

The Cultural Tourism of Blaj

Simona SPÂNU¹, Virgil NICULA²

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 3 April 2022

Accepted 16 August 2022

Published 30 December 2022

JEL classification:

Z32; Z10; Z180

Key words:

Tourism

Culture

Cultural itineraries

Heritage

ABSTRACT

Blaj is a city with two defining dimensions: history and culture. It is the city that stands as the symbol of some of the most important moments in the history of the Romanians, the main events that marked the existence of this small town being related to its role as a religious, educational, and cultural center of both Transylvania and Romania. A tourism analysis was made in order to define sustainable directions for the development of the cultural tourism of Blaj and it was based on the answers of 151 respondents and on discussions with key people from the local administration, culture, education and religious groups. The measures suggested for supporting the capacity of the tourism sector contribute to promoting the role of culture in the sustainable development through creative economy, by increasing access to culture, increasing the diversity of cultural expressions and the integration of Romanian culture in the international cultural tourism circuit.

1. Introduction

Blaj Municipality is located in the Târnavelor Plateau, at an altitude of 257 m in the so-called Blaj Plateau, close to the confluence of the Târnavă Mari with its tributary Târnavă Mică. Blaj occupies a part of the interfluvium between the two Târnavă, the south-western sector of the Lopadei Hills and the northern region of the Secaşelor Plateau. Interfluvium has the largest part of the municipality's surface, and in the Seacăşelor Plateau there are the villages belonging to Mănărade and Spăţac, the component localities Tiur, Deleni Obârşie and Fliteşti, as well as the Izvoarele, Veza and Berc neighborhoods. In the Lopadei Hills is located the locality Petrisat, also belonging to Blaj. Blaj is bordered to the north-west by the commune Crăciunel, to the north by the commune Săncel, to the east by Valea Lungă and to the south by Cergău.

Its approximate position in the middle of the country gives the municipality of Blaj multiple advantages, having advantageous economic connections with the centers of the Târnavelor Plateau, the Apuseni Mountains, the Orientali Carpathians and the Mureş corridor. The distances from some important urban centers of the country are: 364 km from the capital, 250 km from Arad, 239 km from Oradea (localities with which it is connected by railway and road routes of European importance), 196 km from Braşov, 103 km from Cluj-Napoca, 83 km from Tg Mureş,

¹ Associate Professor, Faculty of Economics, "Lucian Blaga" University, Sibiu, Romania; niculavirgil@yahoo.com

² Assistant Professor, Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, Food Industry and Environmental Protection, "Lucian Blaga" University, Sibiu, Romania; simona_spanu@yahoo.com

85 km from Sibiu and 37 km from Alba Iulia, the residence-municipality of Alba County, where Blaj is located.

The railway and road junction, an important wine and fruit growing center, Blaj, which has a little more than 20,000 inhabitants, carries “on its shoulders” the history and culture of the Romanians in Transylvania.

2. Literature Review

About the interpretation of the relationship between culture and tourism (Richards, 2003), the concept of “culture is the soul of tourism” has long been recognized by many scholars and professionals (Liang, 2021; Marques & Cunha, 2013). Culture is the key component of the attraction of tourism resources (Pancu, 2022). In essence, tourists mainly consume culture, which is the starting point and destination of tourists (Falk & Katz-Gerro, 2016). The purpose of being a tourist is to get cultural enjoyment, so tourism itself is a kind of cultural activity (Richards, 2021). When engaging in tourism, the specific projects that tourists participate in, such as appreciating cliff carvings, watching folk song and dance performances, are the main contents of tourism activities. Only tourism with cultural intervention and communication can become real tourism (Macdonald & Jolliffe, 2003). Tourists are more willing to see different local and ethnic characteristics of tourism facilities, and these facilities can enhance the satisfaction of the tourist experience. In the process of receiving tourism services, the cultural quality of tour guides will directly affect the tourists’ perceptions of cultural tourism products. For example, the tour guides should deeply understand the cultural factors of tourism resources, in order to better spread culture, enhance the attraction of cultural resources, and enrich the cultural experiences of tourists (de Rojas & Camarero, 2008). Community residents’ cooperative attitudes towards culture can effectively protect the local culture, so as to obtain the sustainable development of the tourism destination (Seaman, 2008). Tourism culture comes from the interactions between hosts and guests (Canavan, 2016); the interactive process between tourists and tourist destinations shapes the cultural tourism resources of tourist destinations, and also affects tourists’ tourism consumption decisions (Morrone, 2006). The papers concerning cultural tourism realize the important role of culture in the future development of tourism, based on the understanding that the cultural factors of tourists, community residents, and other subjects will have an important impact on the consumption decisions of other tourists, as well as on the future planning of local community residents and tourism resource suppliers. Research on tourism culture originated in Europe and the United States with many achievements. American scholars Robert McIntosh and Shashikant Gupta published a book entitled *Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies*, in 1977, which was the first of its kind to propose the concept of tourism culture. This book compared tourism culture and tourism sociology, marking the separation of tourism culture research from tourism sociology research to become an independent branch of tourism science (Richards, 1996). Since the 1990s, studies on the impact of socio-cultural tourism have increasingly been focused on the socio-cultural impact of

