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Chapter 37
Cultural Symbols in the Context of Communication—Identity Label and Link of Social Cohesion

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Abstract The authors highlight the value of the communication by means of symbols in the context of tourism, a kind of communication that helps individuals learn, in a rather short time, the culture and the cultural heritage of a people or of a community. The verbal symbols, object and gesture-like, spatial ones, etc., become in the touristic language visual attractions, edible, dancing, musical ones, etc., aiming to describe the constant historic effort, a defining one for a society and a culture, in order that it may preserve its tangible and intangible cultural heritage by means of the historical memory. The authors argue that the basic symbols of a culture represent a generous potential, always attractive for tourism development. It is because they represent very efficient tools for accomplishing the objectives assumed by tourism. The paper analyses and presents several main symbols of the communities from the Republic of Moldova, with significant parallels in the culture of other states from a large geographical area. They underline the necessity to offer local communities and touristic agents the possibility to develop local specific artistic activities that maintain the viability of the cultural heritage in all its acknowledged manifestations, by offering it an international cultural reception. The innovation of the project consists in identifying and promoting at a cross-boundary-level common heritage value. These values fit best of all the touristic practice of learning the unique originality, considered in the whole world, of three axiological symbols of the Moldovan society: ritual bread, wine and the tree of life. Thanks to the implementation of a pilot project was created the touristic route "HUNTING FOR SPIRITUAL TREASURES" which offers the possibility to know lively, through participation, the significances of these symbols that refer to the triumph of life and human creativity in an ecological natural environment. The project matches the European aims of asserting and promoting the cultural identities and of acknowledging the values of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage, as a guarantee of social cohesion. It views the development and diversification of the national and cross-border touristic product, the socio-economic development of

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communities, by means of the respect of the general human values. The paper is based on the results of theoretic and practical investigations of the common aspects in the development of culture and civilization for the durable touristic assessment of the anthropologic cultural heritage, of the tangible and intangible cultural goods, being the main identity basis for the socio-economic development and for the cohesion of the community.

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Keywords Cultural symbol · Tree of life · Wine · Ritual bread
Hospitality · Cognitive tourism · Social cohesion

37.1 Introduction

The man of the postmodern society lives in a universe of signs, as rich as the one where the archaic and traditional societies once lived. Like its predecessors, this man cannot imagine his/her own existence without the communication by means of signs. The formation, survival and progress of societies depend as well, why not acknowledge this evident fact, on their ability to develop their semiotic set of cultural tools: languages, codes, channels, signs, symbols, etc. Human communities build their social, cultural and ethnic identity by means of updating permanently, reconsidering and reviving this set of tools that leads, firstly, the social, the historic and ethnic memory. These identities relate between themselves on several levels within the most developed and organized structures of the "Semiosphera", i.e. the language and the life of signs (Лотман 2004). The ethnologist Jean Cuisenier considers that the ethnicity of a people is that something due to which a people bear its identity as people. And this identity "consists neither in language, nor in territory, religion, in that or other peculiarity, but in the project and the activities that make sense of the usage of language, of ruling a territory, of practising customs and religious rituals" (1999). This project unites and harmonizes the social, economic and cultural efforts of all the structures of the society. According to the same author, the identity discourse of Europe is shaped by the cultural communication at local, regional and world level of over 200 peoples or ethnos living on the continent. After the lapse of two millennia and a half, by "ethnic groups" we understand "communities that bear a certain cultural heritage, passing it from one generation to another, in order to display themselves in contemporary life, in order to give value to their identity and make it known, sometimes even through bombs and weapons" (Cuisenier 1999). As for us, like many other people, we consider that it is much more useful to make known your identity by means of knowledge and promotion of identity, so that these would be respected.

Knowing about your own culture and of other people—an always up-to-date touristic objective—becomes more efficient by using signs and symbols. In this context, tourism may be understood as a pleasant communication, well structured, of a group of people, over a certain time span. In the meantime, it is a convention among the participants in the tourist activities, a fact that supposes the usage of a

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symbolic set of tools, specific for the cultures that interact. From a symbolic perspective, man acquires the statute of tourist for a limited time span, always a short one, while his expectations are maximal as value. Persons, who offer services in the field of tourism, practise this quality much more time, in order to offer services according to the requirements of tourists. In order to increase the efficiency of communication during the time allotted to touristic activities and to fulfil the expectancies of guests, hosts frequently appeal to symbols, assuring themselves that all the participants in the event know and accept the conventions of the symbolic thought. We can demand ourselves how much would increase the pleasure of a communication specially focused upon discovering symbols in a culture with a considerable age and symbolic structures relatively well preserved, which maintain their viability by means of traditional institutions, of cultural, educational and economic ones.

