

Impact of Sibiu European Capital of Culture 2007 event on country tourism

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Abstract: - The European Capital Event has become a strategic weapon for cities seeking to attract cultural visitors. Nowadays, the event has certainly developed beyond its mainly cultural origins becoming a part of urban economic and cultural reconstruction alternatives for cities in Europe. The year of 2007 has an historical signification for Romanian tourism: Sibiu, a Transylvanian city, becomes the first East- Central-European Capital of Culture, sharing its title with the city of Luxembourg. The present paper reviews the history of the event, its development within the Romanian city case and explores the role of European Capital of Culture title within the branding of Sibiu. Through a literature review on the subject of place branding and using the results of a primary research, this study reveals the importance of European Capital of Culture status in terms of higher visibility, economical development and tourist advantages.

Key-Words: - cultural tourism, European Capital of Culture, cultural event

1 Introduction

Dictionary of Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Terms define cultural tourism is a general term referring to leisure travel motivated by one or more aspects of the culture of a particular area. This segment of tourism has a consistent positive trend nowadays as a result of [1]:

- a more sophisticated tourist, looking for new experiences, with a shorter stay, focused mainly on urban and cultural tourism;
- more local authorities seeing in tourism a source of income and employments opportunities;
- more awareness focused on conservation, cultural and natural heritage.

But what is the relationship between tourism and culture? Culture and tourism could be considered inseparable and interdependent. Cultural richness of a place attracts many tourists and also “domestic and international tourism continues to be among the foremost vehicles for cultural exchanges” [2].

The project European Capital of Culture was created in order to “to bring the peoples of Europe together” (www.infoeuropa.ro). The concept was initiated in June 1985 by the Council of Ministers of the European Community, on the initiative of actress Melina Mercouri, which was then the Minister of Culture in Greece. The first city designated by such title was Athens. In 2001, the event changed its name from “European City of Culture” into “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC). It has

become one of the most popular cultural initiatives in Europe, influencing culture and cultural tourism. The main objectives of the event are to value the richness and diversity of European cultures, but also common features of them and to promote mutual understanding between European citizens and a sense of belonging to one community.

A study conducted by the European Commission [3] revealed that 80% of the people involved in event set up between 1995 and 2004 considered it the most beneficent cultural event to the city. They have said also that the title play a “catalyst” role of cultural development and positive transformation in terms of a tourist city.

Since 1985 a number of almost 40 cities have been invested with the title of European Capital of Culture. For 15 years European Parliament has chosen a single city in every year. In 2000 rules were changed: nine cities simultaneously received this title as recognition of their merits in the cultural development. In 2001 it was decided that starting from 2007 (Official Journal of the European Communities, 3 November 2006, available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/culture/eac/index_en.htm) that each year two cities to be chosen to coordinate cultural activities after model offered by Luxembourg and Sibiu: a city from Western European countries with a city from Central and Eastern Europe countries.

In 2004 Luxemburg was nominate for 2007 European Capital of Culture. The concept used tries to establish new cultural border for Europe map. The wish to become European Capital of Culture was in the mind of National Theatre’s director from Sibiu since 1997 but the chance appears only in 2001. Because Luxemburg was at its second designation (first in 1995) its authorities express interest in supporting Sibiu as a partner. Their concept for 2007 was based on a generous idea – Europe is a continent of regions.

Our purpose is to find the benefits of the event for Sibiu and country as a whole after. For our investigations we used exploratory research, obtaining secondary data through statistical and published studies, extensive web sites analysis.

2 Why Sibiu?

Looking briefly at the cultural tourism potential, Romania has over 27.000 locations grouped under different categories, and 151 monuments and archaeological sites of special value. Numerous architectural styles are present, from Romanic, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque, to Rococo and Art Nouveau. Romania has also a specific architectural style named Brancoveanu. It is present mainly in castles, palaces and houses belonging to the province of Wallachia. Also a Moldavian architectonic style could be identified as specific to Romania [4].

The cultural tourism in Romania is centred on three locations: Transilvania (North-West and Centre Region) for its medieval towns as Sighisoara, Sibiu, Cluj; Bucovina (North-East Region) for the painted monasteries and Maramures (North-West Region) for wooden churches and traditions. Romania is home to seven World Heritage Sites including the painted monasteries in Bucovina, the historic citadel of Sighisoara, the historic centre of Sibiu and its ensemble of squares and the Dacian fortresses near Hunedoara. A population as diverse and unique as the country’s landscape combines with a rich history offer the visitor a great insight into Europe’s past and present.