tourists and tourism destinations. There are several representative works on tourist studies, such as *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* by Mary Campbell (Richards, 2018), *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* by Eric J. Leed, and *The Tourist Gaze* by John Urry (Jansen-Verbeke, 2008). Additionally, many studies have been conducted on the social impact of tourist culture on tourist destinations (Jansen-Verbeke, 2008). Most of the tourism research in Europe and America is conducted from a sociological and anthropological perspective, focusing on people. Therefore, tourists' psychological and behavioral aspects have become hot topics in Western tourism research (Sultan, 2021). From the perspective of tourists, the analysis of tourists' cultural perception preferences, on the one hand, can more clearly understand the important factors that affect tourists' risk perceptions, such as tourism purpose, motivation, experience, and so on (Lepp, 2008). On the other hand, it can also provide more market-oriented strategies for the structural adjustment of cultural tourism resources in tourist destinations, so as to increase their attractiveness (Fuchs, 2006; Lugosi, 2017; Moal-Ulvoas, 2017). Culture and tourism have an inseparable relationship (Marques, 2021).

Published in 2020, the book *Cultural Tourism* by Hilary du Cros and Bob McKercher remains the only book to bridge the gap between cultural tourism and cultural and heritage management. The first edition illustrated how heritage and tourism goals can be integrated in a management and marketing framework to produce sustainable cultural tourism. The current edition takes this further to base the discussion of cultural tourism in the theory and practice of cultural and heritage management (CM and CHM), under the understanding that for tourism to thrive, a balanced approach to the resource base it uses must be maintained. An "umbrella approach" to cultural tourism represents a unique feature of the book, proposing solutions to achieve an optimal outcome for all sectors. Written by experts in both tourism and cultural heritage management, this book enable professionals and students to gain a better understanding of their own and each other's roles in achieving sustainable cultural tourism. It provides a blueprint for producing top-quality, long-term cultural tourism products.

In 2003, in the book titled *What is Cultural Tourism?* G. Richards outlines the discussion surrounding the definition of cultural tourism and also asks the question whether the term "cultural tourism" is still appropriate to cover the wide variety of activities that now tend to be included under this broad umbrella. Before moving onto the question of definition, however, it is important to consider why cultural tourism has grown in recent decades, because the way in which cultural tourism has developed has arguably coloured the question of definition. *Reasons for the Growth of Cultural Tourism* discusses about the growth of cultural tourism have ranged from the highly theoretical to extremely practical approaches. In theoretical terms, the relationship between tourism and culture illustrates that the current cultural tourism market represents the latest phase in a long standing process of convergence between culture and tourism. In the past, culture and tourism were seen as being separate spheres of social practice, undertaken by distinct social groups at specific

times. As John Urry (1995) has noted, the barriers between culture and tourism are disappearing as a result of two parallel processes: the culturisation of society and the culturisation of tourist practices. As McKercher and du Cros (2002: 3) observe, “this seemingly simple question is actually very difficult to answer because there are almost as many definitions... of cultural tourism as there are cultural tourists”. The reason for this complex situation is relatively simple, however - the definition of culture itself is so difficult.

McIntosh and Goeldner (1986) consider cultural tourism as comprising “all aspects of travel, whereby travellers learn about the history and heritage of others or about their contemporary ways of life or thought”. In order to try and clarify the meaning of cultural tourism, a conceptual definition was proposed by G. Richards (1996), based on the way in which tourists consume culture. According to Littrell (1996), culture can be viewed as comprising what people think (attitudes, beliefs, ideas and values), what people do (normative behaviour patterns, or way of life) and what people make (artworks, artefacts, cultural products).

The conceptual definition proposed by ATLAS was therefore: “The movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs”. There has been some discussion subsequently about the utility of this definition. Alzua et al. (1998) have argued that because “intention” is a complex concept to measure that it would be better to use a scale of tourist motivations, such as that incorporated in Silberberg’s (1995) definition “visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution”. The problem of the extent of the cultural motivation of tourists was recognised in the Irish Tourist Board’s (1988) study of cultural tourism in Europe. Cultural tourism has recently (Richards, 2018) been re-affirmed by the UNWTO as a major element of international tourism consumption. Cultural tourism research has also grown rapidly, particularly in fields such as cultural consumption, cultural motivations, heritage conservation, cultural tourism economics, anthropology and the relationship with the creative economy. Major research trends include the shift from tangible to intangible heritage, more attention for indigenous and other minority groups and a geographical expansion in the coverage of cultural tourism research. The field also reflects a number of “turns” in social science, including the mobilities turn, the performance turn and the creative turn.

The most recently studies are about the categorisation of cultural tourism attractions by tourist preference using location-based social network data: the case of Central, Hong Kong (2022), a study concerning proposes a methodology to categorise cultural tourism attractions based on tourists’ preferences detected by their citywide travel trajectories (Pancu, 2022), or about impacts of COVID-19 on local tour guides (2022) where is show that the primary role of the tour guide, which is to interact with visitors’ face-to-face, has changed significantly. This paper reveal that the current situation in local guiding has highlighted issues such as the fragility of the

profession, the lack of legal protection, and guides' vulnerability when faced with the threat of unfair competition from *free tours*. The study also highlights the passivity of many professionals, whereas other, more resilient tour guides have reactivated their profession in new ways.

