

## **Developing the Eventful City in Sibiu, Romania**

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### **Abstract**

Cities are increasingly using events as an instrument for economic and social change and cultural and urban regeneration. Major events help cities to distinguish themselves, and attracting event-related tourism generates income and jobs and increases atmosphere and 'liveliness'. Many cities have therefore positioned themselves as 'eventful cities' or 'festival cities' by adopting event-led strategies. The effects of the 2007 European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in Sibiu, Romania were evaluated through twelve years of longitudinal research including surveys and depth interviews with local residents, stakeholders and tourists to monitor the sustainability of event-related regeneration strategies. The impacts identified include increased cultural activity, tourism growth, image improvements and increased pride among residents. These impacts have been facilitated by a local growth coalition, and the increased linkage of the city to flows of investment, skills and talent through EU membership. The city has taken some important steps to becoming an 'eventful city', in which events are utilised to sustainably increase the quality of life. However, the momentum of eventfulness developed in 2007 has been difficult to maintain, and there are difficulties in separating the effect of event-related activities from wider cultural, social and economic development factors.

Keywords: Mega events; eventful cities; Tourism development; Cultural tourism, Romania, Sibiu

## **Introduction**

Cities increasingly have to compete to attract and anchor global flows of capital and labour and strengthen their economies. These processes are also becoming more dependent on ‘soft’ factors of production, including service industries, tourism and culture. Many cities have tried to position themselves in this new economic landscape through strategies such as becoming ‘creative cities’ (Landry, 2000) or trying to attract the ‘creative class’ (Florida, 2002). One particular strategy which is becoming popular among cities across the globe is the staging of major cultural and sporting events in order to attract attention, economic growth and inward investment (OECD, 2008). Such strategies are spreading from core industrialised regions to other parts of the world as a form of ‘fast policy’ (Peck, 2002). The 2010 World Expo in Shanghai, the 2007 Universal Forum of Cultures in Monterrey and the staging of the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in Central and Eastern European cities such as Sibiu, Vilnius, Pécs, Tallinn and Istanbul are recent examples of this process.

To date, little structured research has been undertaken on the long-term effects and sustainability of event-based regeneration. Most studies of cultural events, for example, concentrate on pre-event feasibility, activity during the event or post-hoc evaluation. Very rarely are events monitored so that their articulation with the economic, social and cultural life of the city can be studied over time.

This paper reports on a long-term monitoring project for the Romanian city of Sibiu, which was ECoC in 2007. This case study is of particular interest as the first city in Central and Eastern Europe to host the ECoC, the co-incidence of the event with the entry of Romania into the European Union (EU) and the development of a political growth coalition related to a specific cultural group in the region. The paper aims to evaluate the impacts of the ECoC relative to the aims set for it by local stakeholders and to assess the success of the event and of the overall strategy in regenerating the city over the past decade. Our analysis poses the question whether Sibiu has become a successful ‘eventful city’ (Richards and Palmer, 2010).

## *The City of Sibiu*

The Transylvanian city of Sibiu was founded in 1190 by migrants from Germany and Luxemburg and by the 19<sup>th</sup> century it had become a major industrial centre with Romanian, German, Hungarian and Roma populations. The historic city centre survived the Communist era and there is a tradition of alternative cultural manifestations, with the annual jazz festival having been founded in the 1970s. The city became one of the focal points of resistance to the Ceausescu regime and Sibiu was the second city after Timisoara to rise against the Communist dictatorship in 1989.

In the post-Communist era Sibiu underwent economic restructuring as state-owned industrial plants closed or were sold to foreign investors. There was also a major exodus of the German population to Germany after 1990, and the proportion of German residents fell to 1.6% of the city's total population of 154,000 by 2008. In the 1990s the city was in a 'critical' state, with poor infrastructure and a shortage of drinking water. Adverse economic circumstances led to the emergence of a local growth coalition led by the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania (FDGR), which came to power in 2000 with the election of the first German mayor of a city in Romania since World War II. Johannis has emerged as a 'championing local official' (Markusen and Gadwa 2010), typical of the 'new regionalism' in Central and Eastern Europe (De Frantz, 2008; Scott, 2009). The cultural links the city has with Germany and Luxemburg has also enabled Sibiu to tap into international networks and to obtain funding and support for a range of projects, the most significant being the renovation of the city centre and the staging of the 2007 European Capital of Culture (ECoC). The ECoC coincided with entry of Romania to the European Union, which has been shown elsewhere to create an 'accession effect', which can stimulate tourism (Jarvis & Kallas, 2008).

