VARIA

Vampires, colonist ancestors, and identity.
Promoting Sibiu and Romania through culture
(Vampiri, strămoşi ai coloniştilor şi identitate.
Promovarea Sibiului şi a României prin cultură)

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Abstract. The article seeks to describe the impact of a cultural mega-event on a specific city context in post-communist Romania. Our case-study of Sibiu – European Capital of Culture 2007 underlines the importance of cultural events for the identity-building process in the new post-communist settings. On one hand, the cultural event in Sibiu managed to enhance the city’s image and to promote Romania worldwide by stressing on the multicultural identity of the city, the ethnic cooperation and trust in a region still marked by ethnic conflict and hatred. On the other hand, Sibiu’s multiculturalism and Europeanization might become a landmark for Romania and transform into an actual brand, which could finally replace ‘Dracula’ as the main identification label for Romania. Instead of promoting a supernatural, remote, sinister, and even backward Transylvania, the new brand could more properly speak about modern, tolerant and peaceful Romania.

Keywords: cultural tourism, national-building, city branding, Romania, European Capitals of Culture.

Introduction

Cultural events generally have not only artistic outcomes, but also an important direct and indirect economic impact. Large cultural events might promote cultural tourism, which constitutes an undeniable long term source of income. This article is an attempt to analyze the impact of a major cultural event on the local development in Romania, namely the city of Sibiu, European Capital of Culture (ECOC) in 2007. Despite
the importance of the combined direct and indirect economic impact that we dealt with in other research papers, we are interested here in the way cultural tourism helped not only to promote Sibiu as a tourist destination, but to assess Romanian identity-building on new grounds. Although the importance of cultural tourism for the shaping of identities is largely overlooked by social and political research, many post-communist countries use cultural tourism for many years in order to promote a brand new image, following the collapse of communism. They struggle to suppress their communist labels, to reintegrate into the economic and political structures of United Europe and to reestablish themselves as European. In fact, as a specific cultural event, the 2007 ECOC event managed to enhance the city’s image. It symbolically helped the city to regain its European status by underlying local multiculturalism and stressing on the European historical heritage of the city, in the precise year when Romania became full member of the European Union. Therefore, one might seriously take into account the transition from a brand that made Romania well-known, namely ‘Dracula’, but which represents Romania in a way that it would not choose to. This might be a real opportunity to promote Sibiu ECOC 2007, alongside the new European Capital of Culture designated by Romania in 2021, as a new brand that would be more suitable for 21st century European Romania than the embarrassing myth associated with vampires, backwardness and the supernatural.

Cultural tourism and cultural identity

Whereas cities around the world are immersed in a general competition for investments and growth, they are increasingly importing the concepts and techniques of product branding, in order to use them within place marketing strategies. Therefore, cultural tourism has become an important strategy for economic development. But cultural tourism it has other important functions. Sometimes it might help preserve cultural traditions and practices that are no longer part of the everyday life. Heritage tourism helps strengthen the national ties by presenting nation as a group sharing the same history and common characteristics. Sometimes it might affect cultural realities by its capacity to generate new cultural forms, renegotiate values and beliefs. A good example is the marketing of Basque ethnicity and the construction and contestation of ‘Basqueness’. In this vein, the European Capital of Culture may be seen as an initiative of boosting European identity through culture. The European Commission was motivated by a wish to give the European Community (later Union)
an attractive image, at the same time as promoting a measure of integration. Cultural tourism and public investments in local infrastructure, accompanied by wide publicity in Europe and abroad, make today the title of European Capital of Culture attractive enough for cities and countries to compete for designation. Since several years already, the European Commission asks each designated country to run an internal competition, supervised by European cultural experts and to decide about the specific city to be nominated. Retrospectively regarding the general impact of this cultural programme, one might notice that some cities benefited more than others from this mega-event, but also those general strategies were different. In order to assess the impact of this cultural events, divided the activities concerned by the event in three approaches: arrangements with an emphasis on infrastructure, festival programming and developing artistic concepts. In fact, there were combinations of these approaches in most European cities. In the first case, there are Lisbon, Glasgow and Athens. Other cities emphasized on the festival profile, as Florence and Dublin, and aimed to position the cities to Europe. Finally, other cities focused on developing artistic concepts, which is the exploration of cultural identity on an international scale. This was the case of Amsterdam, West Berlin, Antwerp, but also Madrid, the latter willing to claim its European cultural identity after decades of authoritarianism. This was also the case of Sibiu, the first Romanian city to be nominated as European Capital of Culture.