Helena Nobre and Ana Sousa (2022) focused on Portugal's country brand and the Portuguese cultural heritage market. Based on the content analysis of the interview scripts of public decision-makers, museum/site managers, academics, and a tourism entrepreneur, the study offers exploratory findings regarding the roles performed by public entities and other institutions and the means used to attract visitors to heritage sites and encourage the engagement of the different "actors" in cultural heritage experiences. Results indicate that cultural heritage represents a dimension of country identity and a driving factor of the tourism sector for Portugal.

Ting Sun, Yongle Li and Huang Tai (2021) make an analysis of tourist-generated content, including destination image dimensions and frequency, suggests that Chinese tourists prefer human attractions and experiencing neighborhood life, while Western tourists prefer natural scenery and participating in tourist activities.

Magdalena Duda-Seifert & Katarzyna Kajdanek (2022) discuss empirical data describing categories of tourists who visit a site which is both valuable heritage and a museum devoted to the Jewish minority in Poland. The on-site survey (406 persons) enabled the identification of three groups of motivation-driven visitors, namely general, specialised cultural tourists and casual cultural tourists. The characteristics of each of these groups indicate that a motivation affects visitor experience and satisfaction.

Finally, in their paper, Dogan Gursoy, Orhan Akova and Ozan Atsız (2022) explores dimensions of heritage tourism experiences utilizing the user-generated content on a travel sharing website and offers insight for understanding the factors that can affect the heritage tourists' evaluation of travel experiences at a destination. For this purpose, a content analysis of 5212 heritage experience reviews posted for heritage sites on a UGC travel website, TripAdvisor, is conducted. An analysis of reviews revealed 59 items forming six dimensions that include authenticity, the importance of guides, cultural values, sense of heritage, local hospitality and awe.

3. Methodology

According to Saunders et al. (2000) there are two types of data, secondary and primary data. Data that has already been collected by other researchers for another purpose is called secondary data. Primary data is data that a researcher collects on his/her own for a specific purpose. (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 2001). In our paper, we used secondary data. According to Yin (1994), there are six different sources for data collection; documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation and physical artifacts. All of these sources of evidence have both strengths and weaknesses, but none is considered superior to the other. Yin therefore recommends using several of them while a good research should thereby include as many sources as possible.

The considerable number of performances offered to the public in the four years analyzed (2017-2020), both outdoors and in performance halls or alternative cultural projects, had an artistic level at high standards, which attracted a wide participation of the public passionate about a certain genre or amateur public, while also aiming at the development of a cultural tourism in the city of Blaj.

The analysis of the role played by cultural tourism in Blaj was based on an online survey, conducted between October and December 2020 and in which residents of the municipality of Blaj were targeted. The survey implies more structured questions. 152 respondents participated in the questionnaire-based survey, with a total of 151 responses taken in the analysis. The total responses are the sum of the answers selected by the participants to a particular question. The percentage for each option was calculated by dividing the sum of the same options by the total responses.

This paper is also based on information gathered through desktop research, discussion with heritage tourism managers and stakeholder workshops.

Discussions with heritage representative in Blaj cultural heritage corporation provided the detail of their local organizational structure and how this functioned.

4. Results and Discussion

Regardless of the scale and quality of the cultural events organized during this time frame, they marked the cultural life at the local level.

Tourism is an important tool for strengthening the image of a destination, the design of national values and the promotion of attractions at regional level being the result of centuries of cultural exchanges, linguistic diversity and creativity.

The development of cultural tourism and cultural and economic development must be based on a dialogue between urban and rural cultures. Cultural routes are tools aimed at increasing the knowledge and awareness of the community on multicultural dialogue and common heritage, as well as cultural and social tourism.

4.1. Cultural tourism, economic catalyst for Blaj

The Cultural Palace hosted various events, such as: theatre performances for adults and children, folklore shows, for youth, symphonic concerts, fine art exhibitions, conferences on various topics, film screenings, book launches.

The Cultural Center "Iacob Mureșianu" organized meetings, occasional performances, book launches, exhibitions, students' balls, activities with students and teachers.

The Blaj Municipal Library has occasioned meetings with writers, book launches, symposiums, essay sessions, open lessons, school contests, homage and anniversary events, book exhibitions, recitals, auditions, CD launches, video projections.

The "Augustin Benea" History Museum organized cultural events with the main purpose of attracting a large number of visitors, in order to promote the Romanian historical, artistic, cultural and folklore values: documentary exhibitions,

book launches, historical and anniversary evocations, school contests on historical themes, plastic creation camps, recitations, video projections, activities in partnership with other cultural and school institutions, review sessions, personal and group exhibitions, museum performances, openings, etc.

The central event of 2019 was *Pope Francis' visit to Blaj*. A special moment for the Christian community in Romania and a special one for Blaj and furriers, pope Francis' visit to Little Rome is a historical event of utmost importance for the locality. In an impressive atmosphere, full of a special emotion, the Field of Liberty was the place where over 120,000 pilgrims from all over the country and from abroad met in a symbolic embrace with the Sovereign Pontiff. The event was attended by the most important representatives of the Romanian State and the Royal Family. For the city at the confluence of the Târnavelor, the organization of such an event was a test of maturity, which it successfully passed, through a total involvement, together with the other county and national institutions involved. Pope Francis' visit to Blaj is a heritage event that enriches us and urges us to seek what unites us, in order to find our dignity and a prosperous future.