## *Repositioning the city through eventfulness*

Richards and Palmer (2010:2) argue that 'Cities of today face two choices. Either they develop to meet the challenges created by the pace of global change, or they resist the impulse for transformation and stagnate'. This development process includes restructuring urban economies in response to processes of globalisation and repositioning themselves in the emerging landscapes of inter-urban competition (Jessop

and Sum 2000). The overriding imperative for many cities in this new competitive arena has been to distinguish themselves from other cities in order to attract investment, residents and tourists. Turok (2009) argues that there are two basic dimensions of distinctiveness: the tangible or intangible resources a city has and the speed with which elements of the city can be changed. Because occupational structures, or the composition of the workforce, and the presence of specialised industries are not so readily changed, repositioning strategies tend to gravitate toward aspects such as image or the built environment, which are (usually) more amenable to change. Markusen and Schrock (2006) identify three types of distinctiveness for urban economies:

- Productive distinctiveness captures relative uniqueness of a city's production factors—land, labour, capital and technology.
- Consumptive distinctiveness connotes the unique consumption patterns on the part of urban residents,
- Identity distinctiveness relates to the extent to which cities are recognised by residents and non-residents as being culturally unique.

Again, they argue that because productive distinctiveness is relatively hard to change, emphasis has shifted towards relatively intangible sources of distinctiveness, such as patterns of consumption and identity and image. These studies of urban distinctiveness seem to indicate that cities are moving towards more flexible and less tangible sources of distinction, commensurate with the growth of the symbolic economy and the more flexible modes of capital accumulation (Zukin 1995). Many cities have therefore embarked on imaging strategies that can deliver short-term distinctiveness as well as hopefully producing structural change in the positioning of the city relative to the competition (Smith, 2005).

Events have become an important part of such distinctiveness strategies, because they are arguably capable of rallying stakeholders rapidly around developmental agendas, they can be utilised for a wide range of urban objectives and because they can be (relatively) cheap and flexible. The city has become not just a site in which events are staged or produced, but which is also produced through events. The contemporary

‘eventful city’ not just harnesses events to achieve economic, social and cultural policy goals, but also reflexively manages its portfolio of events to maximise event outputs and to improve the effectiveness of event processes (Richards and Palmer, 2010). We define an eventful city as one that ‘purposefully uses a programme of events to strategically and sustainably support long-term policy agendas that enhance the quality of life for all.’

Markwell and Waitt (2009) link such strategies in particular to major events: ‘As “world” cities jostle to (re)establish profiles in a globalizing world economy, high profile festivals have become particularly crucial in (re)fashioning the imagined cityscape – including a (FIFA) World Cup or an Olympic Games.’ They also note that such events are ‘fashioned by boosterist economic policies of urban entrepreneurialism to attract increasingly mobile capital to cities in a globalizing world economy and to (re)image places that have slipped from the tourist circuit’ (Markwell and Waitt, 2009:144). As Mair (2009) notes, there is a growing critical tradition that seeks to uncover the links between global economic structures and such events. However, the role of local creativity in supporting events is often ignored. Even in cities where event-based repositioning and imaging strategies appear to have been successful, as in the case of Barcelona, this has not necessarily led to successful urban regeneration (Smith 2005).

In Europe, one particularly prominent model of developing the eventful city has been the ECoC, a year-long celebration of civic and European culture which rotates between the member states of the EU. This model has been seen as particularly successful in delivering a range of benefits, which has led to more interest in, and competition for, the ECoC title (Palmer, 2004). Over the past 25 years, the ECoC has expanded in terms of budget, geographical scope, length of programme and ambition, to become an all-encompassing development vehicle. Liverpool spent €140 million on the 2008 ECoC, and claimed an economic impact of €900 million, along with significant tourism, image and social impacts (Impacts08, 2010).

The ECoC has not been without its critics, who have argued that the event tends to cater to well-off, frequent cultural consumers rather than the whole population (O’Callaghan and Linehan, 2007). The event has arguably also shifted from cultural motives to economic ones. The recent evaluation of Stavanger (2008) complained that the

European Commission is more interested in success stories in urban regeneration than the cultural content of the event (Miller, 2009). This has also been identified as a problem in several studies of the ECoC, such as Liverpool 2008 (Connelly, 2007), Cork 2005 (O’Callaghan & Linehan, 2007) and Glasgow 1990 (Boyle and Hughes, 1994).

