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Article

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EUROPEAN CULTURAL AND TOURISTIC HERITAGE: SIGHIȘOARA vs. VERONA

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Abstract

Europe is one of the world's regions with the largest concentration of heritage sites and is also the top tourist destination in the world. Even if every European country has a unique and valuable cultural endowment, the socio-economic evolution of each country led to differences in their development stage. The hereby paper aims to highlight the importance of touristic activities in the sustainable development of a touristic area with the help of a specific form of tourism based on the cultural and historical assets.

The two heritage cities chosen for this study are Sighișoara (Romania) and Verona (Italy), both enrolled to the World Heritage List based on their outstanding historical and architectural value.

By using qualitative research methods like the observation and the comparison, but also the analysis of statistic data regarding the tourist flow in the chosen destinations, this paper tries to enhance the possibility of partnership between Sighișoara and Verona based on their comparable medieval and cultural features, highlighting the importance of destination management know-how exchange and the added value of these heritage cities.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the tourism potential of both cities, but also the problems they face regarding in from of the short length of tourist stay, coming with a possible solution of joint destination branding of the two cities and the proposal for two thematic travel packages designed to promote them on the European market.

Keywords: thematic tourism, cultural heritage, historic and architectural value, partnership, destination branding, marketing

JEL Classification: M31; L83

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Introduction

A country can present its cultural touristic heritage through a diverse range of elements including hospitality, specific architecture, local gastronomy, typical handicraft products, traditional events and all those particularities that describe the life of that nation.

In this era of uniformity and standardization we can observe a great attention granted to the creation of global products, thus goods and even services offered by one country can become very similar to the ones offered by other countries. In this context the need to encourage cultural diversity and promote local identity, both as touristic resource and cultural inheritance received with the obligation to safeguard and pass down to future generations, becomes a priority of each and every one of us. A successful and efficient tourism does not depend exclusively on the tourist equipment and endowment of a location, on a high level infrastructure or on appropriate accommodation, but on the ability of the travel service provider to create a specific travel “product” that reflects the local traditions and reveals the most interesting experiences that a visitor could have.

In a closer look, the cultural factors play a determinant role in activities designed to promote the transfer or sharing of knowledge and ideas, the below listed elements suggest a few entities, events and activities that can generate a tourist flow based on these factors: libraries, museums, exhibitions; music, theatre, cinema; educational trips, short term classes; schools and universities for long term study and research; scientific and archaeological expeditions; cinematographic co-productions; conferences, congresses, meetings, seminars (Charles, Goelder and Brent, 2006).

This paper aims to present some of the features that define what we call cultural tourism, a form of tourism whose “raw material”, here considered, is represented by the European medieval heritage, and also as a result of the undertaken documentation it proposes the development of partnerships between the two heritage cities here described, Sighișoara and Verona, aiming to highlight their historical and cultural value.

1. Cultural tourism and its characteristics

The exact definition of the aspects that compose the cultural tourism is subject to various disputes. One of the most elegant one among the humanistic definitions is given by Adams, formulated in a very simple, but meaningful way: “travel for self-enrichment”. If we consult the Encyclopedia of Tourism we will find that experts in this field consider *development, presentation and interpretation* of cultural resources as the essential activities of tourism. Cultural tourism is built on satisfying the needs of tourists eager to observe other people in their authentic environment, to see the physical manifestation of their lives expressed through art and handicraft, music, literature, dance, food and beverage, play, crafts, language and ritual (Jafari, 2003). These kinds of activities are gateways for enlarging intercultural experiences and perspectives and also can trigger successful results in different areas such as education, research or artistic activities, but at the same time tourism has become one of the most dynamic economic domain of the tertiary sector.

The motivations which drive a person to plan and undertake a travel, journey, holiday are a complex function with variables going from the natural characteristics of the destination to infrastructure and facilities, historical and cultural value to financial considerations. The figure 1 shows in a synthetic scheme the motivational factors standing behind the decision of a tourist, detailing the cultural and social characteristics in subcategories, suggesting the diversity of this particularity of a destination.

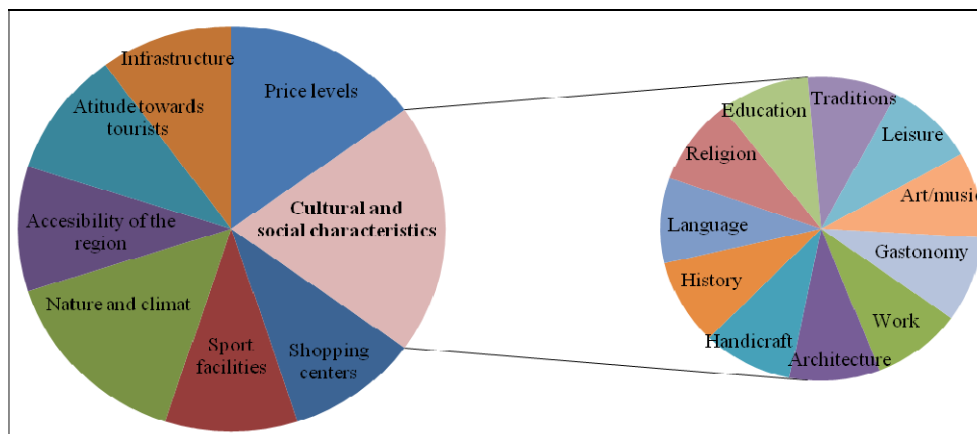


Figure no. 1: Motivations in choosing a tourist destination

Source: Figure made by the author based on Charles R. Goeldner, J.R. Brent Ritchie, *TOURISM, Principles, Practices, Philosophies*, John Wiley & Sons, INC, 2006, p.265

Cultural tourism, but not only, is closely linked to the historical past of the travel destination. Elements from the past have been, and still remain resources intensively used in designing touristic products for a number of increasingly larger and more varied target markets. In this case, the product can be represented by conserved, collected and interpreted artefacts, historical sites, buildings, districts or even whole cities, including commemorative places.

