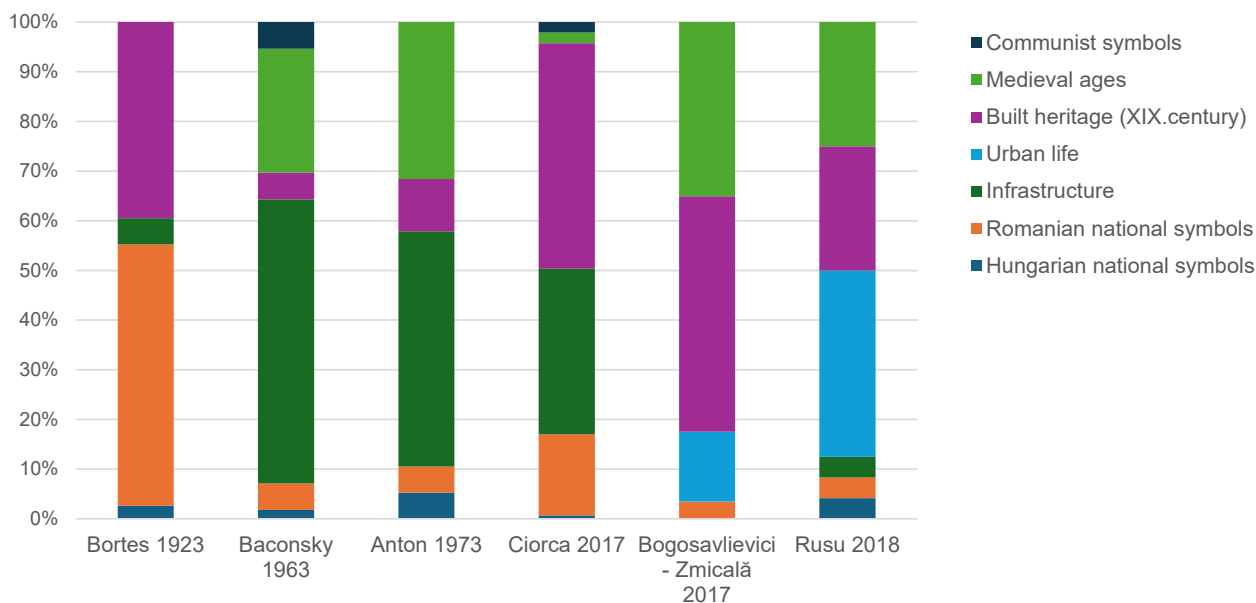


Figure 1. Contents of Romanian-language guidebooks.

