Investigating Cultural Tourism Development and Attractiveness in Transylvania, Romania. A Focus on the Counties of Cluj and Sibiu

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Abstract: Our paper aims at realizing a sketch of the manner how native and foreign visitors perceive and appreciate the cultural tourism offer of Romania and Transylvania, and also that of the counties of Cluj and Sibiu. Cluj is a major economic center of Romania. Sibiu was the European Capital of Culture of 2007. We have tried to identify the answers to several questions: Is Transylvania’s cultural heritage attractive to tourists? Do foreigners travel to Romania for cultural purposes? Are Romanians still interested in cultural activities? The findings of our paper are based on three different researches that we have carried out.

Key-Words: County of Cluj, County of Sibiu, Transylvania, Romania, Cultural tourism, Cultural heritage, Economic crisis, Tourism development

1 Introduction
According to an analysis of Europa Nostra – the European federation for cultural heritage development and promotion – the travel and tourism industry generated 1706 billion Euros by 2005, while the direct and indirect impact of European tourism was responsible for approximately 11.5% of the GDP and 24.3 million jobs (about 12% of the total employment). [7] Obviously, data that are more recent can prove the continuous development of the positive contribution of tourism to Europe’s economy until the beginning of the crisis. Researchers and authorities are, of course, going to thoroughly analyze the economic impact of the global crisis upon travel and tourism industry and upon various tourist destinations.

A statement of Europa Nostra reveals the great importance granted to tourism, and especially to cultural tourism. This position is very valuable from the perspective of the recently integrated Romania into the European Union: “Cultural tourism is an inevitable component of cultural heritage. Our common European heritage also constitutes a key ingredient of the European identity. Cultural tourism is not only one of the key engines of economic growth. The concrete discovery of cultural diversity, common identity and pluralism are equally important stakes for cultural tourism. It has a vital role to play in encouraging both a greater understanding of the rich diversity of the national and regional cultures of Europe and a greater appreciation of our common European heritage, roots and culture. Cultural tourism can therefore help further the cause of European integration and identity by fostering a better understanding between the peoples of Europe.” [7]

Europe’s economic growth is closely related to tourism and culture. These two elements play a key role in fostering a greater understanding of the rich diversity of regional cultures of Europe and a deeper appreciation of the common European heritage. Over a third of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites are situated in Europe. Cultural tourism focuses on the joy of discovering and enjoying historic monuments and sites, including cultural landscapes. [7]

These lines speak in favor of our researches concerning the branding process of Transylvania, Romania as an international tourist destination. Moreover, our country enjoys the benefits of multiculturalism. Due to its geographic position and
its historic development, Romania has grown under the sign of the confluence of Occident and Orient (being for centuries the Eastern border of Europe).

Romanians are of Latin origin. The interactions with other peoples and cultures over past centuries have lead to the development of a valuable multicultural environment and heritage. There can be identified many cultural influences: Hungarian, Saxon, Jewish, Slavic, Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Turkish, Serbian, and even those of the Gypsy communities. Transylvania is Romania’s region that was and is by far the most renowned part of our country for its multicultural heritage. The different ethnic groups (Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, Rroma people, Armenians, Jews, etc) living together in this area have lead to the creation of a cultural mix that has transformed Transylvania in a unique space, endowed with a very valuable and highly original cultural patrimony (the result of the cultures’ interweaving): “This expresses itself in built, object, and folkoric hypostases. It belongs – through its texture and features – to the European thesaurus, being the result of an interesting and unique destiny of ethnic confluences.” [3]

Our paper tries to analyze the attractiveness and development of cultural tourism in Transylvania and implicitly Romania, by focusing on two different counties: Cluj (situated in the North-West region of development) and Sibiu (belonging to the Center region of development). There are more reasons for which we have chosen these two counties; among them, we can mention:

