
THE COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH COMMUNICATION: CASE STUDY: THE EUROPEAN CULTURAL CAPITALS

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Abstract:

Competitiveness is usually linked to lowest price, higher profit. In postmodern economies, where “experiences” are produced and dealt the price is only on element, not the most important. The case study “European Cultural Capitals” is made on Sibiu 2007 experience: Sibiu, as a community, as a town have had to prove a better competitiveness when it has applied to have the honor and its competitiveness is measured by specific indicators in comparing with former European Cultural Capitals. The paper analyze some indicators that can measure the competitiveness in such a field.

Keywords: *competitiveness, communication, european cultural capital*

According to the American heritage Dictionary “to compete” means “to strive with another or others to attain a goal, such as gaining an advantage or winning a victory” the noun being the action of striving in order to attain a goal. In businesses we use to take it as the action that let the market to choose the best of the products, that is, at the end of the line to get the best profit for you in spite of the concurrence. Its common sense means the best prices that will through away the others’ products. In the broad meaning, in a postmodern economy the tool might be a product, a service but mainly the combination of all of them and the profit seams likely to be the corporative utility as a result of the best marginal profit. The products have changed but also the goal: we are over the product – service towards the experiences and the level of profit might be its mass and constancy. The new trend that is nearly compulsory – the corporatist dimension of a company – has added new extends to the meaning of competitiveness, changing the goal. The postmodern economy, based on “experiences’ has changed the means: the enjoyment, the happiness brought by guying has took the place of old and common goods or services.

The program The European Cultural Capital is one of the success stories of EU. Designed to “contribute to bringing the peoples of Europe together”, the European City of Culture project was launched, at the initiative of Melina Mercouri, by the Council of Ministers on 13 June 1985. It has become ever more popular with the citizens of

Europe and has seen its cultural and socio-economic influence grow through the many visitors it has attracted. The European Cities of Culture have been chosen until 2004, on an intergovernmental basis; the Member States unanimously selected cities worthy of hosting the event, and the European Commission awarded a grant each year to the city selected.

For the time being, the European Capitals of Culture are designated each year by the Council of Ministers of the EU, on the basis of the view of a selection panel comprising seven prominent independent members, each of them experts in the culture sector. The selection procedure is laid down in Decision 1419/1999/CE amended by Decision 649/2005/CE. This Decision sets out a chronological list of Member States entitling them to host the event in turn. It defines as well the criteria the cities have to comply with to be designated as European Capital of Culture.

There have been 31 Cities of Culture to date (2004 NN). Nine cities shared the title in 2000 and for 2001, 2002 and 2004 two cities were designed to share the title.

Where is the competitiveness in this topic? First of all a city has to compete to be chosen and enjoy the facilities and the money that might be reached by the program. And finally it has to reach a good place in ranking the former European Capitals of Culture in order to get advantage of a good name. It is about money but not only money: something more that is connected with the life standards that include, at the end of the line the profits too.

This paper was intended to be a case study: the town of Sibiu – Transylvania – Romania as the European Cultural Capital 2007 with Luxembourg. I've planned to investigate the second of the most significant events my town, and its citizens has experienced the last decades (for the other one I cite the Romanian Revolution – December '89, when Sibiu has experienced the bloodiest and the strangest days during the last century). My field researches have shown that Communication of a Tourist Destination by the European Cultural Capital Program is a topic with too large connections, associations and implications and is tide connected with the competitiveness. All data are the preliminary results of the field researches carried out by ATLAS and "Lucian Blaga" University during August and October in Sibiu.

The past European Cities and Capitals of Culture, have focussed in particular on the following aspects:

- i. Organisation of the event (structures, responsibilities, staffing)
- ii. Financing (public funding, sponsoring, other sources)
- iii. Cultural impacts, to include:
 - a. Content and organisation of the cultural programme
 - b. European dimension
 - c. Effects on the cultural life of the city, surrounding region and country
(if relevant)
- iv. Economic Impacts
- v. Visitor/Tourism Impacts
- vi. Social Impacts

vii. Cooperation between cities when two or more cities organised the event simultaneously

viii. Other issues as appropriate

That is a large topic that reach the whole life of the town and all fields of the economy and has generated a strong competition to get parts of the projects to carry out. We have not to forget that for EU a program is a tool of management, finally a business. Palmer Report has pointed out significant information that has opened my mind and has given me the idea of this research. EU European Cultural Capital Program is a performing one. EU just put a drop (**1.19% = EU founding**) and get the splendour of a “tempest” (**98.81% = Total income**). When the selection of candidates was done, the Eastern wave was ready to join EU and for 2007 the first two Orthodox countries were expected to follow. A successful example was well come. And looking around, in Romania and in Bulgaria too, Sibiu enjoys a unique position as I have shown before. And Luxembourg was the main town, ready to share its experience, acquired during its first nomination. But the contest was open to anyone and once gained the competition has started locally between cultural actors to get as much as possible of the project: number, value etc.