A report conducted by the Centre for Cultural Study and Research, under Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs patronage shows that the highest institution capacity index and cultural operators is in Transilvania. This index measures the development of cultural production and cultural goods distribution infrastructure. It is composed from the number of cultural institution from each region divided to 1000 citizens.

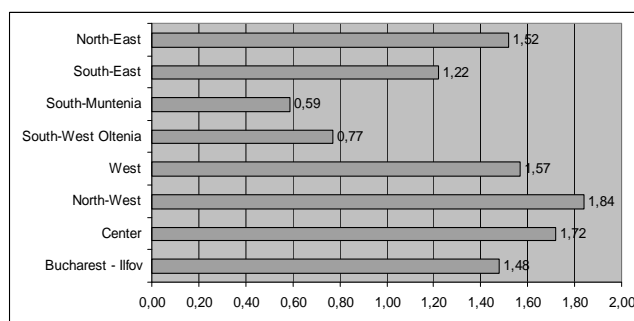


Figure 1: Institution capacity index and cultural operators (including UNESCO heritage)

The planning period for ECoC cultural programs ranged from 2 to 4 years, with the majority spending 3 years planning [5].

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Press reports published after the consultation on the website of the European Commission reflecting that the jury appreciated very much the effort of a small town to set up such an important European program expressed the idea that the program SIBLUX 2007 can be considered a way that both Romania and Sibiu city present themselves in front of the European Union before the accession. The Jury considered strengths of Sibiu the quality of the proposed program for 2007, its multiculturalism - the theme chosen by Sibiu for 2007 was “Multiculturalism” (hence the slogan “City of Culture. City of cultures.”) - the European character of the program SIBLUX 2007, the structure proposed to implement it, and its sustainability. Another point that weighed in the decision taken was the partnership between Luxemburg and Sibiu in for

coordination of events.

Other favorable arguments could be:

1. many partnerships and European cooperation programs developed by Sibiu (with Landshut, Rennes, Klagenfurt, Deventer etc.);

2. Sibiu experience in organizing large events and traditions such as Festivals of Folk, Jazz, Theater, Film etc.

3. Western atmosphere of the city, expressed in particular by the quality of life, style of living together and the values system promoted by its citizens.

3 Event coordinates

Because of the complexity of the program all partners have needed to concentrate their effort first on the design and after on program implementation. Thus, it appeared "Sibiu European Cultural Capital 2007" Association (SCCE 2007). The association is the structure under which was developed the cultural program for 2007 and who coordinated the whole project, organizing meetings for implementing all the events. It was created a Management Board, established an artistic consultative committee and a coordination task force. The projects cover most artistic sectors, and have as a key objective the close collaboration between the cultural sector in Sibiu and European networking and cooperation. A number of improvements to cultural facilities in Sibiu were also proposed.

Sibiu and Romanian authorities perceived this cultural event as a unique chance for rehabilitation and becoming an international recognized space for initiative and quality. "There is no doubt that Sibiu will succeed in 2007", said involved people.

Formal objectives of the program were:

1. Improving the international visibility of Sibiu;
2. Long-term cultural developing of the city;
3. Attracting national and international visitors;
4. Improving filling of local proud and confidence;
5. Increased audience for the cultural products;
6. Improving social cohesion and community development;
7. Improving cultural and non-cultural infrastructure
8. Promoting European cooperation;
9. Promoting creativity and innovation.

The theme chosen by Sibiu aims to present the cultural profile of the city as Sibluc 2007. The Management Bord of the Association retained key concept formulated in the application, but recast it as "City of Culture. City of Cultures. (A Celebration of Cultures Living Together, of Unity in Diversity)". After the model offered by other European Capitals of Culture, including Luxembourg, were established

a number of sections for covering the entire cultural spectrum: arts of the show, mobility, music, architecture, heritage, visual arts, film-photo-multimedia, interdisciplinary, literature-publications and others.