The future cultural mission must take into account the provision of productions and frames of artistic achievement performing at local, national and international level, which will lead to an increase in the level of cultural development of the community. Blaj has every chance to become a beneficial melting pot where future energies meant to boost the community of the area in which they are located will decant. It is important to stimulate cultural consumption, to retain the public, as well as to attract a large mass of participants as a means of emancipation and character formation, for a high quality of life.

Cultural tourism is, in the sense of an overwhelming majority (90.2%) of respondents, a real opportunity for the economic development of Blaj Municipality. In the context of the circular economy, the activity allows the use of all economic sources and resources for the superior exploitation of the cultural potential of Blaj. Cultural tourism opens new perspectives of sustainable development, being a catalyst for increasing the dynamics of transforming Blaj into a reference point for Transylvania and for the entire country.

Given that, almost unanimously, the respondents considered that cultural tourism is an opportunity for the economic development of the municipality of Blaj, the answers regarding the extent to which aspects of tourist interest should be carried out revealed that:

- 70.6% consider it important to restore buildings;
- 52.9% consider useful the existence of tourist information points (there is a tourist information center, but about its activity either not much is known, or such data are not sufficiently promoted);
- the existence of quality tourism services (84.3%);
- promoting the city as a tourist destination (84.3%).

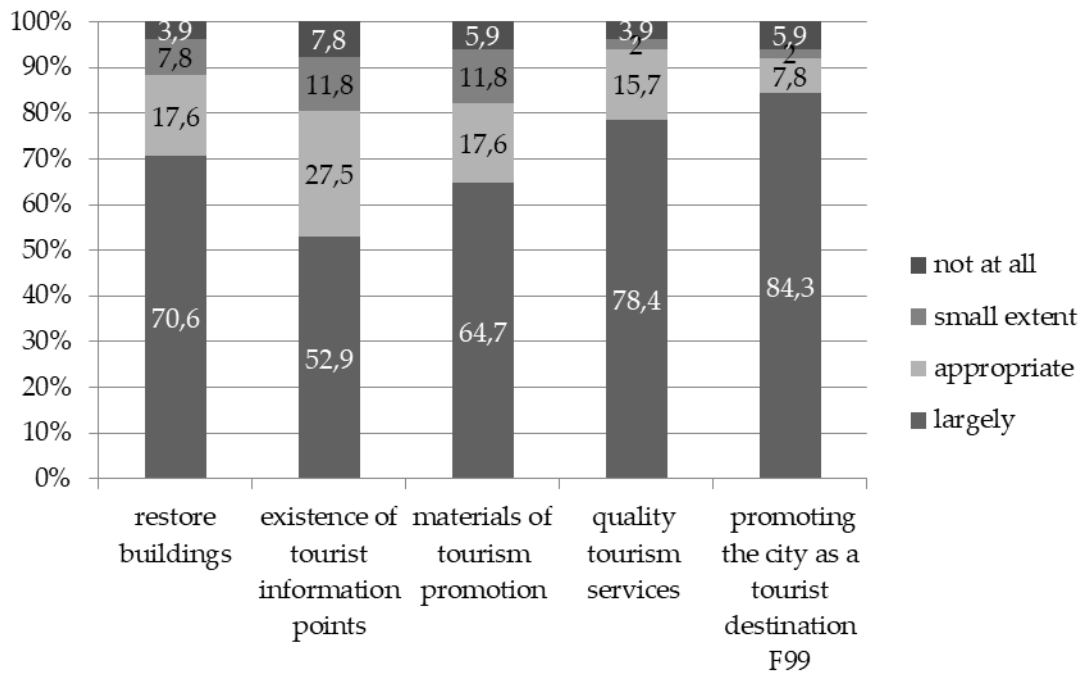


Fig. 1. Share of the role of cultural tourism as an opportunity for economic development of Blaj

Source: Authors' calculations

Regarding the needs of the local cultural sector, the respondents identified the development of infrastructure (38.3%), the purchase of cultural practice equipment (30.9%), the establishment of ensembles / bands to evolve locally and nationally (28.7%) and others (2%), such as the creation of a tourist circuit together with other localities: Alba Iulia, Sighișoara, Turda.