Discussions about the effectiveness of the ECoC in meeting the needs of all citizens and stakeholder groups have also emerged in recent years. For example, Boland (2010) analyses competing interpretations of Liverpool's ECoC in 2008, and shows how the ‘official triumphant message of urban regeneration and economic renaissance’ clashes with more critical interpretations pointing to a lack of benefits for ordinary people. Similarly Jones and Wilks-Heeg (2004) question the ‘boosterism’ of the Liverpool event, arguing that alternative culture had been sidelined in the process. Åkerlund and Müller (2012) also discuss how in the case of Umeå different opinions emerged that may contest the “official” discourse, and that the outcomes of the implementation strategy may be hard to control unless the “official” discourse adapts to these counter-discourses. The official discourse is that Umeå is a city where collaboration and creativity is merged into a culture of “Co-Creation”, in which all its actors and inhabitants are participants, but a clear counter-discourse is also evident through many arguments of unequal power and control over the development. In the case of Cork (ECoC in 2005), O’Callaghan (2012) describes how dissatisfaction with the official programme stimulated the creation of a fringe group that delivered effective criticism of the event. This study revealed the many conflicts that can emerge between stakeholders over issues of cultural ownership, social inclusion and the dichotomy between economics and the arts.

Because of the broadening debate about the efficacy and potentially divisive results of investments in such large-scale cultural projects, there have been more attempts in recent years to measure their impacts. Garcia (2005) analysed the long-term effects of the Glasgow ECoC in 1990, indicating positive image changes for the city and increased confidence among cultural stakeholders. The ECoC in Luxemburg in 2007 monitored resident and visitor attitudes before and during the event (Luxemburg and Greater Region, 2008) and Stavanger undertook extensive research with local residents before, during and after the event in 2008 (Rommetvedt, 2009) and also produced a comprehensive qualitative evaluation (Miller, 2009). In Liverpool (2008) a major

research programme was set up to measure the impacts of the ECoC, with baseline measurements before the event, stakeholder studies during the event and monitoring after the event (Impacts08, 2010). From a qualitative perspective, Quinn (2009) assessed the overall achievements of the 2005 ECoC in Cork, and concluded that the event had failed to have a significant impact on the major stakeholders in the city. A major European research project linking a number of ECoC host cities has also highlighted the need for a more holistic approach to evaluation (European Capitals of Culture Policy Group, 2010). This is particularly important if the sustainability of the event, and its success in further developing eventfulness, is to be measured.

In spite of this recent surge in interest, much previous ECoC-related research lacks a long-term longitudinal perspective, a holistic approach to different stakeholder groups or a link with the broader development of the host city. This paper reports on longitudinal research undertaken in Sibiu over the period 2001-2012. It analyses the effects of the 2007 ECoC from the perspective of local residents and other stakeholders, visitors to the city and cultural consumers in other parts of Europe. The aim of the research is to provide a more holistic, longer-term view of the impacts of a major cultural event on the city and its role in culture-led regeneration strategies. Such longitudinal research is arguably vital in assessing the sustainability of urban development strategies based on tourism and events.

## **Methods**

The research programme combined surveys of residents and visitors, stakeholder interviews and monitoring of statistical indicators. Over 6000 surveys were completed with residents and visitors between 2001 and 2013 through participant interviews with a standardised questionnaire. The questionnaire is based on the Association of Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) survey used in different countries to monitor cultural consumption under residents and visitors (ATLAS, 2009; Richards 2007). The major areas covered in the questionnaire included demographic background, image and impact perceptions, visit characteristics, expenditure and information sources. The survey locations were chosen to reflect a range of different locations in the city, including the main square, major tourist attractions and more peripheral areas of the city. Respondents were selected as far as possible at random from the people passing or visiting the survey location. Surveys were conducted at different times and on different days of the week

to ensure a spread of different visitor types. Both local residents and visitors from outside the city were surveyed. Surveys were also spread across the months of May to October in order to capture a distributed sample of tourists as well as residents. The completed surveys were entered into SPSS for analysis.

A total of 170 depth interviews were also conducted in 2009 and 2010 with cultural operators, travel agents and tour operators, banking and insurance, media, hotels and restaurants, businesses, tourism organisations, political figures and local residents. The interviews therefore covered both direct and indirect stakeholders in the ECoC, and included items such as perceived changes in the city as a result of the ECoC, economic, cultural and social impacts, the ‘atmosphere’ of the city and perceptions of eventfulness.