The study of the symbolic tools, of the strategies of integration, and of the local and regional symbolical behaviours enforces, on one hand, the identity spirit and, on the other hand, it offers new perspectives to the social practices of cooperation between different nations.

A tourism based on knowledge, on enjoying and consuming symbols, these being essential for a society, offers a large number of axiological, multicultural and economic opportunities. Considering the region of south-eastern Europe, to which belongs the Republic of Moldova, Stahl wrote about a unitary whole, a result of the historical evolution, comprising a great variety of features: "… mentalities and practices reminding of Prehistory or heathen Antiquity coexist with Christian and scientific ones; modern industries have established in places where people still travel by carts driven by oxen, or ride donkeys; strong traditional regions are situated in the neighborhood of regions where the past seems to have disappeared…" (2000).

The management of the domain takes into consideration this potential, acknowledges it and seeks for new and new reference marks. Declaring from the beginning the option for the discovery of the main symbols, on which the culture of a people was edified, we enlarge the perspectives of symbolic communication which tourists expect. This is especially because the symbols considered to be essential for a people frequently have a similar prestige in the culture of other peoples, geographically more close or more remote. Always using the same symbols, people have understood each other better. At the same time, people have spread them on a larger areal, investing them with more significances and thus with prestige within cultural practices. Symbols have such a high prestige that it is not possible to learn about the culture of a people without symbols. Otherwise, in order to understand better what are the best and the most beautiful values of a people, you have to accept the lively experience offered by the symbolic communication.

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37.2 Hospitality and Symbols as Cultural Heritage

The field considered here is cognoscible tourism, addressed to active people, those that are eager to learn about new cultural realities, to discover cultural diversity in its most expressive hypostasis. In the Republic of Moldova, a country of villages, the spirit of the traditional culture is still rather strong, because people, especially those from rural localities, but also those living in cities, have a special sensibility towards tradition. This sensibility marks both daily life and the ceremonial, ritual one. However, this traditionalism is neither ostentatious, nor a declarative one. It is experienced naturally, according to behaviour norms prescribed by the community. Traditional norms state that you should offer the foreigner the best, so that he/she would feel like at home.

Hospitality is an essential quality in the Moldovan society. Written records, being in fact opinions of travellers and scholars, witness the practice of hospitality in various forms, during the last three hundred years (Buzilă 2004). People in Moldova have an outstanding artistic spirit that can be noticed in their households (houses), in the objects that decorate the interior, in the art of preparing food and serving meals, in the ways of singing, dancing and in their speech. They are hardworking, endowed with a kind heart, generous and open towards cultural diversity. Their spirit becomes more evident during feasts, when communities assemble to perform their activities.

The calendrical customs, beginning with New Year and ending with Christmas, are based on the stages of the sun and the moon and on the rhythms of the vegetal cycle of nature, which influences the agriculture labour. These customs display, during the year, plenty of occasions to experience feasts together with the entire community. Looking forward for these feasts, families and communities prepare long before, embellish the aspect of households and settlements and undertake considerable expenses in order to prepare special meals. People accept guests and tourists to celebrate together these customs. The interested tourist can see the practice of cumetrii, i.e. the customs on childbirth, marriages and funerals.

A feast of special hospitality is the hram, i.e. the day of the patron saint of a settlement. In the past, until the 70 years of the twentieth century, it lasted three days, but currently one day. The hram is celebrated on the day of the patron saint of the settlement. The analysis of the celebrations of hram in the region under study proves that these are mostly practised in autumn, less in spring and summer. This temporal choice resulted from the tradition—winter was the season of weddings, offering a good opportunity for hospitality, while in spring and summer people were concerned most of all with fieldwork. In autumn, after they had gathered harvest, people possessed good reserves for celebrating the hram. Because the main activity of villagers is agriculture, the majority of hram days are in autumn.