The historical past becomes an abundant source of possibilities for gathering elements intended for tourist consumption, and the result of this amalgam of resources is called by some experts *historical heritage*, *cultural inheritance*, which can find its roots in folklore, in mythology, in the fruits of humanity's artistic and literary imagination. The category of tourists attracted by this kind of activities can be motivated by the search of an identity, or even by the pursuit of a fantasy, thus they are considered a very important niche of clients for travel providers and for the whole community of stakeholders involved in the development process of an area with touristic potential (OECD, 2010). *Niche tourism* represents a great opportunity for entities interested in developing a business in the tourism field because the main motivations of these visitors can be found in their hobbies, personal preferences, in activities that the tourist enjoys and for which he is willing to spend the time and financial resources needed.

The future of European tourism is based on the quality of feelings and emotions experienced by the tourist, Europe remains in top of the worldwide preferred destinations, travellers being always impressed by its incredible architecture, amazing testimony of human artistic skills and unique traditions (Stănciulescu and Lee, 2011).

2. Touristic European cities

Urban tourism has a wide range of motivations such as spending a vacation in the city, visiting the city or one of the following specific reasons: heritage sightseeing (historical sites, castles, monuments, religious building, parks), visiting museums, participation in cultural events such as opera, ballet, theatre, concerts, cultural festivals, music festivals,

traditional holidays, exhibitions, fairs or even industrial or technical tourism (dams, viaducts, tunnels, bridges, urban architectural ensembles). In this context urban heritage is an essential element of urban tourism (Figure no. 2).

Almost 80% of Europe's population is living in cities, making European urban tourism to be an important economic activity. The main characteristics observed regarding urban cultural tourism are outlined in the below listing:

- the interaction between culture and tourism finds its roots in the beginnings of the tourism industry and nowadays this linkage is getting more and more stronger
- cultural tourism is a key factor for sustainable development and intercultural dialogue
- cultural inheritance is the best expression of human historical identity (Holloway, 2009)

According to a survey conducted by the European Commission (Study "European Cultural Routes impact on SMEs' innovation, competitiveness, and clustering, 2011), 20% of European visits have exclusively cultural motivation, while 60% of tourists are truly interested in discovering the cultural values of the places they visit. From a multidimensional perspective, cultural tourism is a growing market. World Tourism Organization (WTO) estimates an annual increase of 10-15% of these journeys, whilst the average growth of tourism industry is going to be between 4-5%.

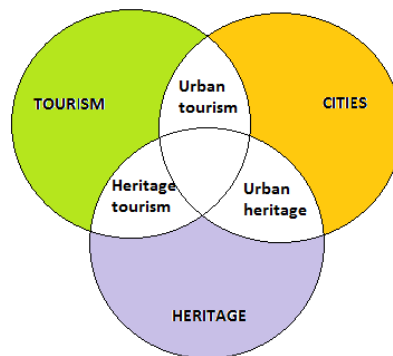


Figure no. 2: The interaction between the concepts of tourism, city and heritage

Source: Figure made by the author based on Ashworth G.J. and Tunbridge J.E., The Tourist-Historic City. Retrospect and Prospects of Managing the Heritage City, Pergamon, 2000, p. 54

The competitive investments in cultural equipments and in touristic infrastructure have a direct impact on the local economy and lead to improvement of living standards. Moreover, urban cultural center is a factor that determines the value of that particular city, which together with other factors like accessibility, tax system, human capital, and stability determines the competitiveness of the city in the global economy (Mariotti, 2012).

The *spatial organization* of a city's cultural resources and the specific infrastructure (hotels, transport, commercial areas) are very important for the success of the development strategy (Lähdesmäki, 2012). While tourism products are relatively immobile due to their irreproducible nature, the additional activities can be located freely in the wide "tourist

area” (Giaoutzi, Nijkamp, 2006). In cities like Venice, Bruges, Salzburg we can see that the majority of economic activities are assigned with priority to touristic use, at the expense of the city’s residents. Restaurants, hotels, all kinds of stores from luxury to economic souvenir boutiques, art galleries, and exchange offices, all are concentrated around the center of attraction and connected with the city’s residential function.

3. Concerns regarding European urban heritage

Concerns of the World Heritage Cities (Organization of World Heritage Cities - OWHC) for European urban heritage are evident also by the programs launched by it. In this regard can be exemplified an achievement program case studies on conservation and management of historic cities called *Historic Cities in Development: Keys for Understanding and Acting* (http://www.ovpm.org/en/compilation_case_studies_conservation_and_management_historic_cities). Each Member City has been invited to contribute by presenting one (or several) urban project(s) so as to understand in detail and describe in a hands-on manner the necessary processes and procedures and, by doing so, instigate a new shared understanding and respect with the respect for heritage, and in particular World Heritage, as part of urban development projects. The project goes beyond the exchange of know-how in conservation – it aims at introducing a more heritage-centered urban development approach. The aim is to create a dynamic within the OWHC’s network of member cities and, more generally, to thereby contribute to the global debate on urban heritage management and sustainable development. The project is headed by the OWHC and implemented by a Steering Committee coordinated by the City of Lyon (member of the OWHC) and the OWHC’s General Secretariat in collaboration with: UNESCO’s World Heritage Centre, as part of its financial and technical support through the Convention France-UNESCO and the Netherlands’ Funds-in-Trust, the Getty Conservation Institute, the Council of Europe, ICOMOS International.