Statistical indicators included business turnover in Sibiu, accommodation capacity and use, accommodation tax revenues, employment, cultural investment, cultural participation and comparisons with surrounding cities. Ivan-Ungureanu (2001) notes that official statistics in Romania tend to underestimate turnover and occupancy levels, and that for hotels the number of non-registered tourists is about one third of the total. This can make it hard to reconcile estimates of economic impact derived from supply and demand side data. However, as turnover underreporting can be assumed to affect the whole period under study, this probably has relatively little impact on trend data.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and the triangulation of different data sources enabled us to trace the cultural, social and economic effects of the ECoC, and underpinned efforts to isolate the ‘ECoC effect’ from other major forces affecting Sibiu during the study period.

## **Results**

The results of the research are presented in major sections relating to impact types covered by the research. We have also tried to evaluate the extent to which the city has met its specific aims, which in the case of the ECoC were a mix of economic, image, cultural, social and physical regeneration goals (Sibiu European Cultural Capital, 2007).

### *Economic goals*

The economic impacts of the ECoC 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 improvements in living conditions, including the improvement of tourist offers and to provide a varied cultural and artistic programme that has attracted many tourists (Insurance agent, Sibiu).

The perception of economic growth among the stakeholders (particularly those in the tourism and financial sectors) is confirmed by secondary data. Figures on the turnover of the local economy show that there was an increase of almost 10% in 2007 (Nistor, 2008). Total employment in Sibiu County grew by almost 9% between 2005 and 2007, compared with a national increase of 4.9% over the same period. After 2007 unemployment rose in Sibiu from 3.2% in 2008 to 5.7% in October 2009, although this figure remained below the national average of 7.8%.

Total tourist arrivals and bednights recorded at registered accommodation in the city rose by over 19%, well above the long-term average for previous ECoCs of around 11% (Palmer et al., 2011). In common with many previous ECoC, tourism experienced a sharp decline the following year, and this fall continued in 2009 thanks to the economic downturn. However figures from 2010 show a sharp recovery in tourism flows, exceeding the 2007 record level of arrivals by 2013 (Table 1). This pattern is reflected in arrivals at Sibiu airport, which saw a 66% growth in 2007, followed by a further 88% growth from 2007 to 2010.

*Insert Table 1: Tourist arrivals and bednights in Sibiu 2006-2013. Source: official tourism statistics*

The number of hotels and hotel beds in the city of Sibiu itself and in the surrounding region also doubled between 2006 and 2010, boosting aggregate tourism revenues in the post-ECoC period. Estimates by Richards and Rotariu (2011) indicate that total visitor spending reached almost €54 million in 2013, double the figure in the ECoC year 2007

(Table 2). Tourism tax revenues also show clearly that 2007 marked a giant leap forward in terms of the development of the tourism economy of the city and the contribution of tourism to civic finances. Revenues grew by over 70% between 2006 and 2007, and remained high in 2008 and 2009.

*Insert Table 2: Expenditure by visitors staying in Sibiu 2007-2013. Source: Official tourism statistics, visitor surveys.*

The growth in tourism was felt directly in 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 hotel and catering sector. (Bank Manager, Sibiu)

Not only did the volume of tourist activity grow, but the city attracted a higher proportion of tourists staying overnight and foreign visitors, adding to the ‘cosmopolitan’ or ‘European’ feel of the city during the ECoC. The rating by visitors of the quality of their visit to Sibiu also increased substantially, rising from an average of 7.7 on a ten point scale in 2001 to over 9 in 2008 (although this dipped slightly to just under 9 in 2013). The proportion of sites visited outside the historic core of the city grew, and the average visitor expenditure rose from less than €200 before 2007 to more than €350 per trip in the period 2007-2010. These trends seem to indicate a qualitative change in the nature of visitors attracted to Sibiu, with more culturally interested, high spending visitors in the post-ECoC period.

Because many of the hotel projects related to the ECoC were not actually operational until 2007 or even in 2008, the biggest effects of hotel development were actually felt after the ECoC. Not only did tourism increase, but visitors also stayed in higher grade accommodation and therefore paid higher average room rates.

*Image goals*

As some authors have argued, physical change may also be the best way to achieve image change and build 'brand value' (Hildreth, 2008). In the case of Sibiu culture-led regeneration certainly seems to have had an impact, as the image of the city has improved markedly. This was obvious to many different stakeholders:

Another positive aspect resulting from the Sibiu ECoC in 2007 is to increase visibility both nationally and internationally through cultural events of the highest class. (Bank employee, Sibiu)

This renewed image was promulgated through the national and international media. Many stakeholders commented on the fact that Sibiu was listed among 'Europe's Most Idyllic Places to Live' by *Forbes Magazine* (Beckett and Olson, 2008). In 2011 Sibiu was the only Romanian city to be awarded three stars in the Michelin Green Guide, indicating that it is a 'must-see' destination.