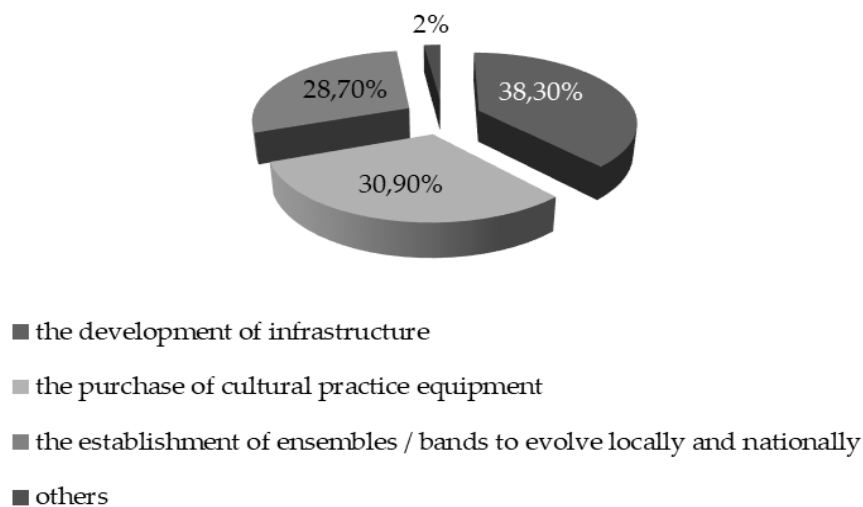


Fig. 2. The share of needs for the development of cultural tourism in Blaj

Source: Authors' calculations

4.2. Analysis of tourism indicators in Blaj

Interest in Blaj Municipality has increased among tourists, whose number has increased from 4511 people in 2014 to 11392 tourists in 2019, which means an increase of 2.5 times. The maximum of the analyzed period was reached in 2018, when the number of tourists was 13294 people, 3.1 times more than in 2014 and 14.3% more compared to 2019. The data come from statistical sources³, but also from the National Tourist Information Center. The construction of the Blaj National Tourist Information Center was carried out by attracting non-reimbursable European funds. The information center is intended for the development of tourism in Blaj, but also for the promotion of cultural, historical values and traditions of Blaj.

The accommodation possibilities in Blaj are represented by a hotel, touristic and agritourist pensions. Of the seven reception structures with tourist accommodation functions existing at the level of 2020, one is a hotel, five are tourist hostels and one is an agritourism pension. The number of these accommodation structures increased from 3 in 2014 to 5 in 2015-2018 and then 6 in 2019. Compared to 2014, the increase in 2020 is 2.3 times.

The tourist accommodation capacity indicates an increase in the number of places for the period 2014-2020 of 2.1 times. If in 2014 there were 86 places of accommodation, of which 40 in the hotel, 38 in tourist pensions and 8 in agropensions, the number of accommodation places in tourist pensions increased 2.2 times in 2015 compared to 2014, 3.26 times in 2017 compared to 2014, reaching the maximum in 2018, with 137 seats (3.6-fold increase compared to 2014).

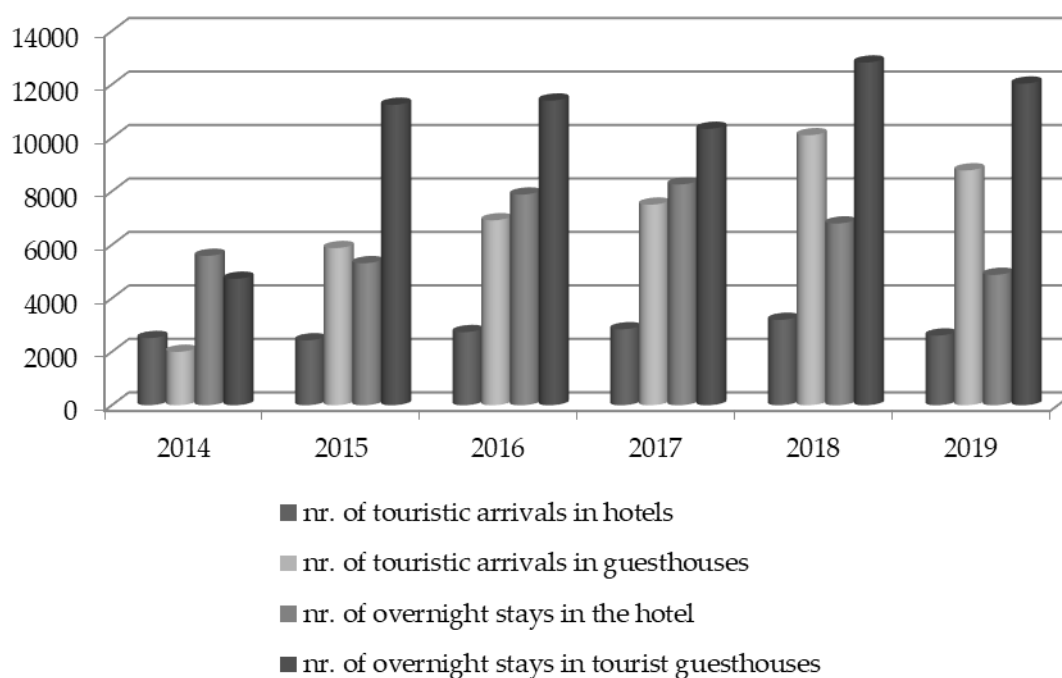


Fig. 3. The dynamics of tourist arrivals and overnight stays in Blaj during 2014-2019

Source: <https://insse.ro/>; TEMPO ONLINE

³ www.insse.ro

The number of tourist arrivals increased during the period under review, from 4511 people in 2014 to 11392 people in 2019, so an increase of 2.53 times. The peak of arrivals was in 2018, when the hotel recorded a number of tourist arrivals 1.27 times more than in 2014, and the tourist guesthouses increased 5.1 times higher for the same time frame.

The number of overnight stays in the hotel increased 1.48 times from 2014 to 2017, after which it decreased by 41% in 2019 compared to 2017 and by 13% in 2019 compared to 2014. In contrast, the number of overnight stays in tourist guesthouses increased 2.5 times in 2019 compared to 2014, the peak being in 2018, with an increase of 2.7 times compared to 2014.