- Cluj is one of Romania’s major counties from the point of view of its economic development, size and contribution to the country’s wealth;
- Cluj is situated in the center of Transylvania;
- Cluj hosts “Babeş-Bolyai” University (a major Romanian university, renowned world-wide);
- during the past two and a half years we have carried out three web-based researches in this county: one concerning how foreign visitors perceive Transylvania as an international tourist destination (May – June 2006, quota based sample that included 91 subjects); another one focusing on the positive and negative aspects associated to Transylvania (May 2008 – February 2009, random sample that included 1105 persons); and the most recent one concerned with the impact of the economic crisis upon tourism in the County of Cluj and tourism behaviors of Romanians (February – March 2009, random sample of 170 persons); all three of these researches basically constitute the testing phase of a more complex research that is going to be carried out beginning with April 2009;
- Sibiu is another key county of Romania;
- Sibiu was together with Luxembourg the European Capital of Culture of 2007 (ECC ’07);
- Both counties enjoy rich cultural heritages.

It is a well-known fact that Romania is internationally recognized as a country with a generous and rich cultural heritage. Romania has a cultural-historic and ethno-folkloric heritage with a great tourism potential. There are over 680 heritage sites of great international and national tourism attractiveness (churches, monasteries and graveyards, monuments and architectural ensembles, urban and rural historic centers, etc). The folkloric heritage is also very valuable, due to its uniqueness (wooden churches and gates in Maramureş and Sălaj, handicraft, traditional costumes, fairs, habits and traditions, etc). According to the Ministry of Tourism, cultural tourism is supported by an accommodation capacity of almost 13% of the country’s total. [6]

The figures presented by the Ministry of Culture, Cults and National Heritage reveal Romania’s cultural heritage by 2004 [5]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Transylvania</th>
<th>Cluj</th>
<th>Sibiu</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing Monuments</strong></td>
<td>29525</td>
<td>10936</td>
<td>1382</td>
<td>926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Destroyed Monuments</strong></td>
<td>544</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A short glance at the table from above allows us to point out the fact that Transylvania has a great cultural heritage (37% of Romania’s total), while Cluj appoints for 4.6% and Sibiu for 3.1%. Moreover, there are seven major categories of monuments listed by UNESCO, adding up to a total of 33 cultural and historic objectives [5]: seven fortified Saxon churches from Transylvania; the Hurezi monastery of Walachia; seven painted monasteries and churches of Bucovina; the old fortress of Sighişoara (the only one still inhabited of Europe); eight wooden churches of Maramureş; six ancient fortresses and archaeological sites of ancient Dacia (in the Mountains of Orăştie); and the natural reservation of the Danube Delta. Of these worldwide known objectives, 23 belong to Transylvania.

2 Problem Formulation

Another general truth is represented by the fact that, unfortunately, Romania is expected to confront harsh times, due to the global economic crisis; in this respect, tourism, and, implicitly, cultural
tourism may represent a source of economic recovery.

One can easily notice the fact that Romania and its destinations are merely present on the map of the international tourism. Reasons for such a situation can be identified in the fact that Romania is not properly promoted inside the country and neither abroad. It does not yet have a tourist brand. A quasi-anonymous presence on a highly competitive market is translated through poor tourism (both national and international) performances, figures and revenues. On one hand, Romanians tend to choose destinations from abroad, while foreigners rarely think of Romania as a tourist destination. Still, we ought to mention that Transylvania enjoys a higher notoriety and a better perception among foreign visitors: 79% of the investigated persons associate rather positive sentiments to Transylvania. Almost 96% of the same respondents associate a positive image to the region, while only 81% perceive Romania positively. [1], [2]

Keeping in mind the above-mentioned facts, we intend to focus our attention upon the opportunities offered by Transylvania’s cultural tourism potential to the economic development of the region and of the whole country, under the conditions of the present global threat: the economic crisis.

We may raise questions such as the ones given below:
- Is Transylvania’s cultural heritage attractive to tourists?
- Do foreigners travel to Romania for cultural purposes?
- Are Romanians still interested in cultural activities?