External acclaim also increased the appreciation of locals for what their city had achieved. The re-imagining of Sibiu on the European stage also led to a re-thinking of the position of Sibiu in Romania.

I think the Sibiu ECoC 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 (Airport worker, Sibiu)

These feelings were also echoed by Stakeholders in the region around Sibiu, who felt that the area as a whole had benefited from the ECoC, a point also supported by statistics on hotel supply and occupancy.

In the post-ECoC surveys, respondents were also asked to assess the longer-term image impacts and overall effectiveness of the event. The overwhelming majority of residents feel there is more attention for the city in the national media (87% agreeing in 2008, 82% in 2013). However, they were less convinced about the long-term international media impacts (78% agreeing in 2008, 76% in 2013). These figures also indicate that residents feel the media image effect is declining slightly over time.

Following the ECoC more local residents chose their own city among their top five cultural destinations, rising from 23% in 2007 to 48% in 2008 (although it fell to 32% by 2013). This boost mirrors the stronger image that Sibiu was able to project in the rest of the country and abroad as a result of the ECoC. The national impact of the ECoC was appreciated not just by respondents in Sibiu itself, but also those located in other parts of the country.

Surveys (ATLAS, 2009) conducted in other parts of Europe before, during and after the ECoC indicated that the event had had a positive effect on the image of the city outside Romania as well. In absolute terms, Sibiu scored relatively low as a potential cultural destination, with less than 5% of consumers listing the city in 2007. However, a comparison with other recent ECoCs indicates that this performance is relatively strong for a city that was 'unknown' outside Romania before 2007. In 2007 recognition of Sibiu as a potential cultural destination rose over 4 times compared with 2006 and Sibiu also scored higher than Luxemburg, the partner ECoC for that year. There was a rapid decline in the strength of Sibiu's image following the ECoC, but the level of recognition still remained at over twice the pre-ECoC level.

### *Cultural and social goals*

Although the more tangible impacts related to physical regeneration and economic growth were perhaps most visible for the majority of stakeholders, there were nonetheless many social and cultural impacts of the ECoC. For example, cultural participation levels increased as a result of the ECoC, and remained high in the post-ECoC period, while participation in other Romanian cities fell. The cultural boost was also recognised by residents:

(The) 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. (Heritage manager, Fargaras)

In particular, the opportunities offered by the extensive cultural programme were appreciated by a large number of stakeholders: Almost €16.4 million was invested in cultural infrastructure for the ECoC, which also vastly increased cultural consumption during the ECoC year (Johannis, 2008). 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. (Bank worker, Sibiu).

Being from Sibiu was something that made many respondents feel proud, especially as the city was recognised not just at 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:

The very fact that during 2007 Sibiu was perceived to be at the heart of ‘Europe’ was also a source of immense pride for the citizens of Sibiu. I developed a special sensitivity for everything you call ‘my city’. (Sports association member, Sibiu)

Another impact of the ECoC was a feeling that Sibiu had become both more ‘European’ and cosmopolitan:

My personal life has changed in the sense that in my spare time walking in downtown Sibiu I noticed different people from different corners of the world. (Insurance Office employee, Sibiu)

This ‘Europeanness’ was also noted by Palonen (2011), who reported on successful creative interventions in Sibiu aimed at strengthening links with the EU.

### **The sustainability of eventful strategies**

In analysing the sustainability of strategies to develop eventfulness, it is important to underline that sustainability embraces all aspects of event impact, not just the survival of the event itself or the environmental aspects of the event. Our assessment of the

sustainability of the ECoC strategy in Sibiu concentrates on the period after the event, and the longer term legacies now emerging from the event programme.

In general, the picture that emerges from the research is that all stakeholder groups were generally happy with the ECoC and its immediate outcomes. In particular, local residents felt that the city had been transformed through physical regeneration, image change, and growth in tourism. The fact that the city had become more widely known through the ECoC made locals feel more proud of being from Sibiu.