One of the key objectives of the OWHC is to favour, both on the regional and international levels, cooperation and the exchange of information and knowledge between World Heritage cities. In that sense, the OWHC organized the *City2City* program that is intended to disseminate all types of exchanges and dialogues among its member cities (http://www.ovpm.org/en/city2city_program).

The inscription of a cultural site on UNESCO's World Heritage List is not an end in itself. The characteristics and the qualities that justified its inscription must be preserved. While it is the responsibility of the international community and local officials, it is also the responsibility of each and every one of us to help safeguard the cultural and natural sites of the earth before it is too late. It is a question of protecting the heritage to pass it on to future generations, to make it accessible to a greater number of people, and also to ensure that this heritage, an essential component of cultural diversity, is developed properly not only from the cultural point of view but also economic, of the local economy and GDP (Patuelli, Mussoni, and Candela, 2013).

Moreover, the new vision of European policy for valuing cultural heritage indicate the objective of surpassing the context of cultural city with a much larger and diversified framework, that of cultural routes (Council of Europe, 2010).

In the literature and also in practice is shown increasingly more as cultural tourism can help to avoid the negative effects of mass tourism; cultural tourism as a more sustainable form

of tourism contributes to the mitigation of negative effects derived from seasonality, etc. (Cuccia and Rizzo, 2011).

4. Research methodology

The two heritage cities chosen for this study are Sighișoara (Romania) and Verona (Italy), the choice is not random, both of which are included on the World Heritage List for their historical and architectural values outstanding. While each European country has significant cultural resources unique, the socio - economic development of each country led to substantial differences in their developmental stages.

Using the method of comparative analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, the method of confrontation, official statistical data for Sighișoara (from Mureș County Regional Statistical Department), official statistics for Verona (Hoteliers Association, Tour operators, Travel agencies) enabled us to analyse flows of tourists of chosen destinations. Other working tools used in the cultural investigation highlights the importance of tourism activities in the sustainable development of tourist resorts with a specific form of tourism based on cultural and historical values.

Analysis of the tourism potential of the two cities, highlighting the problems they face regarding in from of the short length of tourist stay, has led to the individualization of a possible solution of joint destination branding of the two cities and the proposal for two thematic travel packages designed to promote them on the European market (Majdoub, 2010).

We also presented the program of travel offers for the two destinations having as core attraction - the cultural events which are organized in Sighișoara and Verona respectively. This analysis was developed based on data provided by travel agencies REMTOURS SRL from Oradea (www.remtours.ro) and Grosso Eurotour from Messina, Italy (www.agenziaviaggigrossoeurotour.com).

Also, this paper aims to contribute to the development of a partnership between Sighișoara and Verona based on medieval cultural traits comparable, highlighting the importance of the exchange of know - how on destination management and added value.

5. Comparative analysis of Sighișoara and Verona

5.1 Sighișoara – masterpiece of Transylvanian medieval architecture

Human existence and permanence in this region is lost in the mists of the ages. Not far from Sighișoara there have been identified the remains of a settlement that dates back to the early Palaeolithic era, and also in the local museum we can find relics dated from the 18th century B.C. which proves the presence of a population that used to live in huts and manufactured geometrical decorated pottery similar to the ones of the artists of the Cucuteni culture (Dubowy, 1997).

The medieval city of Sighișoara began its development thanks to the settlement of the Hungarians in the 11th century A.D., and later due to the massive colonization of the region by German craftsmen and merchants which were sent from the Rhine Valley, Flandria,

Saxonia in the 12th century by king Geza II to guard the borders of Transylvania and in return he gave them “fundus regius” (land) and several entitlements and privileges. They settled on a hill, called City Hill, and fortified the settlement with walls guarded by towers. Sighișoara was first mentioned in an official document under the name of *Castrum Sex* in 1280 A.D., the Romanian version of the town’s name appears only in 1431 in a document issued by Vlad Dracul. The medieval fortress is a military, civic and ecclesiastic architectural complex of outstanding European value. Sighișoara, an example of a small fortified city “in the border region between the Latin-oriented culture of central Europe and the Byzantine-Orthodox culture of south-eastern Europe” is the only medieval fortress that is entirely inhabited in South-East Europe (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/902>).

The historical city center is included on the World Heritage List of UNESCO since 1999 and it has become an important tourist attraction for thousands of visitors from all over the world eager to discover the enchanting site of a world described in chronicles and tour-guides. The city of Sighișoara, “the most beautiful and well preserved fortress cities of Transylvania” over the times has received several titles, like “The Pearl of Transylvania” or “Transylvanian Nürnberg” and nowadays it a remarkable museum city giving modern day visitors the opportunity to travel back in time.

From the initial 14 towers, nine are still standing today, namely: the Clock Tower, the Ropemakers Tower, the Butchers Tower, the Tailors Tower, the Shoemakers Tower, the Tanners Tower, the Locksmiths Tower, the Coopers Tower (Vlăsceanu, 1998).

The imposing *Clock Tower*, the main entrance gate to the fortress, opposite to the entrance guarded by the Tailors Tower, it owns its name to the clock with figurines, unique in Romania, situated on the fourth floor. The Clock Tower, symbol of Sighișoara, played a special role for it was placed under the responsibility of the city council, which held its assemblies there until 1566 (Drăguț, 1968), now it houses the History Museum of Sighișoara.

Even if the architectural and cultural values are the most outstanding ones, Sighișoara is also home to a precious natural heritage. Near the city, on the Breite plateau, we can find the largest and most representative centuries old oak - tree reservation in Central-Eastern Europe. Breite plateau is a “culturally modified” forest, bearing the footprint of the eight century long Saxon history, being the scene for many important traditional celebrations.