During the hram, guests come to the village and villagers invite them to their houses. As a rule, during the first part of the day, different sport competitions and exhibitions take place, while in the second half of the day traditional dances are organized in the centre of the locality, where all the inhabitants and guests

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participate. Thus, the hram day turns into a common feast with food and joy. Nowadays, people prepare for the hram day much food so that it would be enough for all the potential guests. In general, the hram means the assembly of all the relatives in the same space, under the auspices of the holiness of the feast dedicated to the patron saint who protects the local church.

Hospitality has been and continues to be an outstanding feature of the character of the inhabitants of the Republic of Moldova, becoming a distinct mark of all its inhabitants, due to the social behaviour of Moldovans. During the centuries, Moldovans have been tolerant, generous and hospitable, and continue to be like that, in spite of the historic events that affected their normal course of life. It is the custom of the land, i.e. the set of unwritten laws that functioned for centuries before and after the adoption of written law codes, due to the tradition, which imposed hospitality as a social norm. Maybe it was nourished, on one hand, as a remedy or as a capacity to adapt to the constant changes of the cultural alterity and, on the other hand, as a permanent will of strengthening the whole family and the village community. Moldovans have inherited and passed on hospitality not just as a fundamental feature of their group character, but also as an institution of hospitality. It means that hospitality has been and is displayed by all the social layers: from top to bottom. It was imposed and permanently managed by traditional and modern social institutions, functioning on the basis of a very strict complex of syncretic social representations, taken from all the cultural forms. Hospitality comprises several systems of the social domain: morality, ethics, economy, religion, politics, ritual, ceremonies, but also daily life.

In the archaic and the traditional culture, hospitality, as a social phenomenon, is governed by custom and ritual, while in the modern one it is more associated with the field of ceremonies and etiquette. Out of these relationships result the differences between the historical forms of hospitality and the contemporary ones. Although basically this kind of social behaviour has clearly established rules, performers and roles, being respected in various time contexts, the behaviour of the guest also differs from that of the modern guest. The older are the sources concerning the phenomenon of hospitality, the more we discover its code, its symbolic character, bearing numerous significances. On the contrary, nowadays it is simpler, less sacred, more nonconformist and personalized.

Hospitality bears a superior place within the system of values specific for the traditional culture. It designates an indispensable form of human relationship. It may be considered as a proof of the capacity of groups and of their members to be sociable, to accept diversity and the other one's difference in a tolerant way, with respect and generosity, thinking firstly about universal values.

Hospitality may also be understood as a social mechanism directed towards the inner organization of communities, in order to tolerate the differences between your own identity and the alterity of guests, to manage their relationships in the name of the common good. Performing it naturally, i.e. according to the traditions, human communities indirectly strengthen the vitality of their own culture, although they experience a seeming unequal exchange of values.

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The model of our hospitality still is a traditional one, with all its defining mechanisms, components and marks. The ritual bread, with all the diversity of forms consecrated through tradition, is present in all customs and traditions. Bread is both an aliment and a symbol, or an objectified symbol with a great capacity of representation. The main characteristic of the ritual bread in Moldova is the intertwining and twisting of two, three and several rolls of dough. After baking, breads become alike sculptures. The specific forms of the ritual bread are baked in order to personify Christmas (also known as Father Christmas), New Year and the Saints. There is a clear link between the significances of these breads and their form, the latter being confined to the sign of the infinite. The fact that the Romanians from other regions of the Romanian cultural area, as well as the Bulgarians, use other forms within the feast of the Saints (Mesnil and Popova 1992) proves that these models of bread have a local character, being confined to a larger context of representations. The most frequent form is the circle and, by generalization, it is called colac (a kind of traditional bread, of circle form). Round, big colaci are given to the main performers during all the customs referring to human age: cumetrii (baptism feast), weddings, funerals, remembering the dead ones. The cultural practice witnesses over 200 forms of ritual bread, each of them having its form, name and distinct significances within customs. From an iconographic perspective, these forms of bread make a common system with the folk ornaments (Buzilă 1998).