Published result on the official website shows that under the Sibiu European Capital of Culture 2007 program were presented 337 projects, in total 2062 event – "a kaleidoscope of artistic styles and directions for the different tastes: from the theater and painting, music, film, dance, literature and architecture to contemporary art and gastronomy" [6]. The included events have reflected the multicultural and multilingual character of the city and have confirmed the slogan: "A city of culture - a city of cultures".

The promotion campaign for Sibiu – European Capital of Culture 2007 was made with the support of GAV Scholtz & Friends. The program was promoted in Romania and at international level using different instruments of promotional mix: outdoor, TV and radio spots, presentation film, Internet adds, PR and exhibitions. Media campaign had targeted 50 millions peoples from Europe and 75 % of Romanian urban population. Were broadcasted 1500 TV spots on international channels: 50 % to National Geographic, 30 % to Euronews and 20 % to Travel Channel. The budget was around 1 million EUR and the target was young people, anxious for knowledge. The concept "Normal. Sibiu" represents a novelty vision of art and culture role in a post-modern and young social context.

According with the Protocol of Cooperation signed by these institutions on 28 July 2006 the amount of funding allocated to cultural projects included in the program "Sibiu - ECC 2007" was around 13.400.000 Euro, financed by Ministry of Culture (sursa18) (cca. 3.400.000 Euro for 99 projects), Sibiu County Council (around 450.000 Euro for 21 projects), City Hall Sibiu (about 8.200.000 euros for 215 projects) and the Association SCCE 2007 (7500 Euro for 2 projects) and European Union contributed with 1.4 million for closing events [6]. In general, these amounts represent around 10% of the total investment required for the movement of the mechanism, so very little compared to the total paid by the host city and country. The protocol is the first document referring to budget for Sibiu - ECC 2007. According to official registration the initial budget was estimated at 43 million RON (1 EURO = 4.2767 RON in March 13 2009) in which had the following origin:

- 7,3 million RON - cultural operators contribution;

- 21 million RON - the resort minister;
 - 13,2 million Ron - the Local Council of Sibiu;
 - 1,5 million USD - the Sibiu County Council.
- Regarding the producers of this ambitious event, in addition with official partners and media, an important contribution had the volunteers.

4 Events Benefits

Certainly in 2007 the SCCE was the most exposed event. As is shown on the website of SCCE in 2007 on Results, the major benefit of Sibiu after 2007 year is certainly enhancing the visibility. The city became in a very short time maybe the most famous city in Romania after the capital of the country. In general, one of the main objectives of the European Cultural Capital is the rehabilitation and development of cultural infrastructure. This objective has been applied in the case of Sibiu.

In order to achieve the cultural objectives of 2007, it is necessary to achieve related goals, regarding the restoration of city's monuments, the public communication and the cultural and the urban infrastructure. The Romanian Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs budget for 2005 allocated 2 millions EUR for the Sibiu 2007 Program, whereas the budget for 2006 provides some 8.5 millions EUR, out of which 6 million will be spent on restoration of the city's historic facades. For 2007 the allocated budget is around 5.7 millions EUR to finish started programs.

By extending the action area of both the central and the local public authorities involved to the rehabilitation of the physical and cultural infrastructure of the town and the county, the program "Sibiu – European Capital of Culture 2007" transcends the dimensions of a strictly cultural project. The rehabilitation of the airport (60 millions EUR in total, from which 11 millions as a grant from the Government) and the improvement of the town infrastructure (6 millions EUR from the central budget) prove both the scale and the extent of the preparations and the national commitment to the program.

The second important effect is on local economy. According to the survey conducted by the Center for Research on Culture (CSCDS) and Center for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS) on economic agents from Sibiu [7], the event has a positive impact on firms in the county of Sibiu, 54% of questioned companies had an increase in turnover and 57% of them stating that the program had a positive impact on profitability. The survey was conducted on a sample of 279 firms from Sibiu county.

The survey also highlighted that 96% of the companies considered that the program had a high and very high impact on tourism development, 97% of the subjects said that it had a greater impact on increasing the number of tourists, 72.5% - a decisive impact in attracting new investors, 71.1% - high impact in development of the city and 66% - a significant impact on increasing investments.