Surveys conducted with residents indicated that they were overwhelmingly positive about the development of the city and the changes they had seen. The majority of residents agreed that the ECoC had brought benefits in terms of image, economic, cultural and social outcomes, although there seems to be a feeling that Sibiu had benefitted in economic than in social or overall quality of life terms. Interestingly, however, more highly educated residents were significantly less likely to perceived improvements in the quality of life than those with less education. Asked if they thought Sibiu had made good use of the opportunities provided by the ECoC, 86% of residents responded positively in 2008, and 88% in 2013 (Table 3).

*Insert Table 3: Statements about the impact on Sibiu 2007-2013 (local residents)*

It seems that the perceptions of positive economic and cultural impacts of the ECoC have been more durable in Sibiu than those related to social and quality of life benefits. There was also a division of opinion on quality of life impacts along occupational lines in 2009, with those in service jobs and technical professionals being significantly less likely to see quality of life benefits than other occupational groups. The surveys during the ECoC in 2007 also showed a significant difference in perceived social cohesion and quality of life benefits according to culturally-related employment. Those in the cultural sector were generally more positive than other groups, indicating that the impacts of the ECoC had been particularly positive for those with an employment link to culture.

*Cultural legacies*

The 2007 ECoC had a range of cultural aims, including cultural development, improving cultural infrastructure, increasing the cultural audience and developing European cultural cooperation.

There are some indicators that point to increasing cultural participation since the ECoC. Firstly, the number of cultural visits in the city grew not just in 2007, but also continued to increase in 2008 and 2009. For example the Bruckenthal Museum in Sibiu generated more than 370,000 visits in 2010, compared with less than 100,000 in 2006. In contrast the number of museum visitors in Romania as a whole fell by 27% between 2007 and 2010 (INSEE 2011). Our surveys also indicate that the average number of cultural attractions in the city visited by Sibiu residents annually rose from 1.8 visits a year in 2007 to 4.0 in 2013. An analysis of cultural events listed in the annual events calendar of the city shows a post-ECoC fall in activity, although official figures for the region as a whole indicate an increase.

The cultural infrastructure of the city has certainly improved as a direct result of the ECoC, with a new public library building, renovation of the ‘Gong’ children’s theatre and the Bruckenthal Fine Arts Museum. A number of stakeholders therefore commented on the improvement of cultural facilities and the range and scale of

activities available in the city. Local residents were not the only stakeholders who noticed that the ECoC had improved cultural facilities. Almost 80% of repeat visitors to Sibiu in 2012 agreed that the cultural facilities in the city had improved since 2007. These improvements arguably helped to stimulate an increase in cultural participation, which has seen stronger growth in Sibiu in recent years compared with other major Romanian cities (Sanetra-Szeliga, 2011).

The ex-post evaluation of the ECoC by ECOTEC (2009) also noted significant cultural gains, including greater effectiveness of the local cultural sector, particularly small companies and not-for-profit associations, who raised the quality of their operations and became more professional. The report concluded that ‘the capacity of cultural governance within Sibiu has improved significantly as a result of the ECoC.’

### *Economic legacies*

One of the main aims for the ECoC was raising the international profile of the city, thereby attracting visitors and inward investment, improving the non-cultural infrastructure and promoting creativity and innovation.

The international image of Sibiu was certainly boosted by the ECoC, with significant coverage in the national and international media. The image of Sibiu as a cultural destination also improved, creating the potential for more cultural tourism. The ECoC also stimulated more (cultural) tourism in 2007, which is estimated to have generated a total expenditure of around €160 million, of which about €25 million could be attributed to the ECoC itself (Richards and Rotarui, 2011). This suggests a boost to the local economy even greater than the 10% increase indicated by Nistor (2008) on the basis of official turnover figures.

Inward investment related to the ECoC was secured in the form of new hotels and hotel renovations worth an estimated €60 million (Cosma et al., 2009). The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development also granted loans to Sibiu for restoration of the city centre prior to the ECoC and subsequently made loans for new roads and other infrastructure worth €26 million. This is important as many stakeholders indicated that the city still suffers from infrastructure problems, particularly in terms of transportation.

Thus while specific elements of the civic infrastructure may have improved, these seem to have been largely concentrated on the cultural sector and primarily in the centre of the city. Unemployment also rose after the ECoC in line with national and international trends, and now stands close to pre-2007 levels.

### *Social aims*

The main social aim was strengthening social cohesion and feeling of pride and self-confidence in the local population. The surveys indicate that this aim was largely achieved, with a majority of local residents agreeing that the ECoC had improved social cohesion in the city. The stakeholder interviews also underlined the role of the event in strengthening pride in the city. The growing self-confidence was linked by several interviewees to the European scale of the event, and the feeling that the city had a significant role on the European stage. The ECoC was also responsible for a boost in NGO activity in the city, indicating that it had strengthened civil society as a whole.