4.3. The role of cultural itineraries in the development of tourism

Heritage must be considered an element in a dynamic process of existence that changes its meaning and meaning in accordance with the people who live in those places, in different historical periods, as well as the cultural background of visitors. Cultural routes allow for the rediscovery of cultural heritage and allow the work of involving and raising awareness of the local population on the creation of policies to protect and sustainably manage their heritage. Human activities are connected with the evolution and change of the living environment, as well as with that of heritage. Cultural heritage could be perceived both as a direct economic resource (e.g. for tourism), or as an indirect source of well-being for the community: it is a relational resource within the cultural ecosystem. In this respect, cultural heritage cannot be understood exclusively as a tool for producing profit but as a catalyst for building a strong relationship between the local community and a common heritage and identity.

A good promotion of the cultural heritage through tourism is represented by the cultural itineraries, which serve as channels for intercultural dialogue and offer a better understanding of history, through the cross-border exchanges of people, ideas and cultures. They are a model of community cultural cooperation, offering important lessons about identity and citizenship through a participatory experience of culture. They allow access to culture to be ensured as a fundamental right.

Each cultural itinerary combines material and intangible heritage, illustrating the exchanges, cultures and traditions that have shaped the area over the millennia. The cultural itinerary promotes a cultural and educational heritage and tourist cooperation aimed at developing and promoting a historical route, a cultural concept, personality or phenomenon of regional or national importance with significance for understanding and respecting common European values. Cultural routes are an important element of the European tourism strategy, especially for cultural tourism - tourism that is sustainable, ethical and social, because it is built on local knowledge, skills and heritage, which presents a destination for quality cultural experience. Cultural itineraries are inseparable from tourism, which offers the possibility of physical and space travel through areas of interest. Cultural heritage is

a basis for the development of dialogue, cooperation, democratic debate and participation, as well as openness between cultures.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of cultural tourism in Blaj Municipality

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multicultural and intercultural environment; ▪ Quality events; ▪ Increasing interest in artistic education; ▪ Diversity of cultural events; ▪ Receptive, interested public; ▪ The presence of an increased collaborative spirit; ▪ The conviction of the community that cultural tourism is an opportunity for the socio-economic development of the municipality; ▪ The existence of a valuable cultural heritage; ▪ The community's interest in culture and cultural and artistic manifestations; ▪ The interest of young people to get involved by volunteering at large-scale cultural events; ▪ The international promotion of Blaj following the visit of Pope Francis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of a calendar of events and of an integrated system of management of spaces / infrastructure (the degree of occupancy during the year of a space); ▪ Lack of a coherent local cultural policy and assumed by all stakeholders – administration, institutions and cultural organizations; ▪ Low level of cultural education, preference for mass culture; ▪ A reduced participatory culture (civic culture, need and interest for involvement, social and cultural contribution at an early stage); ▪ Participation in cultural events of a small audience with interest in niche artistic areas, reduced mobility between the audience of different types of artistic forms (theatre audience, exhibition audience); ▪ Access to culture is limited both physically (urban-rural, urban mobility) and socially (for disadvantaged groups); ▪ Low level of general culture, as a result of the state of pre-university education; ▪ Lack of sustainability of the sector; ▪ Problems related to infrastructure and its use (undercutting, poor condition of some buildings and institutions financed by the Ministry of Culture).
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ European funds and structural funds usable for large-scale events; ▪ Interest in social innovation/social creativity practices; ▪ The culture of volunteering is on the rise (the involvement of several generations in large-scale events such as the visit of Pope Francis); ▪ The existence of IT specialists for digital culture projects; ▪ Development of cultural tourism by creating cultural routes/itineraries; ▪ The existence of natural and heritage sites in the surroundings of Blaj; ▪ Attitude of participation and civic responsibility - Cultural Center; ▪ Redefining a long-term vision and the role of culture in increasing the quality of life and the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of sustainability of the sector/ precariousness of cultural operators; ▪ Limited financial resources, discontinuity of support, low employability of the system, lack of a social protection system for independent artists, etc.; ▪ Depopulation of villages as a result of migration to rural areas; ▪ Lack of co-financing possibility for accessing projects through European funds; ▪ Underdeveloped land access infrastructure; ▪ Natural phenomena that can degrade in time the built cultural heritage; ▪ The property regime of historical monuments determines their abandonment.

international positioning of the city; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The possibility of accessing European funds for the elaboration of a virtual tour of the museum; ▪ The development of cultural and ecumenical tourism. 	
--	--

Source: Authors' elaboration

5. Conclusion

Blaj Municipality benefits from a large number and a high variety of tourist attractions, but the touristic infrastructure and implicitly the number of overnight stays and arrivals are far below the existing potential. Starting from these favorable trends, the local tourism needs an additional impulse from three directions: modernization of the transport infrastructure that ensures accessibility to the tourist objectives of national interest, promotion of a strong local identity, relying on the characteristic ethnographic areas and (re)qualification of the labor force to trades that support tourism activities.