The main objectives of the 2007 event were:

- Raising the international profile of Sibiu
- Long term cultural development
- Attracting international visitors
- Enhancing feelings of pride and self-confidence
- Growing and expanding the local audience for culture
- Improving social cohesion and creating an economic downstream
- Improving cultural and non cultural infrastructure
- Developing relationships with other European cities/regions and promoting European cultural cooperation
- Promoting creativity and innovation

What are the results of the competition according to ATLAS survey?

The cultural programme of Sibiu 2007 was wide-ranging, covering nine major fields: architecture, urban installations, visual arts, dramatic arts, video, movies, multimedia, literature, publications, music, mobility, conferences, research, heritage, interdisciplinary themes

Month	Number of events
January	56
February	56
March	100
April	92
May	166
June	145
July	158

August	368
September	165
October	81
November	33
December	27
Total	1447

The initial tourism figures for Sibiu over the period January to June 2007 indicate that the event has given a significant boost to tourism. Compared with the first six months of 2005, the number of tourist arrivals at accommodation establishments increased by almost 27% and the number of overnight stays grew by almost 36%.

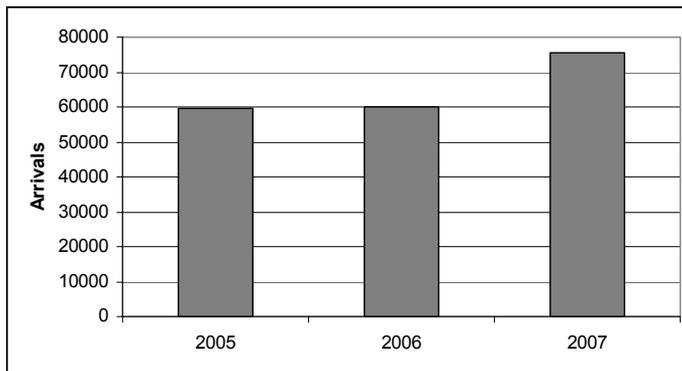


Fig 1: Arrivals at tourist accommodation in Sibiu, January-June 2005, 2006 and 2007

The main competition was between the local cultural agents according to the event and the location.

site	quality of your visit	programme of Sibiu 2007	Sibiu as a tourist destination
Casa de Cultura	9,1	9,0	9,1
Astra Museum	9,0	9,0	9,3
Azilul Church	8,8	8,1	8,8
Main Street	8,8	8,5	8,8
Imperium Pub	8,7	8,8	9,0
History Museum	8,7	8,6	8,9
Pavilion	8,5	8,6	8,8
Main square	8,4	8,6	9,0
Biblioteca Astra	8,4	8,6	8,7
Biserica Evanghelică	8,4	8,7	8,4
Bruckenthal Museum	8,4	8,5	8,7
Astra Studio	8,1	8,0	8,7

Art Gallery	7,8	8,0	8,5
Teatru Radu Stanca	7,7	9,3	9,7
Total	8,5	8,6	8,8

Fig. 2 Quality ratings by venue

But also between the communication channels

Booking channel	Visitor origin		
	Sibiu Region	Elsewhere in Romania	Abroad
In person			27,6%
Internet	42,9%	37,8%	36,2%
Made own arrangements directly	57,1%	62,2%	36,2%
Total	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Fig. 3 Booking channel used by visitor origin

In terms of the accommodation used the competition was even harder. A large number of visitors stayed with friends and relatives, followed by hotels. Those staying with friends and relatives or in their own home tended to be visitors from the Sibiu region, whereas the use of hotels and other commercial forms of accommodation was much higher for visitors from the rest of Romania or abroad. For example, 47% of foreign tourists stayed in hotels, and a further 25% in guest houses or bed and breakfast establishments.