2.1 Transylvania’s Cultural Tourism Offer

In order to be able to better analyze Transylvania’s potential from the point of view of tourism, we believe it is necessary to shortly define cultural tourism. It represents, “in a narrow sense, special interest holidays (vacations) essentially motivated by cultural interests, such as trips and visits to historical sites and monuments, museums and galleries, artistic performances and festivals, as well as lifestyles of communities. In a broad sense, it also includes activities with a cultural content as parts of trips and visits with a combination of pursuits.” [4]

Throughout the following lines we are going to shortly present the features of the cultural offer of Romania and Transylvania [8]. Due to the significant registered changes, we have decided to present the figures for the years of 1990 and 2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Museums</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
<th>Museums</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>679</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>705</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several observations ought to be made. Despite the fact that both the number of museums and the total number of visitors increased by 2007, compared to 1990, in Transylvania’s and Romania’s cases, we need to point out that, in fact, there was registered an important decrease in the average number of visitors per museum (-19% for Transylvania and, for Romania, -23%). The most dramatic decrease of visitors appeared in the case of Cluj County (-59%), while the number of museums increased significantly. The number of museums grew less in the case of the County of Sibiu but we ought to highlight the important increase in the average visitors (+66%). Obviously, this can be easily associated to the intensification of the tourist activity of Sibiu during 2007, mainly generated by the events of the European Capital of Culture 2007.

Next, we have decided to analyze the country’s entertainment industry, which mainly consists of show institutions (drama theatres, puppet theatres, opera houses, musical, comedy and variety theatres, philharmonics and symphonic orchestras, folk music bands, song and music ensembles and circuses).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Spectators</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Spectators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>6937774</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2272407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>4385789</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>1352788</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of institutions did not suffer significant changes but, again, there are registered important decreases in the average numbers of spectators; Sibiu was again the exception of 2007 (-0.9%), while, in the other cases, decrease rates were very high (-42% for Romania, -40% for Transylvania, and -56% for Cluj).

A brief numeric illustration of both Romania’s and Transylvania’s tourist activity ever since 1989 (that brought the shift towards capitalism in former communist Romania) is needed:
Table 4. Tourist Activity Since 1990 [8]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1229655</td>
<td>707038</td>
<td>4920129</td>
<td>6971925</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>4882316</td>
<td>2626782</td>
<td>1996590</td>
<td>2894243</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluj</td>
<td>398030</td>
<td>234619</td>
<td>146616</td>
<td>372007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibiu</td>
<td>10864891</td>
<td>6304570</td>
<td>4053105</td>
<td>5420968</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transylvania</td>
<td>4394470</td>
<td>2365888</td>
<td>1620812</td>
<td>2279887</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluj</td>
<td>635241</td>
<td>356917</td>
<td>211539</td>
<td>304241</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibiu</td>
<td>356524</td>
<td>180492</td>
<td>111461</td>
<td>67766</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romanian</td>
<td>1431661</td>
<td>765815</td>
<td>467024</td>
<td>550957</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluj</td>
<td>487846</td>
<td>260894</td>
<td>175778</td>
<td>614356</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibiu</td>
<td>63674</td>
<td>27755</td>
<td>35155</td>
<td>67766</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners</td>
<td>32113</td>
<td>23080</td>
<td>40415</td>
<td>92052</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides the fact that, again, 2007 proved to be a true success for Sibiu, we need to make a few other remarks:

- generally speaking, Romania’s and Transylvania’s tourist activity registered an important decrease between 1990 and 2000; only after that year, our country’s tourism began to resurrect;
- the two analyzed counties, Cluj and Sibiu, seem to have enjoyed a better recovering of their tourist activity; Cluj-Napoca (the County residence) has managed to become a very attractive business tourism destination but it is also appreciated as a cultural site; while Sibiu (ECC ’07) is a top cultural tourism and a business destination, too;
- data from above only present tourists (accommodated tourists) but Sibiu and Cluj-Napoca receive important numbers of day-visitors, too (who do not stay overnight); unfortunately, NIS does not have any figures for this category;
- the important number of museum visitors and spectators of cultural events (mainly registered in the case of Sibiu, but in that of Cluj, too) reveal a significant interest for cultural activities (both for residents and for visitors and tourists – studies concerning Sibiu ECC ’07 confirm this statement);
- the increase in the number of foreign visitors for 2007 can be accounted for by ECC ’07.