The Republic of Moldova is one of the 70 countries of the world specialized in the cultivation of wine grapes and in producing wine. Because these are century-old crafts in the Romanian cultural area, they have evidently shaped the traditional civilization and culture. The consumption of wine represents a reference cultural complex. It expresses, by means of rites, customs and ceremonies, deep contents belonging to the folk philosophy and ethics, marked by myths, beliefs and customs. "Wine drinking creates a state of wellbeing, due to its euphoric qualities and it is tranquilising, producing relaxation. It generates pleasant physical impressions, stimulates joy, enriches imagination, mitigates sadness, stimulates communication, eliminates social barriers, creates the sentiment of power, of freedom from obsessions or depression, influences the moral state of man" (Costea 1995).

Because wine drinking is firstly a social and ritual act, and because of the specific of this drink to produce a state only it can create, it is natural for this action to establish from the very beginning some behaviour norms, some clear attitudes among the participants. These indications are traditionally promoted by means of well wishes. The verbal language is the most explicit and fit for establishing a relationship of communication. The standard of the entire ritual is honouring wine. It concentrates all the moral qualities of the traditional world. To honour wine means more than drinking wine with someone. It means to honour the other person, to welcome and praise that person. The bearers of traditional culture insist on this expression. To honour wine means to have a state of spirit different from the common one. It means to raise above other states of spirit, to be ready for a special communication, required by ritual prescriptions.

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The space destined for receiving guests in our tradition is called casa mare ("the great house"). It is the largest room in the house, the best fit out, demonstrating by means of its objects the prestige and the age of the family from the community. It is equipped according to the tradition, with different items of furniture, rugs and other emblematic fabrics, inherited or manufactured by that family. These items, made of local raw material, establish the link with nature and have as ornament mainly vegetal motifs. The flowers woven, embroidered or carved on different objects prove the wish of their creators to make the world nicer. We frequently meet on rugs representations of the sun, waters, birds, humans and trees, so that the great house becomes like a small universe. During feasts, people contemplate this universe; they feel at ease in the context of customs, together with their guests.

37.3 The Tree of Life, Ritual Bread and Wine

Having a great capacity of representation, alike some vehicles of time, symbols offer the possibility to travel through time and space, shorten distances, increase the comprehension of the relationships among people, between them and cosmos. Out of several symbols that shape our folk culture, we have chosen three symbols, each of them concentrating rich meanings: The Tree of Life, Ritual Bread and Wine. Among these three fundamental symbols, there are several similitudes, which tourists gradually discover, playing the role of seekers for spiritual treasures. All of them are symbols of life; this is the reason why they are constantly present in the customs related to human ages (birth, wedding and funeral). All of them link man and nature, because in the folk culture man is perceived as a child of nature. Paradise, as an ideal space, is conceived as a garden with fruit trees, where a river of wine and one of milk flow.

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Symbols highlight, through their expressions, essential links between human existence and Mother Nature. They develop the functions analysed by Chevalier and Gheerbrant (1995) and, for this reason, they fit perfectly the options for tourism. Symbols have the function of exploring; they assist the acknowledgement of less known aspects. A ritual bread is the expression of sacred, of folk morality and of the labour of ploughmen.

The function of the symbol, as a substitute, reveals its essence. It always represents something else according to a convention. At first, we discover the symbol as an independent entity and then we perceive it as a messenger, as the substitute of someone else. The Tree of Life is a universal symbol, bearing several significances. It is known in all cultures, in all civilizations, great and minor, ancient and modern, in all religions. In the Romanian cultural areal, it is known under different names: tree of life, world tree, cosmic tree, world axis. The image of the tree matches these significances through symbolic associations.

These hypostases are illustrated along the touristic route, being centred on the idea of the "Tree of Life". Its image can be seen in various artistic forms: on rugs, towels, traditional costumes, in architecture, on pottery; it is associated with ritual

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bread and grapevine. The image of the tree, in a great variety of representations, beginning with the simplest stylized ornamental motifs to the most complex, but also as a ritual object present in the ceremonies related to funerals and to remembering the dead ones, can be discovered and admired in all the locations of the route. Its leitmotif is the same like in folktales: the person in touch with this tree gains eternal youth and life without death. The motif Tree of Life was attested in Moldova 7000 years ago, and it is widespread in the Romanian traditional culture. It can take the image of the grapevine and bear several significances, starting with sacred ones, cosmogonic and aesthetic. The wine grapes or the wine which joins bread in all the customs has therapeutic and energizing qualities, being perceived as a source of life. Tourists will learn about these traditions by participating in them.