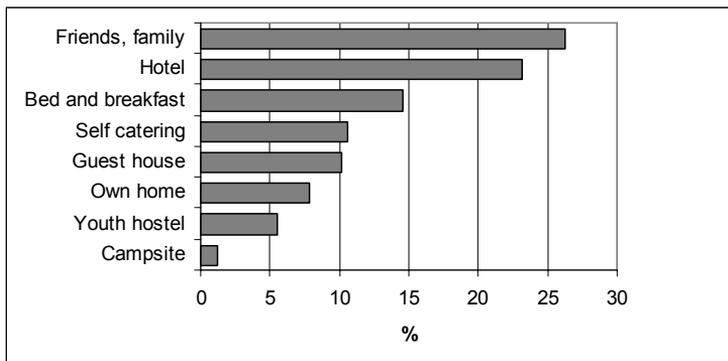


Fig. 4 Accommodation used

The image of Sibiu compared with other cities: one of the aspects of the Cultural Capital which is important for all host cities is the projection of a favorable

image, particularly to an international audience. Visitors to Sibiu 2007 were therefore asked to rank a number of cities as a cultural destination. This is a standard question which has also been used in previous ECOC studies.

When the views of all visitors are taken into consideration, Sibiu scores extremely well as a cultural destination. Almost a quarter of respondents listed Sibiu among their top five cultural destinations from the list of cities. Although there is obviously a degree of local pride at play, this is a very strong performance against other leading cultural destinations.

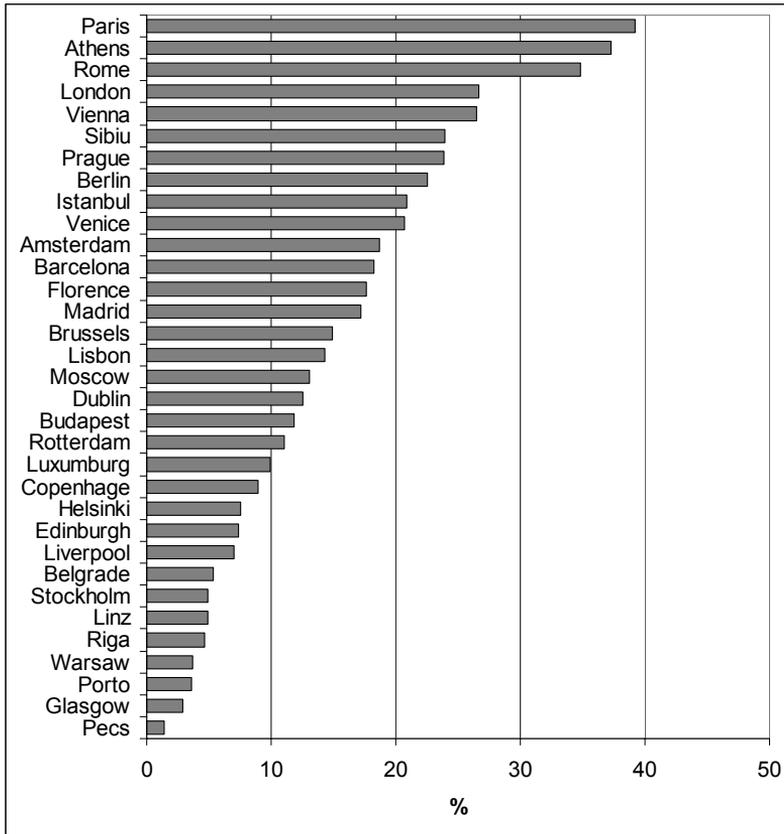


Fig. 5 Ranking of European cities as a destination for a cultural holiday (five choices possible)

When we look at the rankings of Sibiu as a cultural destination among the ATLAS surveys held in other locations in Europe, we can see that the event has had a small, but marked effect on the image of the city. In 2006, Sibiu was listed as one of the top five cultural destinations by 0.5% of cultural visitors interviewed in other parts of Europe. This underlines the general lack of awareness of the city outside Romania in the period prior to the ECOC. In 2007, however, the proportion of visitors interviewed outside Romania listing Sibiu among their top cultural destinations rose to 3.5%. Although this still does not put Sibiu very high on the ranking of European cultural

destinations, it does testify to the positive effect of the ECOC on awareness of the city and its image as a cultural destination.