**Sibiu, European Capital of Culture in 2007**

When compared to Lisbon, Dublin, Paris, Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Berlin, Brussels or Madrid, one might quickly notice that Sibiu has not the advantage of being capital-city and that Romania is the newest EU member state (only from 2007). Even compared to other Romanian cities, Sibiu is not in the most suitable position when competing against other urban centers. It is a relatively small city in Romania, as he has only 150,000 inhabitants, according to the 2011 census. It sets only 15th in the ranking of the most populated cities in Romania and its population is less than 10 % of the population of Bucharest, the capital-city of Romania. Its nomination as European Capital of Culture, alongside Luxembourg, is merely related to its cultural profile. In fact, Sibiu was designated in May 2004 as European Capital of Culture by the Council of Ministers of the EU with no help from the Romanian central government, since Romania was only a candidate country, and not yet an EU member state. As mentioned earlier, Romania has the right today, as member state, to
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designate as candidate one of its cities, and the decision is expected to be made in 2015. No one can say which would have been the city chosen by the central government if Romania was a member state in 2004, and no one can either say which will be the next Romanian city to bear this title again. An internal competition has been launched, yet there is no official strategy of the central government to guide and boost the competition. The responsibility has been endorsed in each competing city by non-profit associations, in cooperation with local authorities in Iași, Cluj-Napoca, Alba-Iulia, Craiova, Timișoara, but the financing and the local coordination differ by and large. The cultural and tourist strategy of each candidate city is worth taking into account in a future comparative analysis.

The special relationship between Luxembourg and Sibiu, in fact, offered this unique opportunity to the Romanian city. The reason to invite Sibiu to share the European Capital of Culture title in 2007 is based on rather symbolic arguments, namely the common origin.9 It is generally known that Sibiu was founded in the 12th century by Western settlers coming from the Rhine, Moselle and Meuse basin area, which is more or less the contemporary territory of the Luxembourg duchy, in order to defend the Eastern frontiers of the Hungarian kingdom.10 Symbolically, the ECOC title would play a role of bridging gaps across space and time and help reunite the dispersed Luxembourgeois community.11 One should also note that the 2007 ECOC programme in Luxembourg integrated provinces from neighboring states, France, Germany and Belgium, which once were parts of the duchy. In the same time, by the ECOC symbolic title, Romania would reunite as well with its lost European family, following decades of historical and ideological European division.

The promotion of multiculturalism

As underlined earlier, many European Capital of Culture stated as priority the development of tourism, the enhancement of the city’s image, urban revitalization and an expansion of creative industries and jobs. It is also the case of Sibiu, which stated as main targets for 2007 to develop its tourism industry, to promote high quality cultural events and to facilitate the contacts between various artists and cultural institutions. Yet there is another underlying general purpose of the 2007 ECOC programme in Sibiu, namely to demonstrate the European belonging of the city and of the country in that special year, when Romania has become full member of the European Union. The main argument for the European belonging that has been largely
promoted in 2007 was multiculturalism. The motto of Sibiu ECOC 2007 was ‘Sibiu: city of culture, city of cultures’ and the multicultural characteristic of the city was emphasized in all occasion. In his speech to the German Society in Berlin in December 2007, the mayor of the city, Klaus Johannis (himself of German origin), clearly underlined that multiculturalism is the true heritage of the city and one of the chief arguments for the city in the competition for the ECOC title.12

This emphasis on multiculturalism is important when one takes into account the overall regional context. Romania is part of a region shattered after 1989 by ethnic, linguistic and religious conflicts that largely affected transition to democracy. Whereas other transition countries from Southern Europe and Latin America focused mainly on democratization and marketization, new democracies from Eastern Europe had very often to solve, additionally, stateness and nationhood problems, namely to define the basis of the national integration for large minorities, to obtain the recognition of the inherited borders and establish a constitutional framework all within a short period of time.13 When compared to former Yugoslavia, Romania made proof of cautiousness and moderation and managed to avoid open ethnic and religious conflicts. Of course, there are cases of limited conflicts in various urban and rural areas in Romania between ethnic Romanians and ethnic minorities. Nationalism was, for a long time, an essential ingredient of the Romanian post-communist politics.14 From this perspective, Sibiu is, one might say, a successful story. Whereas other cities in Transylvania witnessed open bloody conflicts between ethnic Romanians and ethnic Hungarians, like in Târgu-Mureș, or more limited and rather symbolic conflicts like Cluj,15 the city of Sibiu became a model of cooperation between different ethnic segments’ elites. In fact, in 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012, the candidate of a small cultural organization of the ethnic Germans in Romania won the seat of Sibiu’s mayor, noticeably, in a city inhabited almost entirely by ethnic Romanians.16 This rather ‘cultural’ model of voting behavior was to be replicated in 2004 and 2008 in other smaller urban communities in Sibiu County, in contrast with more typical ethnic voting in cities like Cluj and Târgu-Mureș.17