Symbols mediate or intermediate; they have the capacity to support our comprehension across considerable areas and realities. Thus, the cosmic tree comprises AQ7 and displays the universe through several significant details. The funeral tree from northern Moldova is decorated with several ritual breads, being arranged in a tripartite order, corresponding to the three levels of the world: underground, terrestrial and celestial one. This function of mediating is likewise important; through it, the symbol links phenomena, objects and persons within significant relationships. Thus, the tree branches embroidered on the sleeves of the shirt with altiță (an embroidered piece of fabric on the shoulder), in the female costume, create a bridge from the woman wearing this cloth to its alter ego (simulacrum)—the tree. The association between human and tree is frequent in the folk culture. They say that AQ8 each human has his/her tree. At birth, parents plant a tree, in the name of the baby, and cherish it like a child. During the funerals from Moldova, they prepare the tree of life, in the name of the dead one, and offer it as a gift to a younger person, so that he/she would continue the projects of the one who left for the otherworld. On this tree are hanged all the things necessary for maintaining life: sweets, fruits, ritual breads, cup, clothes and shoes fit for the dead one. When they offer these things, they say: "Take this tree. In this world it belongs to you; in the otherworld it belongs to (they pronounce the name of the dead one)". It is believed that human soul mounts through this tree to the skies. For this reason, they put in it the ladder of the soul, having the form of a bread.

Symbols join known realities and unknown entities, making the latter relevant. The Tree of Life links worlds. World axis is situated in the centre of the universe, integrating it according to its distinct signs. Wine, alike bread, unites, solidarizes people, making them a part of the community. During weddings, guests are invited to taste the bridegroom's colac (traditional bread, of circle form) and the bride's colac, in order to be lucky. Several ritual breads accompany the stages of the wedding, gradually mediating the union of the families belonging to the newlyweds, and the creation of a new family. The ritual bread from Moldova is original and imposes itself in the world through the diversity of sculptural and volumetric motifs, taking geometrical, vegetal and zoomorphic forms. During the customs is used a bread of a higher quality than the daily one. The ritual forms of bread are a main symbol in the customs that mark human life and the feasts of the folk calendar. Bread starts to embody the divinity, concentrating all the value vectors of the society.

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The consumption of ritual bread is anticipated by the ritual of moulding and baking it with the participation of tourists. Each tourist should know better the taste of the ritual bread and its distinct forms. For this reason, tourists receive everyday a significant bread in the bag and spend the whole day under its sign, discovering pleasant cultural realities. Food communions unite most rapidly people.

The pedagogic function of symbols is the closest to the therapeutic one. Watching, creating, consuming symbols, people feel themselves members of the great communities that bear this heritage, experience it lively and share it generously with guests. This participation makes people simplify their attitudes and get acquainted with the others, gain new experiences and the respect for communities, values and ideals. Symbols are identity marks. We can also experience the joy of other cultural identities, opening new horizons of alterity, accepting the challenges of other identities. Safeguarding the cultural heritage in localities, passing it on to younger generations, takes place by assimilating the symbolic thought, by assuming the cultural marks of the group. The more the marks and the values expressed by them are common for several communities, the more increases the unity of nations.

The touristic route with the generic title The Tree of Life aims the acknowledgement, the preservation and promotion of the values of the cultural heritage of the Republic of Moldova by means of universal symbols, common for several states from the Black Sea region. These symbols are represented through the tree of life, the ritual bread and wine that aim to display the value of important traditions from the local life and culture within an international touristic product, having the impact of stable development of local communities. The new touristic product, supported by modern technological facilities, uses authentic, valuable traditions from Moldova. It offers another form for the development of the cultural heritage and for the touristic development of the localities selected within the project. The route lasts 3 days, when visitors discover diverse aspects of ancestral traditions from the target localities, centred on these symbols.