2.2 Foreigners and Transylvania’s Cultural Tourism Offer

Our previous researches [1], [2] revealed different aspects concerning Transylvania’s foreign visitors. The aspects relevant for our current paper are:

- 49.45% of the investigated foreigners travel for satisfying their cultural tourism needs; while 26.37% travel for professional and business purposes;
- when asked why they would travel back to Transylvania, 40.9% mentioned cultural purposes, while 22.7% would return for business tourism;
- tourists were asked to evaluate Transylvania as a tourist destination; we may conclude: the landscapes are highly appreciated but the region’s attractions receive only a low to moderate appreciation (due to their poor organization and promotion); cultural elements and sites enjoyed a relatively high evaluation;
- tourists were asked to mention their favorite activities while traveling during vacations; the results relevant for our paper were: visiting of churches and monasteries (71.4%), visiting of historic and archaeological sites (68.1%), going out and eating in restaurants (68.1%);
- we aimed at finding out if Transylvania enjoys or not a higher notoriety than Romania – tourists were asked to mention destinations and tourist attraction from Romania and, then, from Transylvania; most of the nominations in Romania’s case were situated in Transylvania, thus, it seemed relatively easy to identify tourist objectives from this region; therefore, we dare conclude that Transylvania is better known abroad.

2.3 Romanians and Transylvania’s Cultural Tourism Offer

A first concern of our research was to determine the interest raised among Romanian tourists by native destinations, respectively by foreign ones. We have asked them to mention how they make their choice. Responses were split as follows:

- Romanian destinations are taken into consideration: always (11%), most of the times (39%); often (19%); sometimes (17%); rarely (6%); very rarely (5%) and never (2%);
- foreign destinations are considered: always (7%), most of the times (23%); often (19%); sometimes (28%); rarely (9%); very rarely (9%) and never (6%).

The fact that 30% of the respondents seem not to be interested in native destinations can be associated to the poor quality services of our domestic tourism offer, to the uneven quality-price quota, and, why not, to the lack of a tourist brand. On the other hand, the percentage of 52% of the Romanians who
decide rarely to never to travel abroad is closely linked to their limited financial capacities but this fact cannot be associated to a positive appreciation of the inland offer; it is just a matter of time until they are going to travel abroad, too.

Domestic cultural attractions seem to raise a limited interest among Romanians:
- during their summer vacations in Romania, they prefer the relaxation of the beaches (58%) or that of spas (9%), or there are those who love to hike mountains (19%);
- Christmas breaks are generally spent at home (54%), in the mountains (29%) or in the countryside (13%).

For a better identification of the culture related behavior and attitude of Romanians, we have asked them to mention how much money they allocate to cultural activities. Results were rather surprising: 20% do not allot any amount of money at all to cultural activities; 66% spend up to 50 Euros per month for such activities; while the remainder spend up to 300 Euros per month for this purpose. Nearly 60% of the investigated sample spend less than 50 Euros for cultural activities when traveling.

As the need for culture can also be satisfied through reading, we tried to find out how much Romanians spend on buying books: 17% do not buy books, 72% spend less that 50 Euros per month for books, while only a small remainder seems to really be interested to buy books.