When it comes to public policy design and implementation, one generally focuses on rather neutral issues, like transportation, agriculture or water supply. Yet there are some issues that ask for caution, because they deal with contestable ethical, religious or ethnic arguments. The issue of language is a suitable example for such kind of sensitive public policies. As emphasized by Kymlicka and Grin, the issue of language cannot easily be
accommodated with the standard framework dealing with diversity.\textsuperscript{18} Liberals, for example, solved the historical religious conflict in Europe by separating church and state, and by ‘privatizing’ religion. Therefore, churches have become voluntary associations in civil society and the religious membership has been based on individual choice. However appealing such solution might be for religious conflicts, this model cannot work in the realm of language. When it comes to solve the conflict of languages, the state must decide what will be the language(s) of public administration, the courts, the bureaucracy, the army, public schools, road signs or public media. Whereas the privatization of religion offered a solution based on freedom and equality, where there is only one official language the state provides neither linguistic choice nor linguistic equality. In the end, ‘individuals have no choice about the language they use to communicate with public institutions, and there is no equality in the treatment accorded to different linguistic groups’.\textsuperscript{19}

Moving towards multiculturalism, there seems to be a very limited conflict between Romanian nationalism and ethnic equality in the city. Sibiu is located in Transylvania, a region that had witnessed strong religious and ethnic conflicts from the Middle Ages to the modern era. The city itself was the scene of violent clashes that endured in local memory. The origin of the city can be traced back to the Saxon settlements in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century. During the Middle Ages it was part of the Hungarian Kingdom and then incorporated, alongside Transylvania, into the Hapsburg Empire. Its Saxon inhabitants that for centuries enjoyed medieval privileges struggled for autonomy against the Hapsburg monarchy and, starting with 1867, the Hungarian state.\textsuperscript{20} Although a Hungarian province, Transylvania was inhabited by a large Romanian population. The Romanian national movement in Transylvania struggled itself for decades for equality in the Hungarian state.\textsuperscript{21} This struggle ended only in 1918, when Transylvania was finally incorporated in the Romanian monarchy.\textsuperscript{22} Though Sibiu’s origins are Saxon, the current population is 95 \% Romanian. Therefore, there is a symbolic tension between the past and the present, yet this is not an open ethnic conflict. The ethnic elites managed to avoid open struggle and, except some weak tensions due to a statue representing a Romanian national hero, the city is a model for ethnic cooperation. The mayor in office was the candidate of the German Democratic Forum and the Local Council is dominated by German councilors. In 2007 Sibiu tried to consolidate its multifaced identity by promoting diversity and tolerance and therefore symbolically hosted the Third European Ecumenical Summit, grouping the heads of all Churches in Europe.
Sibiu – European Capital of Culture 2007, a new brand for Romania?

The promotion of Sibiu – European Capital of Culture started in November 2006 by an exhibition named ‘Sibiu – Young since 1191’ that took place at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, at the Romanian Embassy in Berlin and at the Maison de l’UNESCO in Paris. Promotion clips have been broadcasted on national television channels, as well as on Euronews, National Geographic Channel and Travel Channel. According to the Romanian Commissioner designated by the Ministry of Culture to overview the ECOC event, the authorities estimate that banners posted on the Euronews, National Geographic and Travel Channel websites have been seen more than 1.9 million times. Moreover, the ‘Guardian’ included in January 2007 the city of Sibiu in the ‘Top 50 fabulous destinations’ for 2007, emphasizing the café culture, Gothic and Art Nouveau architecture of Sibiu. From January to November 2007, national TV channels in Romania broadcasted an average of 6.3 minutes per day about cultural events taking place in Sibiu, while Romanian newspapers published no more than 2245 articles about the city. At the same time, the outdoor campaign reached an audience of over 10 million people. In September 2007, the commissioner estimated that 67 % of the Romanian population had already known that Sibiu was the 2007 European Capital of Culture. Almost half of them heard about the ECOC event during 2006 or before and almost 28 % of those who knew about Sibiu as European Capital of Culture in 2007 also knew the slogan ‘Normal – Sibiu, young since 1191’, fact that makes proof of an unexpected notoriety of the slogan.