However, the surveys also indicate that levels of social cohesion fell after the ECoC, a trend possibly strengthened by rising unemployment. Although residents continue to appreciate the economic and cultural benefits of the ECoC, the social and quality of life impacts have proved more fragile. Quality of life gains also seem to have been unevenly distributed, with those in higher income groups and those with higher education levels more frequently identifying positive social impacts of the ECoC.

### *Developing eventfulness*

The ECoC did help to develop the event organising capacity of the city, or the ‘events orgware’ (Richards and Palmer, 2010). The skills built up by the organising team in 2007 were retained in the city by offering members of the Sibiu 2007 association roles in tourism marketing and event management. Sibiu has therefore to some extent avoided the typical post ECoC skills drain (Palmer, 2004); perhaps in part due to the local origin of many of the organising staff. However, the city has not been able to maintain the high levels of eventfulness seen in 2007. The number of events staged in the city fell from nearly 1500 in the ECoC year to just under 300 in 2008, rising again to over 500 in

2009, only to fall to 239 events in 2010. It therefore seems that the events programme itself has not been sustainable for the city, particularly in the face of severe economic conditions. The city has also leaned on the experience of the ECoC to launch a Baroque Festival in 2012. This programme includes many events related to the Baroque heritage of the city, including a Baroque Parade through the city, Baroque themed jazz and theatre events and the ICon Arts Academy & Festival. The Baroque Festival has attracted European Union regional development funding.

The stakeholder interviews also indicated a broad level of support for event-based development programmes, with the vast majority indicating that Sibiu should endeavour to stage more major events in future.

### *Political sustainability*

The ECoC seems to have strengthened the local growth regime headed by the Mayor, Klaus Johannis, who was often personally credited with successfully using the ECoC to attract investment and improving Sibiu's image. The Mayor was overwhelmingly re-elected in 2004 (with 88.7% of votes), 2008 (83.3% of the votes) and in 2012 (77.9%). The success of his political coalition was largely linked to economic performance, particularly in terms of securing international funds for major projects such as the renovation of the town centre and the new airport.

Many interviewees commented specifically on the role of the local authority and in particular the Mayor in bringing about change. There was a feeling that the authorities had been effective in attracting resources, not just for the ECoC programme itself, but also for the general development of the city. Some respondents also emphasised the fact that the German background of the Mayor had helped in the search for funding, particularly as much of the renovation work was paid for with money from Germany:

.. Another advantage that our city enjoyed is that it received significant funding from the Government, the Ministry of Culture and from Germany, following the steps taken by mayor Klaus Johannis. Many events took place in Sibiu and these were enjoyed by a large number of foreigners and locals alike. Following this with a significant increase in the city economy. In my opinion yes. What has followed

in this project was to improve national and especially international image of Sibiu, attracting visitors, improving social links. (Pension owner, Sibiu).

There was also a feeling among some stakeholders that the city has gained organisational capital from the process, which would help in the future with the development of culture, tourism and events. In addition, there was widespread support for the cultural events policy launched by the municipality after the ECoC.

### *Criticism of the event*

Not surprisingly for an event of this magnitude, the ECoC also attracted criticism from within and without. In spite of the improvement in cultural infrastructure, the city still lacks good basic services in some areas. Some stakeholders felt that the ECoC had diverted attention from tackling these issues. Others noted that prices had increased, and a few expressed concerns that increased debt would lead to higher taxes and municipal fees. There were also comments about the focus of improvements in the city centre, while other areas of the city remained relatively untouched by the event. Externally, concerns were also raised about negative attitudes towards the Roma population, which was apparently reflected in a lack of cooperation with an exhibition on this theme held in partner ECoC Luxemburg in 2007 (Luxemburg and Greater Region, 2008). In comparison with some other ECoCs, however, the level of criticism was relatively muted, probably reflecting a widely-held local view that the event had largely been a success.

However, there are contrasting views which see the ‘success’ of Sibiu as largely a myth. Oanca (2010) argues that a ‘narrative of success’ was created by the urban regime as a legitimisation device for the ruling coalition, reflecting the interests of powerful groups within the city. Although powerful ‘insiders’ in the coalition, such as the Radu Stanca Theatre, benefited from the ECoC, she argues that other actors that did not fit with the narrative of urban German history, such as the ASTRA museum (an open-air museum dealing with Romanian rural life) were disadvantaged. The Director of the ASTRA Museum resigned from the ECoC board as a result of disagreements within the organisation.