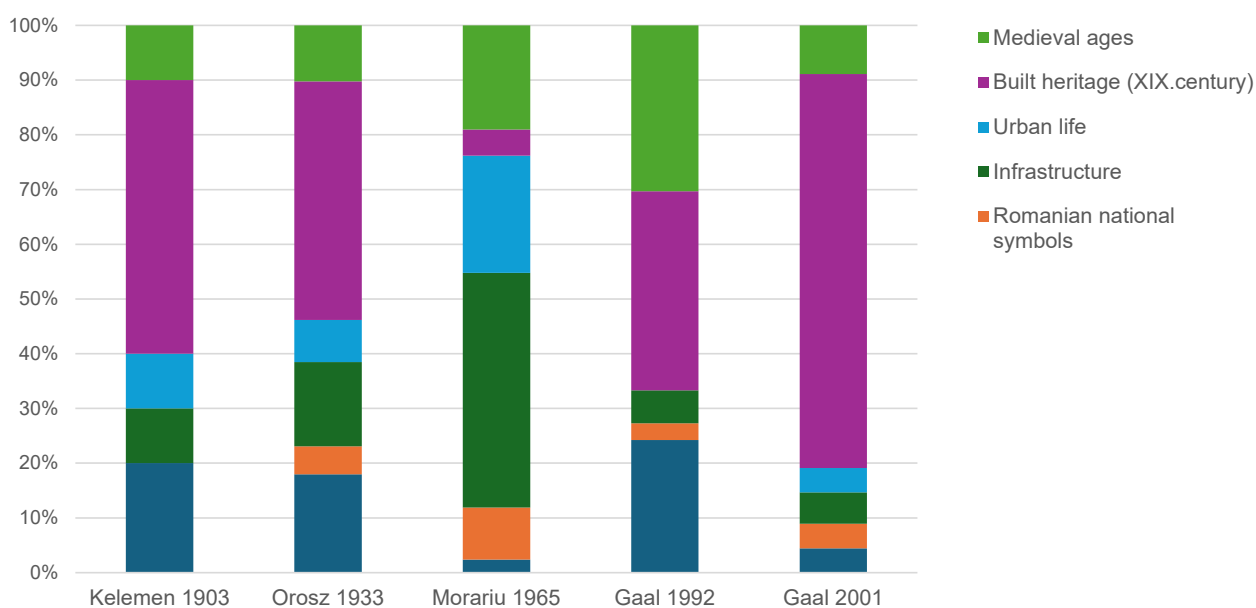


Figure 2. Contents of Hungarian-language guidebooks on Cluj.

book places particular emphasis on presenting Roman artifacts: antique vases and museums showcasing burial traces are introduced. Hungarians appear here as settlers who arrived in “our lands (părțile noastre)” in the 12th century. The exceptionally high overt presence of nationalist rhetoric suggests that this is an example of “hot nationalism” (Hutchinson 2006), meaning the assertive need to prove that the city is part of the new sovereignty, and at the same time, an appearance of a symbolic innovation through the implementation of new symbols.

A common element is also the presentation of infrastructure. This can be understood in the context of Romania’s fundamentally rural character in the 1930s, where products of modernization also held tourist value.

A more important difference is that among the Romanian travel guides, there is no presentation of medieval elements. This can be explained by the fact that in the Middle Ages, the city did not have a significant Romanian population but was mainly Saxon and Hungarian; therefore, in the competition over autochthony, this would have been a disadvantage.