5.2 Verona – between 2000 years of history and 2 million tourists annually

The city is situated in northern Italy, in Veneto region, at the foot of Monte Lessini. In its urban structure and architecture Verona is an outstanding example of a town that developed progressively and uninterruptedly over 2000 years representing in an exceptional way the concept of the fortified town at several stages of European history (Lionello, 1978). The city’s development is closely related to its geographical position, Verona is situated at the crossroads of four roman roads: *Via Gallica*, *Via Claudia Augusta*, *Vicum Veronesium* and *Via Postumia* (Buchi and Cavalieri, 1987) and thanks to the River Adige it was the main gateway between northern and eastern Italy.

The settlement along the River Adige became a Roman colony in the 1st century B.C. rising rapidly in importance due to its strategic position, and in 49 B.C. emperor Caesar grants

roman citizenship to the colony along with the title of *Res Publica Veronensium* (Borelli, 1977). Even if just a small section of the roman fortification survived the rage of time, Verona still has an important number of monuments from the Roman Era. The most famous of them, which became the symbol of the city, is without any doubt the roman amphitheatre, the *Arena* (Puppi, 1978). The Veronese Arena is the third largest amphitheatre in Italy, after the Coliseum of Rome and the roman amphitheatre of Capua, but it is also the most well conserved of them and it is still used to host the famous *Opera Festival* and several concerts. Another important landmark is the Roman Theatre, built in the 1st century B.C., rediscovered in 1830 after removing the building that literally covered it. The ancient Roman Theatre houses annually a series of spectacles under the event called Verona Summer Theatre Festival. An exceptional example of Roman architectural genius is represented by the only bridge that survived the two thousand years that passed by Verona, *Ponte Pietra*, a five the arch stone bridge, bombed by the retreating Germans in 1945 and rebuilt later with the stone bricks found in the river. The magnitude of the earthquake that took place in 1117 was responsible for the collapse of the Arena's exterior ring of arcades, creating the impressive shape that we know today as the Arena with "wings" (Carrara, 1966). The ecclesiastic constructions in Verona achieved their peak during the Middle Ages with exceptional examples of Romanic architecture, the most notable ones being the San Zeno Basilica, the Dome, St. Anastasia Church and St. Fermo Church (Borelli, 1980).

Large military complexes were built in the foreign domination of the Austrians, and the most notable one is San Pietro Castle (Dal Forno, 1973).



Table 1 provides a brief comparison between Sighișoara and Verona demonstrating that although the two cities have followed different roads in their evolution, a series of common features can still be observed.

The two destinations are linked by the fact that the main factor of their touristic notoriety has its origins in the "local mythology". Sighișoara is known as the birth town of the Romanian medieval ruler Vlad Țepeș, named also Vlad Dracul who was notorious for his cruel methods of punishing the corrupt nobleman and who inspired the myth of count Dracula of Transylvania. Verona on the other hand owes its fame to one of the key figures in world literature, William Shakespeare, who placed the action of his tragic love story, *Romeo and Juliet*, in the city along the River Adige, based on the historic conflicts between the two medieval families, the Montague and Capulet family, who ruled the region. The resemblances go on with the annual continuity of cultural events organized in both tourist destinations, for they attract an important number of visitors and also provide a strong touristic identity to these historic cities.

5.3 Cultural events seen as tourist branding methods

City or tourist destination *branding* represents a process which aims to create a well-defined message through designing a slogan, a symbol or a logo, which will communicate to the potential visitors of the location the *image* of that particular destination together with its characteristics, benefits and promoted values (Stănciulescu and Lee, 2011).

Table no. 1: Comparative analysis between the two heritage cities Sighișoara and Verona

Analyzed characteristics	SIGHIȘOARA	VERONA
Location, foundation	<p>Romania, Mureș County, central Transylvania. The area was inhabited from Dacian time, and also during the Roman occupation of Dacia. The first historic written mentioning is dated in 1280, the settlement being called <i>Castrum Sex</i>.</p> 	<p>Italy, Veneto Province, north-eastern Italy. The area has been populated since Neolithic times by the Gauls, Venetians and Lombards, and after the colonization by the Roman Empire in the first century B.C. it becomes <i>Res Publica Veronensium</i>.</p> 
UNESCO listing	<p>Criteria 3 and 5 – 1999 <i>Criterion 3:</i> Sighișoara is an outstanding testimony to the culture of the Transylvanian Saxons, a culture that is coming to a close after 850 years and will continue to exist only through its architectural and urban monuments. <i>Criterion 5:</i> Sighișoara is an outstanding example of a small fortified city in the border region between the Latin-oriented culture of central Europe and the Byzantine-Orthodox culture of south-eastern Europe. The apparently unstoppable process of emigration by the Saxons, the social stratum which had formed and upheld the cultural traditions of the region, threatens the survival of their architectural heritage as well.</p>	<p>Criteria 2 and 4 – 2000 <i>Criterion 2:</i> In its urban structure and its architecture, Verona is an outstanding example of a town that has developed progressively and uninterruptedly over two thousand years, incorporating artistic elements of the highest quality from each succeeding period. <i>Criterion 4:</i> Verona represents in an exceptional way the concept of the fortified town at several seminal stages of European history.</p>
Fortifications	Medieval fortifications built by the craftsmen guilds	Roman walls, medieval fortifications, Venetian reinforcements and Austrian defence system
Mythology	The birthplace of Vlad Dracul, the medieval Romanian ruler who inspired the myth of DRACULA.	The city became famous as the scene of the world's most well-known love story of all times, Romeo and Juliet's tragic story.
Annual cultural events	<p><i>Medieval Sighișoara Festival</i> Sighișoara Blues Festival The celebration of Sighișoara Municipality Marching Band Festival Sighișoara Film Festival</p>	<p><i>Opera Festival at the Arena of Verona</i> Veronese Carnival Verona Summer Theater Festival International Festival of Traditional Games Verona Jazz Festival Schermi d'amore- international film festival Vinitaly</p>

Source: Table made by the author

Cultural events held with a certain continuity can also be considered strong branding elements because in the perception of travellers the cities are being assimilated with these events that create, or recreate the special ambiance of a past era. Table no. 2 presents a brief description of the main cultural events that generate a significant tourist flow both in Sighișoara and in Verona.