As far as tourism promotion is concerned, there are already elements that have shaped a strong identity but are not sufficiently well promoted through online platforms. A significant challenge at local level and at the same time an important step for the development of tourism is the consolidation of the identity of the municipality of Blaj, bringing together and promoting under a brand - umbrella the individual values and brands in the territory and at the same time supporting their development. The local specificity is given by the duality between the established tourist brands and identity areas that include an important variety of material and intangible heritage elements. Thus, the tourist identity must be built starting from the existing and visible objectives such as the legacy of the Transylvanian School, with all the monuments and heritage buildings, in parallel with the promotion of the identity areas in the municipality and in the villages belonging to Blaj.

This paper provides points of discussion for professionals, teachers and students. Greater awareness that tourism planning and management need to be inclusive and integrated into cultural heritage management plans. The mass market will dominate but more niches within cultural tourism will emerge, particularly as a reaction against visiting places that are overcrowded or degraded by over-use. The rise of large-scale cultural tourism products, such as specifically branded cultural tourism areas, purpose-built cultural hubs and leisurescapes in Blaj, are meant as tourism attractions foremost. The impact new virtual technologies are having on cultural tourism experiences, and messaging about intrinsic cultural values. New techniques that can be developed for tourism products and for more inclusive and sensory experiences.

References

- Alzula, A., O'Leary, J. T., & Morrison, A. M. (1998). Cultural and heritage tourism: Identifying niches for international travelers. *Journal of Tourism Studies*, 9(2), 2-13. <https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=990807825;res=IELAPA>

- Bălăci, Ș. (Ed.) (2017). *Revista monumentelor istorice*. București: Institutul Național al Patrimoniului. <http://www.revistamonumenteloristorice.ro/fisiere/RMI-2017.pdf>
- Canavan, B. (2016). Tourism culture: Nexus, characteristics, context and sustainability. *Tourism Management*, 53, 229-243. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.10.002>
- Cavallini, S., Soldi, R., Utma, M. A., & Errico, B. (2028). *How to Design Cultural Development Strategies to Boost Local and Regional Competitiveness and Comparative Advantage: Overview of Good Practices*. European Committee of the Regions. <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/cultural-development-strategies/cultural-development-strategies.pdf>
- Centrul de Studii și Cercetări în Domeniul Culturii. (2005). *Indici despre sectorul cultural la nivel regional*. <https://www.culturadata.ro/indici-despre-sectorul-cultural-la-nivel-regional-2005/>
- Consiliul Județean Alba. (2018). *Strategia de protecție a monumentelor istorice din județul Alba 2018-2023*. <https://judetul-alba.ro/incarcari/2021/11/97-H-Anexa-STRATEGIA-monumente-istorice-20.03.2018.pdf>
- Consiliul Local Blaj. (2014). *Strategia de dezvoltare a municipiului Blaj, 2014-2020*. <http://primariablaj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Strategia-de-Dezvoltare-a-Municipiului-Blaj-2014-2020.pdf>
- Council of Europe. (2015). *Cultural Routes Management: From Theory to Practice. Step-By-Step Guide to the Council of Europe Cultural Routes*. <https://rm.coe.int/gestion-des-itineraires-culturels-de-la-theorie-a-la-pratique/168098b061>
- Council of Europe. (2017). *Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century*. <https://rm.coe.int/16806f6a03>
- Croitoru, C., & Dărășteanu, C. (Coords.) (2019). *UNESCO Culture for Development Indicators. Romania's Analytical Brief and Technical Report*. București: Universul Academic. <https://www.culturadata.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/UNESCO-CDIS-Romanias-Analytical-brief-and-technical-report-EN-web.pdf>
- de Rojas, C., & Camarero, C. (2008). Visitors' experience, mood and satisfaction in a heritage context: Evidence from an interpretation center. *Tourism Management*, 29(3), 525-537. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.06.004>
- du Cros, H., & McKercher, B. (2020). *Cultural Tourism* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Duda-Seifert, & M., Kajdanek, K. (2022). The experience and satisfaction of visiting a Jewish heritage site in the context of cultural and Jewish heritage tourism. Evidence from Krakow, Poland. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 20(3), 419-435. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2021.1956508>
- European Commission. (2018). *European Agenda for Culture*. <https://www.cultureinexternalrelations.eu/2018/06/01/new-european-agenda-for-culture/>
- European Comission. (n.d.). *European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018*. <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-heritage/eu-policy-for-cultural-heritage/european-year-of-cultural-heritage-2018>
- Falk, M., & Katz-Gerro, T. (2016). Cultural participation in Europe: Can we identify common determinants? *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 40(2), 127-162. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10824-015-9242-9>
- Fuchs, G., & Reichel, A. (2006). Tourist destination risk perception: The case of Israel. *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing*, 14(2), 83-108. https://doi.org/10.1300/J150v14n02_06