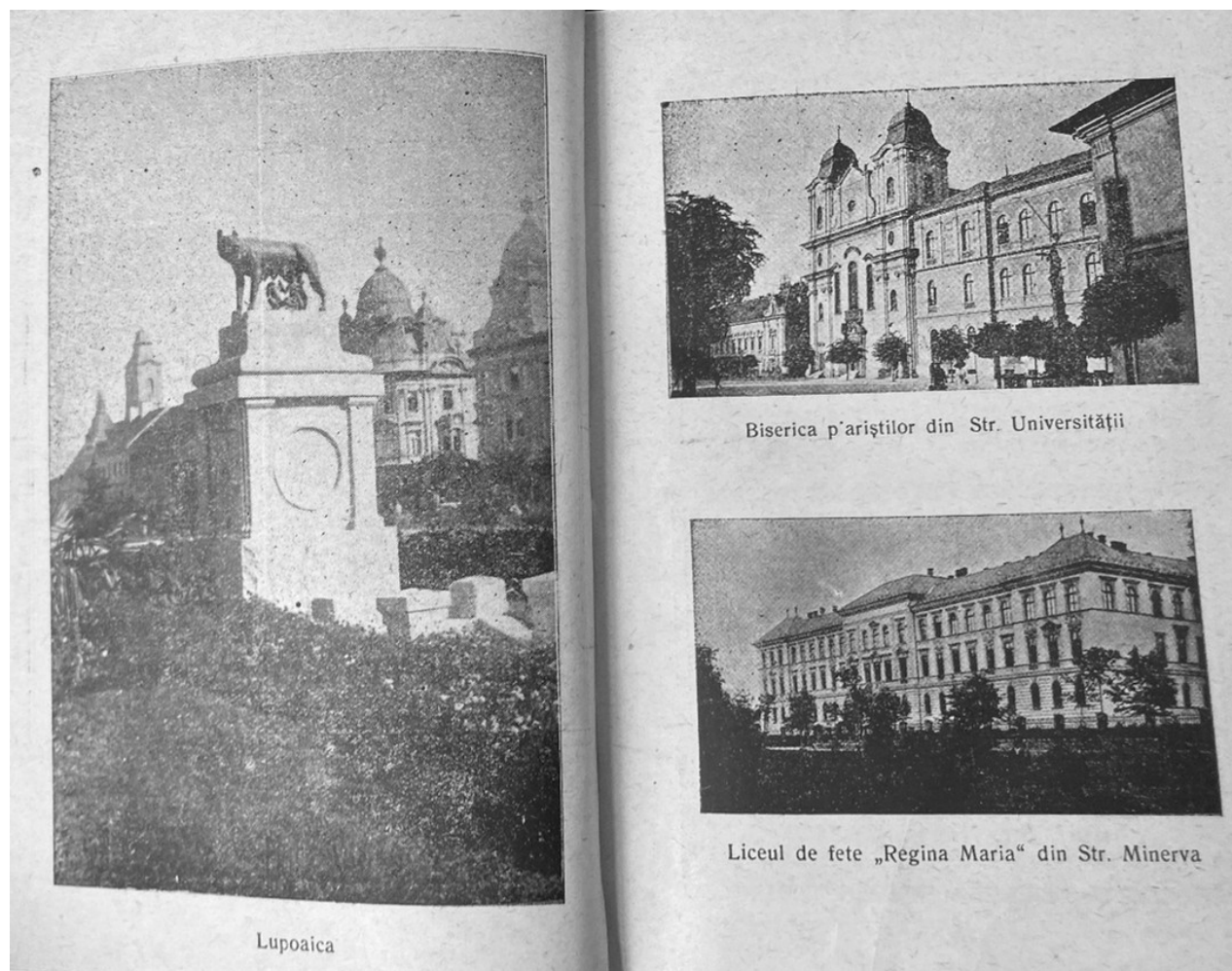


Figure 3. The statue Lupoaica (the she-wolf with Romulus and Remus) in the first guidebook after the imperium change (Borteș 1923).

### 5.3. Socialist travel guides

During the socialist era, only Romanian-language travel guides were published. Unlike earlier books, these already included the presentation of the medieval heritage. Generally, the same medieval content can be observed as in the Hungarian guides, which is a form of appropriative symbolic politics. However, due to the different context, these elements primarily refer to the city itself and are difficult to associate with Romanian ethnic content. The books themselves do not attempt to do so; their captions interpreting images and historical narratives merely mention these elements, referring only to their antiquity and medieval origin rather than integrating them into national or ethnic history. Thus, a new narrative emerged in which Cluj (Kolozsvár) is a (Romanian) city with medieval traditions

as well. Here, we can observe an innovation in that, alongside the nationalist narrative, much greater emphasis is placed on incorporating local references.

At the same time, the greatest emphasis was placed on presenting the new infrastructure, which was a symbolic expansion policy as well. These demonstrated the achievements of the new, modernizing state: youth hostels, university lecture halls, newly built hotels, etc. As we can see, however, these had already appeared in the 1930s (also in the Hungarian-language guides!), thus reflecting the propagandistic activities of the modernizing state, which was one of the socialist regime's most important ideological programs. Furthermore, the travel guide genre itself changed in that it began to recommend places for pragmatic leisure activities, such as hotels and beaches, features less common in earlier or later books. The conspicuous absence of 19th-century heritage can be explained by the socialist narrative's attempt to emphasize its own historical activity, as well as ideological distancing from the "bourgeois" civic heritage. In the visual language, there is a tendency toward aestheticization; the images are not merely illustrative but depict the architectural vocabulary and interiors of buildings. The themes include key spaces of everyday socialist life, such as factories or residential areas, thereby for the first time in tourist guides going beyond the city centre's boundaries. In this case, the symbolic innovation does not stem from nationalism but rather from the ideology of the socialist regime.



Figure 4. A guidebook from the socialist period (Baconsky 1963).