Table no. 2: Cultural events in the two analyzed heritage cities

SIGHIȘOARA	VERONA
Sighișoara Blues Festival: Is nowadays a well-known and appreciated event among national and international artistic environments. It has been organized every year on the last weekend of February since 2005, and the participation of foreign musicians and spectators have raised the event to an international scale.	Veronese carnival: Carnival in Verona dates back to 1531 and is one of the oldest in Italy. Nowadays, on carnival last Friday, called <i>Venerdi' gnocolar'</i> , a big parade ending in front of St. Zeno church rides the streets of Verona. The parade is led by <i>Papa' de' gnocco</i> , a mask representing an old king holding, instead of a sceptre, a huge fork topped by a big gnocchi.
The celebration of Sighișoara Municipality: It is a relatively new event that started in 2008 and it is held in May, trying to enhance the acknowledgement of local cultural values and the importance of heritage by reviving local traditions and encouraging local artists.	Verona Summer Theatre and Shakespearian Festival: The event dedicated to the great English drama writer who placed Verona among the most notorious cities in the world, is held every summer since 1948 in the Roman Theatre when for the first time Romeo and Juliet's tragic love story was put in scene. During the whole summer season the ancient Roman Theatre hosts many famous Shakespearian masterpieces, but also other great plays, along with jazz concerts and dance performances.
March Band Festival: Organized by the local authority with the participation of local and foreign bands, it is held every year at the beginning of September and it is an event dedicated to the ones who appreciate promenade music.	International Festival of Traditional Games: Born in 2003, the <i>International Festival of Street Game: Tocati</i> is a unique festival, in Italy and Europe. Its aim is to revive and teach the youngest, but not only, the old traditional street games.
Sighișoara Film Festival: Aims to promote the Romanian cinematographic culture and to enhance Romania's visibility in the world through art and knowledge. The festival presents Romanian short films, documentaries and feature film productions that have been internationally awarded in the previous year (http://www.sighisoarafilmfestival.ro/index.html)	Schermi d'amore – International Film Festival: The Veronese Film Festival debuts in 1969, when the Cinematographic Week was held for the first time. From 1996 the event became known as <i>Schermi d'amore</i> meaning Screens of Love, a festival dedicated to romantic and melodramatic cinema productions.
Medieval Sighișoara Festival: Starting with the summer of 1992, every year Sighișoara Fortress relives its past through the Medieval Festival. Under the centuries old walls the narrow little streets suddenly become crowded by knights, monks, wizards, clowns and embodied spirits coming from a world where the fabulous and the terrifying lived	Opera Festival at the Arena of Verona: In the early years of last century, the famous tenor from Verona Giovanni Zenatello sang an opera aria in the <i>Arena</i> for few friends who had gathered there by chance. They soon realized how good the acoustic was in the 2000 years old Roman Amphitheatre and decided to use it to perform a real opera. In 1913, anniversary of

together along with the magic and the adventure. With every edition of the Festival, the Middle Ages loses its known features becoming no longer the darkest and most frightening era of the historical past, for it is brought to life after hundreds of years through ART. The importance of this cultural manifestation lies in the fact that, with the help of medieval art forms like games, theater, music, dance, it provides a gateway between the modern world and a long lost era, being also a form of cultural communication and contributing to a deeper understanding of Sighișoara's multicultural environment

the death of *Giuseppe Verdi*, the *Aida* was staged in the Arena. People came from all over the world to see the operas in Verona. After the first edition, the opera season in the Arena quickly became an international institution, the greatest lyric theatre in the world, with a huge stage and seating for some 20,000 spectators per evening astonished in front of huge and elaborate stage sets. Along the enchanting opera shows, the Veronese Arena is host to a great number of classical music, jazz, blues and pop music in scene where history meets the present, the antique merges with the modern and the art of music with the sensitive souls of spectators.

Source: Table made by the author on: <http://www.blues-festival.ro>, <http://www.arena.it/>,
<http://www.sighisoara.org.ro/portal/portal.nsf/AllByUNID/00003312?OpenDocument>,
http://www.veronissima.com/sito_inglese/html/events_carnival_ing.html,
http://www.estateteatralerveronese.it/nqcontent.cfm?a_id=18493&tt=estateTeatrale2008&id_menu=18492

5.4 Statistical indexes characterizing tourism activity in the two heritage cities

In this following part there will be presented the main indicators that are used to describe and analyze the tourist flow of a region or city in order to observe the major trends of tourist demand towards the analyzed destinations and also to see the evolution of the accommodation facilities on a three year horizon.

Thus, for the Sighișoara city, the evolution of accommodation facilities in the 2009- 2011 period is presented in Figure no. 3.