The greatest financial impact has been recorded in the tourism sector, 95% of hotels and pensions reported a significant impact on their activity in 2007. The lowest financial impact, according to the survey, was registered in the creative production sector and related services and in renting of mobile and immobile properties. Perhaps these less favorable results to the latter category of entrepreneurs can be explained by poor infrastructure that has led to a reduced demand for rental cars for travel (to visit around town, for example). Regarding the level of turnover, the biggest influence has been felt by the hotels (with a net balance of +80%), tour-operators (+76%) and transporters (+75%). The firms reported a number of 930 new jobs in 2007.

The popularity of the program has increased the number of tourists and visitors who enjoyed the cultural events held during 2007 that exceeded 800.000, which represent more than triple of 2006 (when were registered 252.694 tourists, including 68.732 foreigners) or triple of 2005 (228.627 tourists, 73.614 foreigners) (Statistical Yearbook for Sibiu County). Of course, these numbers are reflected also at the country level as an increasing in number of tourists for 2007.

The predicted increasing of tourists attracted many investments in hotel industry. The total amount spent for refreshing accommodation establishments was 60 millions EUR. Many existing hotels were renovated and some of them were reclassified to upper category. Other new hotels appeared or are expected to be on the market during this year. An international brand will be also in Sibiu 2007: Ramada which is expected to increase its portfolio here. In 2007 the number of lodging capacities has increased with almost 70 % comparing with 2005. This will put Sibiu in top 5 Romanian destinations classification from the number of hotels point of view. An interesting aspect is the presence of medium and big hotels in these new appearances, with more than 70 rooms [8]. Regarding the number of bed places in 2005 were 1 320 and for 2007 Sibiu offers more than 2 000 bed places, which represents almost 70% increasing.

Several companies and many business people expressed their intention to build in Sibiu until the

end of 2009 six new hotels with three and four stars, which will require total investment of around 20 million Euros. These investments will increase by approximately 30% [9] the accommodation capacity of the city.

From the tourist operators point of view, the results of the CSCDS and CURS survey revealed that they have registered the highest increases in turnover in 2007 compared with 2006 - 13.7%, transporters with 10.9%, operators from hotel industry an increase of 10.5%, rented apartments/ rooms - 8% and restaurants / bars with 7.9%. Also, the number of visitors in museums was doubled in 2007 in Sibiu [7].

These individual successes on medium and long-term term means a couple of advantages for the local authority: important amounts to the local budget and state (in 2007 Sibiu registered the highest growth rate of the local budget) and on the other hand allow and promote private investment which can lead to general development and welfare.

There were also other opportunities created through the program for local tourism:

- For the first time for a Romanian destination we can find Sibiu in top 10 on the fabulous 50 destinations for 2007 at New horizons [10].
- Increased visibility of Sibiu with 90% [11], as a result of effectiveness integrated marketing campaign.
- Recognition of the international festivals;
- Participation at many international fairs and exhibitions;
- Release of *Sibiu Travel Guide* [12], the first complete guide of the city (which was accompanied in 2007 by the schedule of cultural events). Guide has been published by the Publishing House of Guides, in 4 languages (English – Romanian and French-German), in 20.000 copies. The information contained referred to: history of the city, tourist attractions, entertainments and maps of the city.
- Invitation launched by Venice for Sibiu to join a association of European cities with cultural tourism [13].

5 Conclusions

One of WTTC recommendation for Romania, after the report from Spring 2006, was to focus on cultural tourism and to develop this kind of product in the first place. After a neglected period for tourism, the event from Sibiu put Romania into the light. Sibiu and Romanian authorities perceived this cultural event as a unique chance for rehabilitation and becoming an international recognized space for initiative and quality.

The objective for local authorities was to develop and innovate through cultural action, to demonstrate that Sibiu can be a tourist centre. The programme was designed to promote cultural cooperation and to celebrate the European destiny of Sibiu, through a cultural programme with European dimension and significance. The program has proved profitable for Sibiu economy as a whole. From the tourist point of view the following conclusions can be formulated:

- ✓ More than 4 years of strong investment in infrastructure;
- ✓ Cultural tourism is ready to become one of the basic pillars of the Sibiu economy;
- ✓ A dynamic business environment with an increasing of collaboration and partnerships between national and international firms;
- ✓ An increasing of competition in tourist sector which can stimulate a better quality of services offered to the clients;
- ✓ Creation of a brand for Sibiu as a European cultural city.

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