This heritage route is confined to the communication through symbols and comprises ten different touristic locations: museums, vineyards, a fortress, a monastery, a touristic halt, an archaeological landscape, a rural touristic pension, a cultural centre, a wine collection. In these contexts, the required symbols are essential; they express the creativity as well as the generosity of our people. They will be seen in various hypostases consecrated through tradition, in museums and houses. They will be tasted, drunk and prepared. They will be admired as works of art, but also will be created so that tourists can participate in discovering their significances, alike seekers for treasures. Each of these locations emphasizes either all the three symbols—the tree of life, ritual bread and wine—or one or two of them. But in all the cases, the activities suggest the homage of the natural setting and the triumph of life. Tourists have different possibilities to become "seekers of spiritual treasures" within century-old traditions. By participating in different traditional activities centred on preparing, ritual usage and consumption of the objectified symbols: the tree of life, ritual bread and wine, tourists have the possibility to discover the most interesting cultural manifestations of these universal symbols in various settings where they appeared and are practiced. Like a real

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seeker for treasures, each tourist will receive a Magic Bag where he/she will gather, along the route, souvenirs–treasures bearing these symbols. First of all, these souvenirs are various ritual breads, wine pots, objects of folk art—every day others and in a different location. The route provides the knowledge of various manifestations of these symbols of life, which address both the artistic imagination of tourists, creating them a pleasant state of spirit, and their gustatory senses, through the ritual bread and wine.

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Starting with the visit to the oldest and richest museum of the Republic of Moldova—The National Museum of Ethnography and Natural History—holder of the proofs concerning the local development of the cultural heritage, tourists will be tented to learn about the millennial experiences of life and living of the native inhabitants. Foreign guests will observe them also through active participation in their transmission up to nowadays. Tourists will understand better the meaning of the native soil for the inhabitants of Moldova (from peasant to academic), as well as the perspectives of efficient economic growth of local resources and the amelioration of the level of life of the inhabitants of this zone. The choice of this project, wholly fit to the specific of the work and leisure activities of the inhabitants of Moldova, will draw the attention of local creators and will contribute to the diversification of the touristic product, to the adjustment of the standards of touristic activities to the world ones.

37.4 Conclusions

Being passed on from one generation to another, because they perpetuate visions, practices, experiences and values, symbols can be understood as playing the role of social genes. They appeared from the necessity of people to communicate, at the beginnings of mankind, when people manifested themselves as social beings. Symbols manifest mostly a socializing function, integrating people within communities, helping them build relationships with the others. Tourism supposes a continuous socialization, being facilitated by the use of symbols. The diversity of these symbols offers plenty of ways for mediating socialization. The choice of these three main symbols—the Tree of Life, ritual bread and wine—as reference points for tourism, is favourable both for the providers of services and for their beneficiaries.

Hospitality is one of the essential values of the Moldovan society and the guarantee for the development of tourism. It takes different aspects in rural communities, as well as among the providers of touristic services in the urban area. This is why the touristic route comprises its numerous manifestations.

The main concern for discovering symbols and their significances pertains to the domain of the feast which involves special human emotions. Feasts enforce sentiments, test the system of values, stimulate communication and human behaviour, solidarize community, assert its social fundaments and prove the prestige of people and values. Tourism is like a feast that lasts as much as tourists, considered to be

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guests, are hosted. In the scenarios of feasts from the Republic of Moldova are traditionally used several main symbols, bearing rich significances. We considered necessary useful to emphasize some of them in the touristic offer, in order to provide the guests with the key to many other symbols.

The acknowledgement of symbols takes place in the cultural settings of the Republic of Moldova, these being unique due to their natural and anthropic content. The discovery of this symbolic universe takes place also by means of the national cuisine, a varied one, based on local products, verified as a gustative practice for centuries and enriched as a result of living in the neighbourhood of other cultures.

The willingness to learn about interesting places, original cultures, to taste meals and participate in relevant activities maintains tourism on an economic orbit. It helps discover in the cultural heritage generous sources for national and international cooperation.

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AQ7	Please check whether the edit made in the sentence 'Symbols mediate… areas and realities.' conveys the intended meaning.	
AQ8	Please check whether the edits made in the sentence 'The association…folk culture.' convey the intended meaning.	
AQ9	In the sentence 'This heritage route…a wine collection', it is mentioned that 'ten locations' are given but there are only nine specified. Please check.	
AQ10	Please check the clarity of the phrase 'every day others and in a different location' in the sentence 'First of all…a different location'.	
AQ11	Please check the clarity of the sentence 'We considered necessary…many other symbols'.	

UNCORRECTED PROOF