#### 5.4. Post-socialist books

The content of Hungarian-language books published in the post-socialist era did not change significantly from earlier ones. The medieval and 19th-century heritage remained the most important content. However, the proportion of 19th-century elements increased significantly. Furthermore, the city's historical narrative was expanded with content that clearly aimed to refute Romanian ethno-nationalist narratives. Instead of the Daco–Roman continuity, the city's Roman origins were presented, and the Hungarian conquest of 895 was also emphasized. The books provided more detailed information about Hungarian architects, the typical uses during the Hungarian period, and important Hungarian figures associated with the buildings. This emphasis served as a verification of the Hungarian past and the Hungarian origin of the heritage. Thus, we can see that these books implicitly respond very strongly to the Romanian ethno-nationalism of the Ceaușescu era, and subsequently to the symbolic politicization under Funar. This constancy also applies to the visual language: the books are building-centric and primarily illustrative in nature.

In post-socialist Romanian guidebooks, the socialist infrastructure was replaced by the already mentioned 19th-century built heritage, and a new type emerged—urban mood pictures. The approaches of the books diversified significantly depending on the publisher, but it is clearly visible that the Romanian nationalist narrative remained. But this nationalist ideology subjected to significant self-criticism (Boia 2001). Symbols from previous regimes either do not appear or are relegated to the background due to proportions and image sizes. For example, the Romanian symbol of the interwar period, the Lupoaică (the she-wolf with Romulus and Remus), appears rarely or only in small size. The statue of Michael the Brave, erected during the socialist regime, does not appear in any of the books. However, problematic monuments created after the regime change (such as Avram Iancu, who was considered among Hungarians as “anti-Hungarian”) appear only rarely. Besides the political and memorial narrative, aestheticization also emerges, which manifests in lifestyle and architecture. The presentation of architectural forms (e.g., gates, chimneys, old walls) broadens the tourist's perception from a political reading toward an aesthetic one. Moreover, the lifestyle—which is not really group-specific—mostly encourages engagement with the city's historicity and its reception and perception. Representations appear in which the urban environment functions primarily as a backdrop in images, with a focus on a nostalgic depiction of everyday life (e.g., sepia-toned photos). Thus, the focus has shifted from nation-oriented memory tourism toward the narrative of lifestyle, nostalgia, and the (shared) city, which, at the same time, became embedded in the political mainstream seeking to more fully integrate the principles of multiculturalism.

#### 5.5. The case of the Matthias statue

Matthias (Mátyás) is the city's most significant historical figure, one of the most important Central European humanist rulers of the 15th century, king of Hungary. His statue is the main square's centrepiece as well as the city's defining symbol. Therefore, no book can ignore it, making an analysis of its depiction particularly suitable for examining the appearance of nationalism.



Figure 5. Sepia-toned nostalgic photo of the main square (Rusu 2018).

In the 1923 Romanian-language book (Bortuş 1923), all the symbolic competition strategies described by Harrison can be observed. Matthias is presented—for the first time in guidebooks—as a ruler of Romanian origin. Moreover, considering the sizes and placement of images, a kind of evaluative competition is also visible, since the statue of Romulus and Remus (Lupoanca), symbolizing connections between the Romanians and the Roman Empire and originating from Italy, appears with a larger image and a more prominent position than Matthias's statue. This representative innovation simultaneously rewrites the city's tourist image with new (Romanian) symbols. The same logic continues in socialist books, but here, Michael the Brave's statue becomes the alternative to Matthias's statue. This statue was erected in the 1940s by local socialist authorities.

After the regime change, this competition receded into the background, and there was more of an attempt to create a shared ownership, within which previous rival

symbols also faded or disappeared, and Matthias's statue clearly moved into the spotlight. Here, it is interpreted primarily as a popular urban symbol or as a statue of significant artistic value, avoiding the explicit nationalist contestations.

The Hungarian narratives have undergone little change since 1903. Both in their thematic focus and visual language, they have retained their core characteristics, remaining primarily informed by the early 20th-century nationalizing and bourgeois ideology.

Irredentism or explicit Hungarian nationalist rhetoric does not appear in any Hungarian book, so Hungarian tourists arriving with irredentist ideologies are more likely to learn about the city's old Hungarian character. Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár) is less suitable for ethnic romanticism because its historic city centre displays the Central European appearance typical of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. However, Matthias's statue and birthplace may evoke national grievances. The statue recalls the Romanian-Hungarian symbolic competition for ownership of Matthias's legacy and indirectly allows the loss of Transylvania to be relived through "Romanian nationalist historical lies". Emphasizing the 19th century—the last period when Transylvania was not part of Romania—also reinforces this narrative.