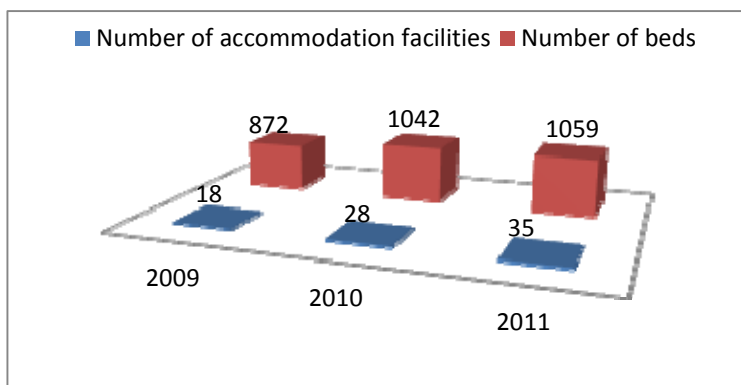


Figure no. 3: The evolution of accommodation facilities between 2009 and 2011

Source: Figure made by author based on statistical data provided by the Regional Statistic Department of Mureș County

The statistic data available from the Regional Statistic Institute shows that in Sighișoara there have been made several investments for enlarging the accommodation capacity, which has grown from 18 units in 2009 to 35 units in 2011, the number of beds suggests the use of urban touristic boarding houses adequate to the landscape of the city, but which have a limitation in the number of provided rooms and beds.

The situation of tourist flow in Sighișoara in the period observed (2009-2011) (Figure no. 4) is characterized by an increasing trend of tourist arrivals and put ups for the night, but in spite of this the average time of days spent by the tourists in Sighișoara is situated around the value of 1,35 days. This shows that Sighișoara is an attractive tourist destination, but it lacks the elements necessary to determine a longer stay of visitors.

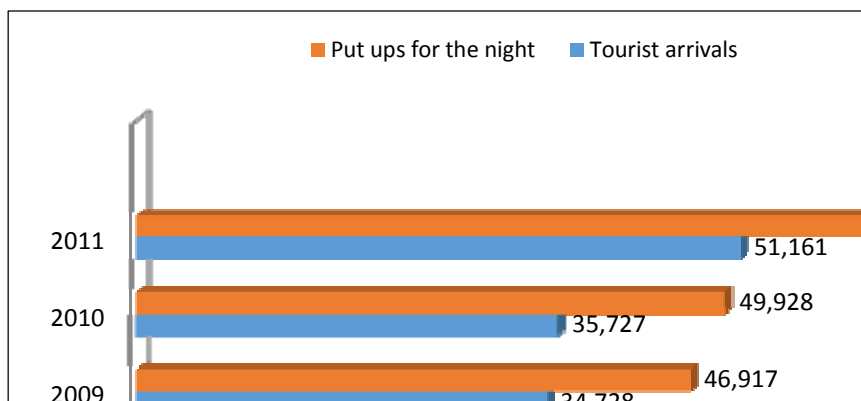


Figure no. 4: Tourist flow indicators in Sighișoara, 2009-2011

Source: Figure made by author based on statistical data provided by the Regional Statistic Department of Mureș County

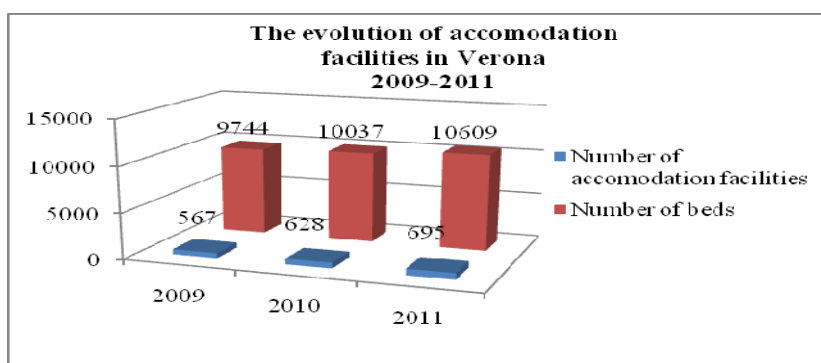


Figure no. 5: The evolution of tourist infrastructure in Verona

Source: Figure made by author based on statistical data provided by https://intranet.comune.verona.it/media/_ComVR/Cdr/Cultura/Allegati/1_Verona_Unesco-motivazioni-e-_condizioni-visita.pdf

Next it shows the evolution of accommodation facilities during 2009- 2011 for the city of Verona.

In Figure no. 5 we can observe that the tourist accommodation facilities of the city of Verona had a slightly increasing trend between the years 2009 and 2011, reaching in the last presented year the number of 10.609 available beds.

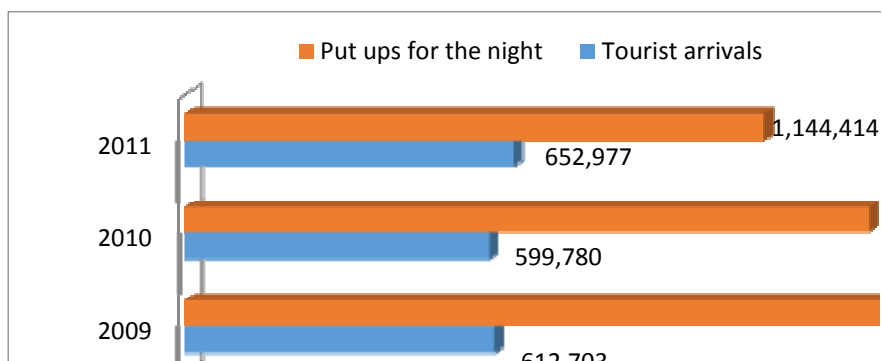


Figure no. 6: Tourist flow indicators for Verona, 2009-2011

Source: Figure made by author based on statistical data provided by https://intranet.comune.verona.it/media/_ComVR/Cdr/Cultura/Allegati/1_Verona_Unesco-motivazioni-e-_condizioni-visita.pdf

Figure no. 6 presents the situation of the tourist flow in Verona, destination which although enjoys a remarkable tourist demand, in 2010 the arrivals decreased probably as a result of the economic crisis, but this situation is resolved in 2011, when the arrivals outcome the ones in 2009. Nevertheless arrival levels have increased in 2011, the put ups for the night have decreased during all three years, which determined a short length of the average stay of tourists from 2.27 days in 2009 to 2.21 days in 2011.