Impacts of the Cultural Capital Event: This analysis has already demonstrated that the Cultural Capital has generated significant visitor spending in Sibiu. However the event was also designed to have to have broader impacts in terms of building cultural infrastructure and participation and increasing social cohesion. These are more difficult aspects of the impact to measure, but we have attempted an initial assessment here by asking the visitors to the Cultural Capital what they thought the impacts had been.

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Improved the image of Sibiu	92,6	1,0	6,3
Brought more money to Sibiu	87,3	2,3	10,4
Improved cultural facilities	80,0	6,4	13,6
Created more social cohesion	61,6	10,3	28,1
Improved the quality of life	48,5	18,6	32,9

Fig 6 Impacts of Sibiu 2007 (% respondents)

Although each ECOC is unique, there are a number of common features which make comparisons between the different host cities interesting. In particular, the ECOC tend to share a number of core objectives for the event, which include: The ECOC event certainly seems to have had a positive impact on the image of the city, at least among visitors. The ranking of the city among the top five cultural destinations by visitors is stronger than the other ECOC host cities we have monitored. The tourism impacts of Sibiu 2007 have been very positive. The 36% increase in staying visitors is greater than all previous ECOCs, with the exception of Weimar (1999). As in the case of Weimar and other cities which have achieved a substantial increase in tourism during the Cultural Capital year, the level of tourism in Sibiu is relatively low, and the availability of tourism accommodation has also been relatively restricted. This means that a large percentage increase in overnight stays can be achieved with a relatively small growth in total overnight stays.

Cultural Capital	% change in visitor stays in ECOC year
Luxembourg 1995	-4,9
Copenhagen 1996	11,3
Thessalonica 197	15,3
Stockholm 1998	9,4
Weimar 1999	56,3
Helsinki 2000	7,5
Prague 2000	-6.7
Reykjavik 2000	15,3

Bologna 2000	10,1
Brussels 2000	5,3
Bergen 2000	1,0
Rotterdam 2001	10,6
Salamanca 2002	21,6
Bruges 2002	9,0
Graz 2003	24,8
Lille 2004	27,0
Sibiu 2007	36,0

Fig. 7 Change in overnight visitors to Cultural Capitals

Competition on Expenditure: The estimated €13 million spent locally by ECOC visitors is comparable to the economic impact of many other ECOCs. For example, the expenditure in Sibiu in 2007 is roughly comparable to cities such as Bruges, Luxemburg and Rotterdam.

	Additional visitor spend directly attributable to the ECOC (€ million)
Luxembourg 1995	14
Rotterdam 2001	17
Porto 2001	23
Salamanca 2002	37.5
Bruges 2002	10
Graz 2003	21
Sibiu 2007	13

Fig. 8 expenditure through ECOC

Competition on “Motivation”: one of the important questions for any ECOC is what proportion of visitors are attracted by the cultural programme itself. In this respect Sibiu has also been relatively successful, with only Salamanca among recent ECOCs attracting a higher proportion of visitors coming for the cultural programme.

City	% motivated primarily by the ECOC
Luxembourg 1995	15
Rotterdam 2001	7.2
Porto 2001	16.4
Salamanca 2002	34
<i>Sibiu 2007</i>	<i>32</i>

Fig. 9 Competition on “motivation”

The final result of the competition: Quality ratings. Sibiu 2007 achieved a higher level of visitor satisfaction than other ECOCs for which these data are available. In particular, the quality of the programme scored significantly higher than the ECOCs held in 2001 and 2002.

Quality ratings of different aspects of the ECOC

	Rotterdam 2001	Porto 2001	Salamanca 2002	Sibi u 2007
This event	7.5	6.7	7.9	8.5
Cultural Capital programme	6.9	6.1	7.4	8.6
The city as a tourist destination	7.4		8,7	9.0

Fig 10. Quality rating

However this positive impression among visitors is not always mirrored among those who have not visited the city. In the 2007 ATLAS surveys in other European cities, for example, Sibiu was only mentioned by 3.5% of cultural visitors. This may still be seen as a creditable impact of Sibiu 2007, since the previous level of awareness of Sibiu was far lower at European level. But it indicates that there is still much work to do to translate the positive image of visitors to the city into a positive image for non-visitors as well.

Conclusion:

As soon as we chose a particular field of the life, like cultural events the competitiveness rely no longer on getting the higher profit but mainly on additional and collateral goals, communication being the mean for reaching them. The European Cultural Capital means money, thus profit, but the real winner get exposition, better life and a higher position. All these as a result of a better competitiveness but in its modern sense.

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