The ‘Forbes’ Top 2008 list ranks Sibiu as one of ‘Europe’s most idyllic places to live’. The short description made by ‘Forbes’ depicts Sibiu as “an important but little known city of 160,000 that lies in the heart of Transylvania. Outside Romania, Transylvania is best known as the sinister setting of Bram Stoker's novel Dracula. Yet within Romania, the region is known for the outstanding beauty of its Carpathian mountain landscape and its rich and significant history. In 2007, Sibiu was the European capital of culture, and apartments surrounded by cobbled streets and pastel colored buildings can be picked up for under 50,000 Euros ($65,000).” Except the buildings’ low prices, the main two references to the city are ‘Dracula’ and the European Capital of Culture 2007. Therefore, one should be aware that without the title of Capital of Culture, the important but little known city of Sibiu would never been ranked in Forbes’ list among other well-known touristic destinations like Rome, Budapest or Copenhagen.
The promotion of the city might also be seen as an opportunity for Romania. Although the significance of tourism in the construction of political identities is frequently overlooked, a key component of the political transformation in post-communist countries has been the construction of new identities and the projection of these identities to the wider world. According to Light, tourism is one of numerous ways in which these countries can seek to demonstrate their post-socialist identity. Therefore, Sibiu could be seen as a landmark for Romania, a place of ethnic diversity and religious cooperation, much different from the Balkans, a region engulfed by hatred and bloodshed. In the same time, Sibiu is a landmark for Romania in the precise year of its EU accession. Finally, Sibiu might become a new brand that replaces ‘Dracula’. According to Light (2007), while states may encourage forms of tourism that enable them to present themselves to the wider world on their own terms, they never exercise complete control over this activity and may be represented in a way that they would not choose. This, in turn, may give rise to forms of tourism demand that a state would never seek to encourage. This is the case of ‘Dracula tourism’ in Romania, a kind of tourism that is discordant with Romania’s self-image and the way it wishes to present itself to the wider world. Both ‘Dracula’ and Sibiu are located in Transylvania.

Whereas ‘Dracula’ relates to a supernatural, sinister, remote and backward Transylvania, Sibiu might be a model for ethnic cooperation and multiculturalism, a landmark for European Romania.

**Conclusion**

Cultural events have not only undeniable cultural outcomes, but they also may represent a serious identity-building effort. In our case-study of Sibiu European Capital of Culture in 2007, we unraveled cultural outcomes, in terms of collective, historical identity strengthening, cultural cooperation and promotion. In fact, this cultural mega-event was the greatest opportunity for the city, but also for Romania, to make worldwide known their cultural identity and historical heritage. It was also the city’s best opportunity to claim his European identity and to regain his European status in the precise year when Romania finally became full member of the European Union. This cultural event may boost the identity-building in Romania and help overpass the remaining tensions between Romanian nationalism and Europeanization.

The first Romanian city designated as European Capital of Culture represents a success story of ethnic cooperation and trust in wider regional context still marked by ethnic violence. In the same time, ‘Sibiu ECOC 2007’ could become a more suitable brand for Romania.
than the other one, the famous ‘Dracula’. Instead of promoting a supernatural and backward Transylvania, the new brand could better present Romania to the wider world in its new European settings. This effort could be carry on by the new Romanian ECOC in 2021. As other cities in the region emphasized their Europeaness, the future Romanian city, and especially Iași, could expand Europeanization beyond borders in the Republic of Moldova, pointing out the common identity and the shared history, values and beliefs. This symbolic inclusion was made by Luxembourg in 2007, when the small duchy symbolically expanded its cultural borders in order to ‘engulf’ former provinces lost during its harsh history in favor of its powerful neighbors, Germany, France and Belgium.

Notes

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10. Fernand Fehlen, “Luxemburg und Siebenbürgen”, STADE Working Paper 1-07, University of
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13 Available at: http://www.sibiu.ro/cms/archives.php?id=A2007121


20 Will Kymlicka, François Grin, Ibid., p. 9.


25 Available at: http://www.culturanet.ro/eng/ (accessed 15 March 2009). The data come from a survey conducted in June-July 2007 by the Center for Urban and Regional Sociology at the request of the Center for Research on Culture, which is an institute subordinated to the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affaires in Romania.


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