5.5 Discovering Medieval Europe: an opportunity to enhance the cultural heritage

Contemporary society is undoubtedly described by the wide process of globalization, and specifically a rapidly increasing trend of development in the tourist sector, phenomenon which determines stakeholders in the tourism business to pay a special attention in designing and marketing of their products.

One possibility of increasing the competitive advantage of a tourist destination could be represented by establishing partnerships with other similar destinations. Such initiative can be applied in the case of the two historic cities presented in the previous chapter, for they are suitable for such an approach due to their historical significance, architectural importance and touristic endowment. A partnership between Sighișoara and Verona could be established based on a *City2City* collaboration, sustained by international institutions like the World Heritage City Organization and the UNESCO, or through a more common initiative known as “twin cities”, both method aiming towards a collaboration between the local administrations which would have as a result know-how exchange in historic destination management, expertise and cooperation for the sustainable development of the two cities.

Although both tourist destinations own a large number of touristic elements which generate an important tourist flow, from the analyzed statistical data we could see that they are faced with a short average stay of the tourists, Sighișoara being usually perceived like a “one day trip” destination, while Verona’s visitors spend in average only two days in this beautiful city. An institutional partnership between Sighișoara and Verona would have a series of benefits like for example knowledge exchange regarding conservation and presentation of their cultural and historic heritage, interaction of two different urban management systems which could generate ideas for improving their development plans, and most important the designing of special thematic travel packages would represent an excellent marketing strategy with direct results in the mutual raising of awareness of their touristic potential.

Attracting tourists from Italy, and Western Europe, towards the fortified town in the heart of Transylvania, and also marketing Verona’s treasures among the Romanian tourist can be a way to increase their notoriety and thus correct the low level statistic indicators and contribute to a significant local and national economic development.

Discovering Medieval Europe is a proposal for a thematic travel package addressed to visitors who appreciate the cultural values of a location and by combining the two tourist destinations under the “umbrella” of this common nomination it can be seen as a tourist branding method which aims to raise their competitiveness on the international market.

Since both cities, beside their tangible historic heritage, have a tradition in organizing cultural events, manifestations which provide them a certain touristic identity, the travel packages will be designed to give visitors the chance to witness these events and at the same time to get to know the two heritage cities.

Undoubtedly Sighișoara is the most captivating tourist destinations in Romania during the *Medieval Festival*, when the little Transylvanian burg takes on its festive clothes and the paved alleys get filled with artists who bring to life the medieval spirit. On the other hand, the enchanting Verona stands out though its grand spectacles held in the Arena during the opera season, when the 22.000 seats of the ancient Roman amphitheatre are occupied by spectators who love theatre, opera and culture and who are eager to see on stage and *in situ*, the most notorious and appreciated love story of all times, *Romeo and Juliet*.

A proper marketing activity to inform potential tourists on products offered, additional services, artistic and cultural valences of town, etc. can be a valid tool for the sustainable tourism development as it allows to meet the traveller/consumer needs - but providing the rational use of provider entity’s resources (human, technological, informational) (Drăgulănescu, 2013).

In the case of the marketing of the presented travel packages under the created common brand named *Discovering Medieval Europe*, the most appropriate ways to „conquer” a large number of clients are represented by the *virtual promotion*, though a well-designed web site where virtual tours of the destinations are possible along with a detailed description of the program, the *specialized printed materials* and the advertising spots. The main purpose is to align the two destinations to a common brand image, and for this a carefully designed *brand logo* is very useful and can contribute to attracting a large number of European tourists in Romania and also to further increase Verona’s popularity.

The following part presents the travel program offers for the two destinations having as core-attraction the cultural events above mentioned. This analysis was developed based on data provided by Remtours SRL and Grosso Eurotour.

Sighișoara – LAND OF KNIGHTS (Period: 21-24 July 2013)

Day 1: Landing on Transylvania International Airport in Târgu Mureș around 2 p.m., transfer by bus to Sighișoara and check-in to booked hotel.

During the evening there is a free program, tourists can start to accommodate with the magical ambience of the medieval city, where every little street is animated by actors, dance shows and musicians.

Day 2: At 11 a.m. tourists can enjoy a walking tour assisted by a professional tour guide in East Europe's most beautiful and well preserved medieval fortress, they will visit the History Museum of Sighișoara located in the Clock Tower, the iconic building of Sighișoara where they will have the opportunity to find out interesting features of medieval history. The night is reserved for the participation to the many events organized within the Medieval Festival: medieval music concert, dance show, where tourists can learn the centuries old dance steps, archery, historic costume renting, and, specially organized by the hosting facility, the chance for ladies to dress up according to the aristocratic dress-code of the Middle Ages and the gentlemen can show their knightly talent in a real armed competition.

Day 3: The third day is dedicated to the towers of Sighișoara, the Ropemakers Tower, the Butchers Tower, the Tailors Tower, the Shoemakers Tower, the Tanners Tower, the Locksmiths Tower, the Coopers Tower, starting at 10 a.m., tourists will have the chance to visit all the towers of the medieval burg and also the beautiful Hill Church.