The Hungarian narrative was more ethnic and local in character, meaning that although local history is embedded within national history, it does not extend to a national space or historical references beyond that, unlike the Romanian narratives. Therefore, it can primarily be interpreted in the Transylvanian context, within minority-majority relations.

In contrast, initially the Romanian narrative aimed to secure the Romanian character, later supplemented with the socialist system's own self-justifications. After the regime change, a local approach became typical, focusing on the city, its historicity, and its Western and Central European connections.

Nowadays, Hungarian books primarily showcase the 19th-century Hungarian urban image, while Romanian ones provide a nostalgic, lifestyle-centred, less referential, and less history-centred approach.

The relationship between Romanian nationalism and tourism has significantly transformed over the past century. After an initial nationalist "overcompensation" and selective heritage presentation, supplemented and recoded with socialist narratives, the socialist regime continued nationalist portrayals. This process went hand in hand with integrating the city's heritage as fully as possible into Romanian tourism. After the regime change, this nationalism receded significantly, giving way to multiculturalism, which now assimilates and reinterprets the heritage of ethnic minorities. In this process, the Hungarian (and occasionally Saxon and Jewish) heritage is increasingly foregrounded, strengthening the image of a multicultural (past) city.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study clearly confirms the strong relationship between tourism and politics (Richter 1989). Furthermore, through the concept of geopolitical subject formation, it is evident that Hungarian tourists from Hungary and Romanian tourists participate in very different processes of geopolitical identity construction during their tourism experiences in the city.

In the Hungarian nationalist geographical imagination, Transylvania is seen as the largest and most significant unjustly lost territory, whose population

struggles to maintain and preserve the traditional Hungarian national identity (Feischmidt 2008), to which the “mother country” could (or should) refer in moments of identity crises. Therefore, for Hungarian tourists from Hungary, these narratives primarily evoke the 19th century, the pre-Trianon era, the time of a great national unity. Among Transylvanian Hungarians, however, this form of national pilgrimage or the romanticized image of authentic Hungarianness is not associated with Cluj; rather, it is seen as one of the Transylvanian cities that functions as a cultural-political centre.

Since the majority of the city’s population is ethnic Romanian, these narratives do not contribute to a meaningful change in national identity patterns or narratives but rather reinforce them. It can be assumed that, for the Transylvanian tourist, the Cluj discourses are more localized and are primarily interpreted in relation to other Transylvanian Hungarian cities. In the Romanian geographical imagination, although Transylvania is the “core” of the national territory (Mitu 2013), newer narratives tend to adopt a more distant stance towards classical nationalist rhetoric. Hence, Romanian tourists consuming tourism publications from the 2010s onwards encounter a city that is a historically significant, bourgeois, beautiful Romanian city, but at the same time “European” and multicultural, which is an alternative of the Balkanist discourse (Light 2007). This shift creates a significant gap between classical Romanian geographical thinking and today’s city itself. Thus, the tourist experience holds substantial potential to shift away from classical nationalist geopolitical subject formation. Foreign tourists primarily encounter Romanian narratives and thus get to know a Romanian but multicultural city. This primarily dislodges the city from earlier Romanian-related geographical imaginations and the post-socialist image, allowing it to be integrated into the image of European mid-sized cities.

This study has demonstrated that in the case of a multicultural location, the formation of geopolitical subjectivity is shaped by the discourses of the local minority, the kin-state and the nation-state alike. Furthermore, the minority narrative in this context tends to be less changeable and, consequently, less affected by broader ideological and intellectual currents. In contrast, the tourism discourse of the majority society proves to be more variable and polyphonic.

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## Additional information

### Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest was declared.

### Ethical statement

No ethical statement was reported.

### Use of AI

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The author solely contributed to this work.

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### Data availability

All of the data that support the findings of this study are available in the main text or Supplementary Information.