## Conclusions

Our research indicates that the Sibiu ECoC in 2007 and the programme of cultural development leading up to it had substantial impacts on the city both in the short and longer term. The ECoC certainly met most of its short term aims, as there was a significant economic boost from tourism and an improvement in the external image of the city. Levels of social cohesion rose and feelings of local pride increased and cultural activity in the city reached record levels. Over the longer term there has been increased cultural, hotel and infrastructure investment and a qualitative change in tourism flows towards cultural visitors with higher spending power.

At the same time, however, there is also evidence of a post-event decline in the 'ECoC effect', as tourism growth slowed, support for the Mayor and his coalition slowly eroded and the economic climate worsened. There are signs that the boosterism that surrounded the event has failed to generate real structural change, with persistent infrastructure problems and a disconnect between the image of a pristine medieval city and the reality of post-socialist degradation. The question is whether the balance, on the whole, is positive or not, and if the event has been an effective tool for change.

The relatively strong performance as ECoC does seem to indicate the strength of the local political regime and its ability to link with the global 'space of flows' to secure capital. In particular, national power structures were generally bypassed and Sibiu relied heavily on its links with Germany and Luxemburg to deliver finance and content for the event and the associated regeneration of the city. This is in sharp contrast to other post-socialist ECoCs, such as Pécs and Tallinn, which arguably suffered from political problems during the preparation and delivery phases (Dantz, 2010). The ECoC also had an important effect on the administrative context of Sibiu, bolstering the local growth coalition and also overcoming to some extent the problem of 'short-termism' that Sagan (2009) identifies as an important barrier to economic and political development in Central and Eastern Europe, and which Coles (2003) identifies as a major barrier to securing the sustainability of major redevelopment projects in post-socialist cities.

This seems to confirm an important conclusion of the Palmer (2004) evaluation of the ECoC, namely that political stability and commitment are vital to the success of the

programme. For a 'regime' such as the ruling coalition in Sibiu, there is therefore an important synergy to be gained from such culture-led regeneration strategies. A strong coalition which is able to mobilise stakeholders behind a vision of urban change is likely to deliver a successful and more sustainable event, which in turn will strengthen support for the regime. In the case of Sibiu this seems to have delivered an event which is perceived to have a tangible legacy, and which has not been quickly forgotten by residents or external observers. This is an important factor in the current adverse economic climate, which in many other cases might lead to the ECoC being associated with the economic slump that followed it. In fact, many respondents seem able to separate the positive ECoC effect from the wider economic crisis since 2007.

One important factor is the timeframe over which change is judged, and also the baseline against which measurements are made. The reality in the Sibiu case is that comparisons are often made against the background of a relatively impoverished recent past. So even if some momentum was lost after 2007 as political attention was focused elsewhere, the long term view of the ECoC and other attempts to develop Sibiu as an eventful city continue to be viewed in a relatively positive light, particularly by residents.

However, the question remains if the observed changes in the cultural or economic climate were actually related to the ECoC, or whether they stem from a broader strategy of urban regeneration. One way of teasing out the broader development effects from the impact of the ECoC is to look at those indicators that relate directly to the aims of the ECoC itself, and to see if these display a temporal pattern which might suggest a causal link with the ECoC programme. In the longer term, there is also the question whether Sibiu has been able to use the ECoC to build longer term sustainability in event development and become an 'eventful city' using events to improve the quality of life.

The data presented here provide an initial assessment of Sibiu as a relatively successful ECoC, at least in terms of the context of the city and the resources available. However, there is clearly a need to conduct more long term research, and this needs to adopt a holistic approach with triangulation of research methodologies. This can perhaps be best achieved by designing a structured research programme that deals with all of the major effects likely to be generated by such an event. In this respect, the model suggested by

Sacco and Blessi (2004) is a useful starting point. As Richards and Palmer have pointed out, the development of an eventful city is a process that requires strategic effort over 25 years or more. It is therefore unrealistic to expect that researchers will be able to make definitive statements, even after a decade of research. With some of the key effects of Sibiu ECoC in 2007 only becoming visible after 5 years, the importance of sustained longitudinal research is underlined. In particular, it is vital to establish pre-event baselines (van Bommel et al., 2011) and to follow up on developments on a regular basis during and after the event.

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