The afternoon comes with a proposal to spend some time in the amazing natural scene of Breite Plateau, the best preserved oak tree reservation of Central and Eastern Europe, where they will be invited to a traditional Transylvanian feast.

Day 4: During the morning check out from the hotel, around 10 a.m. the transfer bus leaves to the airport.

Accommodation: CASA BAROCA***, fee 60 Euro/night

Food&beverage: Vlad Dracul Restaurant, average price of breakfast and dinner: 16 Euro

Transport: flight Milano - Târgu Mureș, round trip in part charter system: 85 Euro

Verona – THE CITY OF LOVE (Period: 13-16 July 2013)

Day 1: Landing on Catullo International Airport of Verona around 10 a.m., bus transfer to the city and check-in to the hotel.

At 15:00 the tourists can enjoy a little walking tour of the city center, visiting the main squares of Verona: Piazza Erbe, Piazza Dante – a perfect mix between Scaliger- era medieval architecture and Renaissance style, Piazza Bra – with the magnificent Arena and its neoclassic buildings. The tour ends with the visit to the famous House of Juliet, where tourist can enter the building (there is an 8 Euro entrance fee).

Day 2: The second day in Verona is dedicated to its roman and medieval heritage, including visits in two of the most important museums of Verona, namely the Archaeological Museum, hosted by the 2000 years old Roman Theatre, and the Civic Museum of Castelvechio, the largest art collection in Verona province by the city's iconic medieval castle, Castelvechio built by ruler Cangrande della Scala during the Middle Ages, along with the city's defence system and the most beautiful of Verona's bridges, the Scaliger Bridge. The night is reserved for the unique opportunity to see the two millennia old Arena come to live while in a magical medieval scenery the love story which has been told thousands of times come alive on the stage of the Veronese Arena. From 20:00 it's time for the show: *Romeo and Juliet* theatre performance.

Day 3: Tourists have the chance to explore the religious side of Verona, with guided visit to the Dome and San Zeno Basilica starting from 10 a.m. In the afternoon visitors can climb San Pietro Hill to the massive Austrian castle and to enjoy the Veronese sunset with the breath-taking panorama of the city along the River Adige. The night comes with a slightly different tour-proposal: *Giro delle osterie* – Verona winery tour.

Day 4: Check-out during the morning and transfer to the airport.

Accommodation: Juliette House B&B***, fee 25 Euro/night. Food&beverage: average price of breakfast and dinner: 32 Euro. Transport: flight Bucharest-Verona, round trip in part charter system: 95 Euro

The final estimated price of the travel package for Sighișoara is 357 Euro, and for Verona 468 Euro (Tab. 3). These prices include the round trip charter air flight, transfer by bus to the destinations, three stars accommodation, breakfast and dinner, except the first day of arrival which has only the dinner included and the 4th day which has only the breakfast. To these expenses there were added the cultural expenses and the tour guide allowance, the agency commission of 15% and the VAT (24%). The insurance is not included, but instead the tourists will be given brochures and a small souvenir.

Table no. 3: Price calculation for the two travel offers

No. crt.	Calculation elements	Costs	Detailed cost elements	Value (€)	
				SIGHISOARA	VERONA
1.	DIRECT COSTS	Food & beverage	Fee/day x No. of days	50	105
2.		Accommodation	Fee /night x No. of nights	80	75
3.		Transport :	Charter airplane ticket round-trip Airport transfer Târgu Mureș- Sighișoara/ Villafranca – Verona	95	95
4.		Cultural expenses (entrance fees)	Museums / Romeo and Juliet Spectacle	5	34
5.		Organizing expenses	Brochures and small souvenirs for the tourists	5	5
6.		Tour guide	Tour guide allowance	10	10
7.		Driver	-	5	5
8.		Other expenses	-	-	-
9.	TOTAL DIRECT COSTS			250	329
10.	INSURANCE			-	-
11.	COMMISSION (15%)			37,5	49,35
12.	VAT (24%)			69	90
13.	TOTAL			356,5	468,35
14.	ADJUSTMENTS			+0,5	-0,35
15.	TOTAL PRICE OF PACKAGE			357	468

Source: Table made by the author

Conclusions

Tourism, as a socio-economic activity in general, and cultural tourism here closely presented, are both the fundamental elements for the sustainable development of a region by their contribution to local welfare and at the same time they represent a way of conserving and presenting heritage sites which are inherited from our ancestors, but also borrowed from future generations with the obligation to protect and pass down.

From this research we can conclude that Sighișoara and Verona own an astonishing cultural and historical heritage recognized by international organizations like UNESCO, and which despite the differences in their development, the two cities can still be united in order to create a European cultural joint-brand.

The results of the gathering of information about the two historic cities, the study of the scientific literature and of the analyzed statistic data led to the necessary knowledge for a comparative analysis, to the observing the problems that the two destinations are facing and to the proposal for solving them through a partnership and a common marketing strategy.

The cultural events held with annual continuity presented in part 3 represent strong motivations for visiting these locations and provide them a well-defined cultural identity, therefore these events were turned into the core elements of the travel programs designed to enhance the two medieval cities and to correct the short average stay of tourists.

The tourism business relies almost entirely on the perception of its customers, on the quality of their experiences, thus marketing plays a crucial role in increasing the demand for travel destinations.

The applied value of this paper, along with the identification and correlation of the comparable features between the Transylvanian settlement and the Italian art-city, is reflected by the proposed common brand, *Discovering Medieval Europe*, and the travel packages designed to meet the specific needs of a niche market that is sensitive to cultural experiences and which, once well motivated, will be willing to spend time and financial resources to visit these destinations.

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