Culture consumption in general was also measured based on the habits of spending leisure time:
- cinema (never to rarely, 62%; sometimes, 25%; often to always, 13%);
- folkloric festivals and events (never to rarely, 88%; sometimes, 9%; often to always, 3%);
- folkloric fairs (never to rarely, 72%; sometimes, 14%; often to always, 4%);
- library and reading (never to rarely, 71%; sometimes, 18%; often to always, 11%);
- visiting museums (never to rarely, 68%; sometimes, 24%; often to always, 8%);
- theatre (never to rarely, 65%; sometimes, 25%; often to always, 10%);
- opera house (never to rarely, 79%; sometimes, 15%; often to always, 5%);
- watching TV (never to rarely, 23%; sometimes, 15%; often to always, 62%);
- Philharmonic (never to rarely, 87%; sometimes, 8%; often to always, 5%).

Unfortunately, it seems that the single sane conclusion is that Romanians are very little interested in cultural activities. Watching TV seems to be the favorite pass-time, while more sophisticated activities, such as attending a concert or a drama play merely raise the interest of less than 10%. Even less popular seem to be the traditional and folkloric events. Almost 70% of the investigated persons do not seem to be at all attracted by museums, still only 23% have visited one during the past 5 years or a longer time ago, 30% have been in a museum last year, while the remainder, 47%, have visited one this year.

Romanians were asked to evaluate the cultural tourism offer of Transylvania and Cluj; despite the fact that they do not seem to be attracted by cultural aspects, the investigated people responded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good and very good</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Poor and very poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cluj*</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transylvania</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*19% of the respondents are not familiar with the cultural tourism offer of Cluj

People were asked to mention three museums, three churches and three castles from the county of Cluj. The great majority of the sample resumed to nominating only well-known objectives.

### 3 Problem Solution

After having presented and discussed the results of our researches, we may point out a first solution to the identified problems. Cultural tourism needs to be taught to its potential consumers. Based on the fact that both Romanians and foreigners agree that Transylvania enjoys a rich cultural heritage, authorities, tourism stakeholders and benefiting communities must rejoin their efforts in properly communicating how people can take profit from the positive influences of cultural experiences. Events such as museums open at night can prove to be effective and efficient for attracting visitors. Foreigners seem to be a little more educated concerning cultural tourism, while Romanians seem to have forgotten the joy of discovering the past. The nowadays-venerated TV stations should take their educational role more seriously, by promoting genuine cultural values and should focus less on subcultures.

One must also admit the fact that the poor appreciation and the relatively low interest in the cultural heritage of Transylvania, and consequently of the two counties – Cluj and Sibiu –, is in a great measure generated by the improper state of the access infrastructure (beginning with the roads and
ending up with the restoration and signalization of the cultural tourist attractions). Exception makes the city of Sibiu that was renovated for the events of 2007 but the surrounding areas are still far away from any civilized standards. The city of Cluj-Napoca has also begun to be restored but, unfortunately, that is not the case of most of the other Transylvanian and Romanian destinations: valuable cultural and historic sites seem to be well-preserved and hidden form the eyes of the potential visitors mainly by not being signalized and promoted. Foreign visitor’s access is still limited due to language barriers.

4 Conclusion
Transylvania’s cultural tourism is positively appreciated both by foreign and native visitors. Thus, it is compulsory for the authorities to understand its huge potential and to establish a proper strategy for its promotion. Due to the worldwide recognized success of the project European Capital of Culture of 2007, Sibiu must be used as a means of promoting cultural tourism inland and abroad. The global economic crisis represents a huge opportunity for Romania’s tourism development, as foreigners still perceive it as a relatively cheap destination, with a varied tourism offer. Authorities need to work on the national branding strategy, while local destinations must understand that they need to promote themselves for a better exploitation of their tourism assets and cultural heritage. A very important aspect related to the growth of the domestic tourism is that one of managing to attract Romanian visitors. Hospitality investors must also contribute to this development by improving the quality of delivered services. The fact that Romania’s and Transylvania’s cultural attractions are included in the UNESCO World Heritage offers a great opportunity for the development of cultural tourism.

References: