
2007 EUROPEAN CULTURAL CAPITAL IN SIBIU – PRELIMINARY FINDINGS CONCERNING THE IMPACT ON MAJOR STAKEHOLDERS

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Abstract:

The surveys conducted in Sibiu to evaluate the long term effects of European Cultural Capital in Sibiu in 2007 were carried on during 2008 and 2009. Works are in progress. The preliminary findings concerning the impact on major stakeholders have focused on the main goals of the event: image of Sibiu, economic, social and cultural impact, results of renovation's works, but they have also highlighted effects on local pride, implication of local authorities. As such a kind of research is carried on in Sibiu and for Romanian tourism for the first time, preliminary results might start an open debate about using such research methods in Romania as a suitable tool to evaluate the competitiveness of a major event.

Keywords: *impact, image, renovation, pride, social impact, transformation, challenges*

The European Capital of Culture staged in Sibiu during 2007 was a unique event. It was the first European Capital of Culture (ECOC) to be staged in one of the post-2004 EU accession countries, and it represented a major challenge in being staged just as Romania was joining the EU. The original evaluation report published in 2007 by ATLAS (Richards and Rotariu, 2007), indicated that the event programme had successfully met many of the short-term aims, attracting large numbers of visitors, increasing cultural participation and improving the image of the city in Romania and abroad EU.

The long term effects were studied by ATLAS and Lucian Blaga University during 2008 and 2009 by direct surveys by questionnaires or deep interviews. As the work is still in progress we present the actual findings about:

Impacts on major stakeholders

In order to gauge the impact of the event on the stakeholders in and around Sibiu, depth interviews were held with representatives of a number of major stakeholder groups.

Of these interviews, 48 were held in the City of Sibiu, 10 in the region around Sibiu, and 15 in the rest of Romania. The main interview groups were: travel agents and tour operators, banking and insurance, media, hotels and restaurants, businesses and tourism organisations. The interviews covered the main aspects of the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the ECOC and its impacts:

1. Opinions about the programme of Sibiu capital cultural 2007, its impact on the city and how the event was valorized, including long-term impacts.
2. How the respondent feels affected by the development of Sibiu as a “tourist destination“, how this affected their professional activity, personal life, image, ego's...
3. Perception of weaknesses of Sibiu as a destination: what improvements could be made
4. Level of personal involvement in the development of Sibiu as a tourist destination and willingness to be involved in future.

The analysis of the interviews was conducted using the main items in the interview schedule, and the responses were coded according to the sector and location of respondents.

Interview respondent coding

Location	
Sibiu	S
Sibiu Region	A
Eslewhere in Romania	R
Sector	
Travel agents and tour operator	TA
Banking and insurance	B
Media	M
Business and other	C

The analysis of the interviews largely supported the quantitative survey findings, indicating that almost all stakeholders were positive about the results of the ECOC both in the short and long term. A number of key issues emerged from the interviews which were emphasised by almost all the different stakeholder groups.

Image of Sibiu

There was a widespread feeling that the ECOC had put Sibiu on the map not just nationally but internationally as well. Typical remarks were:

“Another positive aspect resulting from Sibiu European Cultural Capital Sibiu in 2007 is to increase visibility both nationally and internationally through cultural events of the highest class”. SB

“Our city has been promoted and created a very good image about it. I believe that around Sibiu has benefited from the programme and became known and it was appreciated more” ST

“The status of European Capital of Culture of Sibiu brought a positive international image”. STA

The image impacts were not just external, but internal as well:

“Of course Sibiu leave a good image because its history and medieval air that persist like, through the beauty of places, the hosts, etc., which has aroused the curiosity of many Europeans, bringing them here in 2007. I think this programme has been exploited bringing many benefits to residents of the town. I am of Sibiu and attended many events held in 2007 in Sibiu and organizers were pleasantly surprised by the seriousness and extraordinary ideas”. AB

These kinds of remarks reflect the pride created by the improved image of the city (see below) as well as the increased involvement which many people felt as a result of 2007.

More tourism

One of the most immediate impacts of the increased visibility of Sibiu was a greater flow of domestic and international tourists. As one interviewee commented there was

“A significantly increased number of tourists from the country and abroad” SB

The tourism industry in Sibiu experienced:

“A significantly increased number of tourists from the country and abroad”. SB

This impact was felt not just in the city, but also in the surrounding region:

“2007, was the best opportunity to show also the values and history. In Sibiu and around Sibiu also to find many things that draw in any way by tourists so that is still preserved a bit of tradition and the beautiful surroundings” AB

“I think this opportunity has been recovered fully, of brought many tourists, people of culture, both in the city of Sibiu, but also in its surroundings. Yes, the programme effects were fully felt, opening new horizons of rural tourism in the villages around Sibiu”. AB

The impacts of tourism growth were felt not just during the ECOC, but also in 2008 and 2009:

“The fact that tourists came to Sibiu in the following years (2008 and 2009) is due largely to the image that led home those who were visitors in 2007”. SC

One of the reasons that Sibiu has attracted more foreign tourists is because the city has now been placed on the European and International tourism map, largely thanks to the impact of the ECOC. The fact that Sibiu was nominated by Forbes Magazine as one of the top global destinations did not escape the interview respondents:

“the former European cultural capital in 2007 is on the list of most attractive holiday destinations”. STA

Economic impacts

The growth of tourism stimulated the local economy, and the impacts were clear for all stakeholders.

“this event registered benefits in many units: hotel, restaurants and stores, as sales have seen significant increases”. SC

“First, the fact that Sibiu was the cultural capital of Europe in 2007 meant the creation of my job, and I think that says it all”. STA

“In addition, the city economically benefited from attracting funds from the EU, external funding from other institutions, but also funding from the government for the development of Sibiu in the service sector” STA

The economic effects were felt directly in terms of increased turnover for local businesses, especially those related to tourism, but there was also evidence of considerable induced impacts from this expenditure, for example for the banks and other services in the city:

“In my capacity as branch manager of a bank (our) Financial Institution has (seen) increased turnover and profit (for) companies working in the Horeca sector”. SB

“This reality, Sibiu tourist destination, has benefited professionally because many people in the sphere of national and international affairs have made deposits in November, having confidence that they will return soon to open a business in Sibiu”. SB

The economic impacts were felt not just in terms of increased turnover for local businesses, but also through the increased investment in the city by public and private bodies.

“Sibiu has benefited from domestic and international funds, which led to improve all living conditions, including the improvement of tourist offers and to provide a varied programme as cultural and artistic has attracted many tourists” SB

Cultural and social impacts

Many interviewees emphasised that the impacts of the ECOC were wider than just economic:

“Sibiu European Cultural Capital had a strong impact in 2007 in all respects but especially socially, culturally and economic”. SB

“Sibiu-European Cultural Capital in 2007 was designed so as to provide opportunities for issues of inclusion and social cohesion, education, heritage tourism and urban regeneration at all levels. The programme puts culture at the heart of city life and looking into her inspiration for driving community forward”.

AB

In particular, the opportunities offered by the extensive cultural programme were appreciated by a large number of stakeholders:

“The ECOC in 2007 as well as 2008 both gave the opportunity for me and other one thousand inhabitants of the town to watch shows and events culture that otherwise would not have been present in Sibiu (eg Vienna Philharmonic)”. SB

“I’m pleased with the cultural activities taking place in Sibiu. For example, Talia Hall, where concerts are held every Thursday. The summer is full of festivals, plays”. SB

“Cinema and theatre was the height in that period. The city grew as a cultural value” SB

“it is a cultural city where there were very many artistic events that have developed the cultural forming links with other cities and other important figures of world culture”. SC

The fact that the ECOC highlighted the cultural diversity of the city was also seen as a positive factor:

“It was a year when Sibiu presented Europe its cultural diversity, linguistic and religious and how this diversity still live on the German fortress foundation in the eleventh century”. SB

Renovation

One of the crucial elements in improving the image of the city was the renovation of the old town. This was a measure which was appreciate by a large number of stakeholders, not just for the tourism and economic impacts, but also because of the general improvement of the quality of life.

“Very visible in the eyes of the people was the renovation historical centre which otherwise would not have happened very quickly. Both the historical centre and the renovation of an impressive number of monuments and cultural organization of the various events had a favourable effect on the town”. ST

“In 2005 and 2006, extensive renovation activities took place in Sibiu. They have changed the facades of buildings in Piata Mare, Piata Mica, street city, city theater was renovated and they held the Youth Park redevelopment and Astra Park.” SC

“After renovations are completed, Sibiu has restored life ... or so it seems to me”. ST

“Because of this programme, authorities had to make a series of works including: rehabilitation of the historic center, renovation of major buildings in terms of travel, repair of city streets etc.” ST

These investments had a significant impact not just on the city centre itself, but also in other parts of the region:

“large investments in conservation, renovation and highlighting the historical centre, has attracted a number of investments that have led to the development of tourism, both in Sibiu and its surroundings”. SB

Pride in the city

The increased visibility of the city and the restoration of some of its most prestigious landmarks also clearly had an impact on the pride that the citizens of Sibiu felt in their city.

“I developed a special sensitivity for everything you call "my city". The fact that Sibiu was named European Cultural Capital together with Luxembourg is a proud moment. Also, the image to make a potential cue ball in Romania”. S

“We have to be proud that we are locals and try to make known Sibiu in Romania and abroad” SB

“Considering the fact that I was born in Sibiu city and is my soul I was proud that I was given a big chance of being recognized internationally. For me, Sibiu is a city with strong potential and we are proud” SB

Being from Sibiu was suddenly something to take pride in, especially as the city was recognised not just as national, but also European level. The fact that people from other parts of the world felt that Sibiu was worth visiting had an important role in stimulating local pride:

“I read in a magazine, do not know exactly where, that Sibiu is one of Europe's top cities that deserve to be visited, for this we should be proud of our Sibiu” SB

“We saw in Cluj people wearing caps and shirts with the inscription "Sibiu - European Cultural Capital" and then I enjoyed it”. SC

The appreciation from outside also increased the appreciation of locals for what their city had achieved:

“as inhabitants of this town I am very impressed by how well developed in Sibiu”. SB

“I gained a sense of pride, a kind of: here as you can, you can do something good, something of quality, here we are appreciated” SB

Transformation

The renewed pride of the citizens of Sibiu was also a reflection of the fact that something significant had taken place that had transformed the city.

“Sibiu has changed a lot lately, mostly due to the great event held in 2007” SB

“I think BCR Sibiu experienced only benefit from the nominations because 2007 was an impetus that Sibiu was able to capitalize on the most, both culturally and in terms of growth but the visibility of Sibiu, the cultural location, tourism and not least economic” SB

“long term this programme has been transforming our city into a tourist magnet” STA

The transformation of the city has had a number of broader impacts, culturally and socially as well as economically.

“Sibiu, in these conditions provides more possibilities for young people who decide to stay in this city and not just young people”. SC

“a change of pace of life has become more intense, more concentrated, the streets become more crowded” SC

In very basic terms, there was a feeling that Sibiu had become both more ‘European’ and cosmopolitan:

“I noticed this year that the city is visited by tourists (Spanish, Italian), appears to be cosmopolitan city”.

“My personal life has changed in the sense that in my spare time walking on downtown Sibiu noticed different people from different corners of the world” SB

Not just the people coming to the city have changed, but stakeholders also feel that the city itself has gained a greater capacity to undertake major initiatives as well.

“This programme helped the evolution of the organization of events and highlighted the organizational capabilities of companies in this area” SC

Role of the Local Authority

Many stakeholders emphasised the important role that the civic administration had played in the development and the success of the ECOC.

“Locally, in my view local authorities were very much involved, have managed to attract funds and manage them as effectively all in the interests of the community and the city that was very visible in the eyes of the people was the renovation of the historical centre”. SB

“The 2007 event was very well managed by local authorities in Sibiu”; AB

Much of the success of the event was attributed to the leadership given by the Local Authority, and particularly the Mayor:

“I can say that I was involved in decisions that influenced Sibiu by the fact that I expressed my point of view in terms of choosing the mayor of the city”. ST

“I’m proud that Sibiu and we are a good and think about those who lead this city” SB

“Sibiu received significant funding from the Government, Minister of Culture and by funds from Germany, following the steps mayor Klaus Johannis. Many events took place in Sibiu” ST

Sibiu and Romania

A number of respondents emphasised that the ECOC was not just an advantage for Sibiu, but for the whole country. Because the ECOC took place at the time that Romania became a member of the EU, it had the effect of putting Romania in the spotlight and helping to change the image of the country as a whole.

“Also, the image of Sibiu can be a potential catalyst in Romania. Nobody talks about Sibiu without mentioning the country to which it belongs”. SB

“What has followed in this project was to improve national and especially international image of Sibiu, attracting visitors, improve social links”. ST

“Sibiu - European Capital of Culture 2007 is the most important cultural project in Romania”. STA

“I think Sibiu ECC 2007 event was a positive point for both city and for the whole country. I noticed that those who come to our office want to know first about Sibiu as ECOC and then find other information on Romania” STA

“I am sure that through this programme the European cultural, Romania has become more known”. AB

The national impact of the ECOC was appreciated not just by respondents in Sibiu itself, but also those in other parts of the country, including Bucharest:

“From my point of view, this programme was a great chance offered Sibiu and Romania default to show a new image, other than those known so far outside the borders. In the same time not be omitted many economic and cultural benefits, and here I refer to funds raised in the development of infrastructure, recovery objectives and increasing the sense of cultural belonging”. RB

“It was the best thing possible both for Sibiu and for Romania, as Sibiu has benefited not only from this programme but especially what concerns our tourism”. RB

“I am sure that through this programme the European cultural, Romania has become more known”. AB

The improved image of Sibiu and Romania was contrasted by some respondents with the ‘old’ image of the country in other parts of Europe:

“We must improve the image of the country as much time we can. I left with a bitter taste when I was last year at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Vienna, where I saw the pictures made by the Romans about the Romanians, who were only pictures with Gypsies and misery, so they promoted a very bad image about our country”. SB

Remaining challenges

Although the vast majority of stakeholders were positive about the impacts of the ECOC, they were also keenly aware that there remains much to be done to address the weaknesses of the city. One of the key points was the work that still needs to be done on the infrastructure of the city:

“The main weakness that I think at this point is the poor infrastructure of Sibiu” SB

“Weaknesses in Sibiu as a tourist destination are especially the infrastructure system that need improvement” SC

A review of the more detailed comments indicates that the major infrastructure weaknesses relate specifically to roads and parking facilities.

“I think one weakness of both the city of Sibiu and as a tourism destination are narrow streets making difficult traffic. Another problem would be lack of parking”. SB

Other interviewees mentioned the need to improve the tourism and leisure product as well:

“I think that Sibiu needs more means of entertainment such as an amusement park, several swimming pools, upgraded rear different sports, etc.. think that Sibiu needs more means of entertainment such as an amusement park, several swimming pools, upgraded rear different sports, etc..” SB

The changes produced by the ECOC were not always experienced as positive. A number of people mentioned the increase in prices, while others feared for the loss of the tranquil atmosphere of the city.

“Prices were increased to terraces, bars, are prices for tourists, not locals”. SB

“I do not want to be promoted Sibiu as commercial city, but to keep the medieval spirit. It was not too much excitement among the population. To maintain a quiet spirit”. SB

A potential area of improvement indicated by many respondents was the attitude of some citizens, who were felt not to be ‘civilised’ or polite enough to welcome visitors:

“A weakness I would see that has not enough civilized people”. SB

“To contribute to improving the image of Sibiu, people should give more evidence of civilization. Unfortunately this is one of the most important things.”

ST

“To be more civilized! Namely to be more civilized!”ST

Other aspects of the city were also felt to detract from the otherwise positive image of the ECOC:

“In the centre you can find a trash at every step” ST

“The problem with vagrants and beggars has to be solved” SB

Other, longer term problems were indicated by some respondents:

“I think Sibiu has accumulated some debt in 2007 and this will mean higher taxes and fees for city residents. Prices are now related to nutrition, housing, rents are now compared with those not in the country, but those from abroad, in developed countries”. STA

There were also some question marks about the balance of new developments in the city. Although stakeholders were generally pleased with the renovations made in the city centre, some felt that this contrasted with the relatively lack of improvements in other parts of the city.

Overall assessment of the interviews

In general, the picture that emerges from the depth interviews is that all stakeholder groups were very happy with the ECOC and its outcomes. The economic impacts and the growth in tourism were remarked upon by those in the tourism sector as well as other stakeholders.

It is also clear that the event had a significant impact on the image of the city. Residents of Sibiu were aware that Sibiu had become more widely known, and this made them feel more proud of being from Sibiu. They felt that the city had made

significant achievements in 2007, and attributed a significant part of this success to the leadership shown by the Municipality and the Mayor.

These feelings were echoed by respondents from outside Sibiu as well. Stakeholders in the Sibiu region in general felt that the region as a whole had benefitted from the ECOC, which reflects the evidence from the statistics on hotel supply and occupancy as well. Respondents in other parts of Romania were also positive about the effects of the ECOC, as they generally saw that the success of Sibiu had reflected on Romania as a whole.

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