- Galí, N. (2022) Impacts of COVID-19 on local tour guides. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 20(6), 788-805. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2022.2046016>
- Gursoy, D., Akova, O., & Atsız, O. (2022). Understanding the heritage experience: A content analysis of online reviews of World Heritage Sites in Istanbul. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 20(3), 311-334. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2021.1937193>
- Guvernul României. (n.d.). *Strategia pentru cultură și patrimoniu național 2016-2022*. http://www.cultura.ro/sites/default/files/inline-files/_SCPN%202016-2022inavizare.pdf
- Hjalager, A.-M., & Richards, G. (2002). *Tourism and Gastronomy*. London: Routledge.
- Holm, M. R., Lugosi, P., Croes, R. R., & Torres, E. N. (2017). Risk-tourism, risk-taking and subjective well-being: A review and synthesis. *Tourism Management*, 63, 115-122. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.06.004>
- Jansen-Verbeke, M., Priestley, G. K., & Russo, A. P. (2008). *Cultural Resources for Tourism: Patterns, Process and Policies*. New York: Nova Science.
- Jansen-Verbeke, M. (2009). The territoriality paradigm in Cultural Tourism. *Tourism*, 19(1-2), 25-31. <https://dspace.uni.lodz.pl/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11089/11421/v10106-009-0003-z.pdf>
- Lepp, A., & Gibson, H. (2008). Sensation seeking and tourism: Tourist role, perception of risk and destination choice. *Tourism Management*, 29(4), 740-750. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.08.002>
- Liang, F., Pan, Y., Gu, M., Guan, W., & Tsai, F. (2021). Cultural tourism resource perceptions: Analyses based on tourists' online travel notes. *Sustainability*, 13(2), 519. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13020519>
- Littrell, M. A. (1996). Shopping experiences and marketing of culture to tourists. In M. Robinson, N. Evans, P. Callaghan (Eds.), *Tourism and Culture: Image, Identity and Marketing* (pp. 107-120). Newcastle: University of Northumbria.
- Liu, Z., Wang, A., Weber, K., Chan, E. H. W., & Shi, W. (2022). Categorisation of cultural tourism attractions by tourist preference using location-based social network data: The case of Central, Hong Kong. *Tourism Management*, 90, 104488. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2022.104488>
- MacDonald, R., & Jolliffe, L. (2003). Cultural rural tourism: Evidence from Canada. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30(2), 307-322. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383\(02\)00061-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(02)00061-0)
- Marques, L., & Cunha, C. (2013). Literary rural tourism entrepreneurship: Case study evidence from Northern Portugal. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 5(3), 289-303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407963.2013.801158>
- Marques, L. (2021). "Why call it tourist season if we can't shoot them?" – Towards the Utopian sensitized tourist. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19407963.2021.1954655>
- McIntosh, R. W., Goeldner, C. R., & Brent Ritchie, J. R. (1994). *Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies*. Wiley & Sons.
- McKercher, B., & du Cros, H. (2002). *Cultural Tourism: The Partnership Between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management*. New York: Haworth Press.
- Moal-Ulvoas, G. (2017). Positive emotions and spirituality in older travelers. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 66, 151-158. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.07.020>
- Morrone, A. (2006). *Guidelines for Measuring Cultural Participation*. Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. <https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines-for-measuring-cultural-participation-2006-en.pdf>

- Mucică, D. (Coord.) (2014). *Strategia sectorială în domeniul culturii și patrimoniului național pentru perioada 2014-2020*. Centrul de Cercetare și Consultanță în Domeniul Culturii. <https://www.culturadata.ro/strategia-sectoriala-in-domeniul-culturii-si-patrimoniului-national-pentru-perioada-2014-2020-analiza-capacitatii-si-nevoilor-de-finantare/>
- Munsters, W. (1996). Cultural tourism in Belgium. In G. Richards (Ed), *Cultural Tourism in Europe* (pp. 80-90). Wallingford: CAB International.
- Nobre, H., & Sousa, A. (2022). Cultural heritage and nation branding – multi stakeholder perspectives from Portugal. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 20(5), 699-717. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2021.2025383>
- Pancu, L. (2022). Reclaiming public culture as a common terrain of action in the public interest: A dialogue with Raluca Iacob. *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai-Dramatica*, 67(1), 191-201. <https://dramatica.ro/index.php/j/issue/view/7/16>
- Richards, G. (Ed.) (1996). *Cultural Tourism in Europe*. Wallingford: CAB International.
- Richards, G. (2001). *Cultural Attractions and European Tourism*. Wallingford: CAB International.
- Richards, G. (2003). What is cultural tourism? In A. van Maaren (Ed.), *Erfgoed voor Toerisme*. Nationaal Contact Monumenten. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324031354>
- Richards, G. (2018). Cultural tourism: A review of recent research and trends. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 36, 12-21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2018.03.005>
- Richards, G. (2021). *Rethinking Cultural Tourism*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Seaman, B. A. (2008). Cultural Tourism: Global and Local Perspectives by G. Richards. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 32(3), 231-236. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41810995>
- Silberberg, T. (1995). Cultural tourism and business opportunities for museums and heritage sites. *Tourism Management*, 16(5), 361-365. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0261-5177\(95\)00039-Q](https://doi.org/10.1016/0261-5177(95)00039-Q)
- Sultan, M. T., Sharmin, F., Bădulescu, A., Ştiubea, E., Xue, K. (2021). Travelers' responsible environmental behavior towards sustainable coastal tourism: An empirical investigation on social media user-generated content. *Sustainability*, 13(1), 56. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13010056>
- Sun, T., Li, Y., & Tai, H. (2021), Different cultures, different images: A comparison between historic conservation area destination image choices of Chinese and Western tourists. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2021.1962894>
- Urry, J. (1995). *Consuming Places*. London: Routledge.
- Urry, J., & Larsen, J. (2011). *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. SAGE.