

EVENT TOURISM IN ROMANIA – A TOURIST PROFILE

ANCA TUDORICU

*Department of Geography, Bucharest University, Nicolae Bălcescu Av., 1, 010041, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: anktudy@yahoo.com*

The aim of this article is to offer a brief image on Romanian event tourism having as a reference point two case studies – the “Medieval Sighișoara” Art Festival and Stufstock festival (Vama Veche). Both Sighișoara and Vama Veche are two destinations which are going through major changes concerning the transition from mass-tourism to alternative tourism. One of the main directions in this respect is event tourism, represented these two important festivals on the Romanian market. The event tourist is different, special a symbol of the contemporary sophistication.

Key words: event tourism, festivals, Sighișoara, Vama Veche

The world of events is distinctive because of its diversity and its special features. In contemporary world the perspective on events is different than before, festivals becoming less related to religious purposes and more to fashion and social preferences. Moreover, the capacity of attracting tourist flows in deprived areas offers it a very important place in the local, regional and even national development strategies. It appears events are the most exciting tourist phenomena with a recent qualitative and economic growth.

In Romania the event industry can be considered quite a new activity especially strictly related to complex tourism. It is currently developing without evident concern towards integrating event and tourism, or management quality. The main concern should refer to the way in which these events could be strategically integrated into tourism, in order to become a distinct industry with its own planning and management. On the Romanian market the diversity of events as recently increased and there can even be found some festivals with a tourist component. Two of them – Stufstock festival from Vama Veche and “Medieval Sighișoara” – Sighișoara will briefly be analyzed below.

Known as one of the few inhabited citadels in Europe, Sighișoara owns a special place in the Romanian tourism landscape due to its unique qualities. That is why it is the most suitable place for a medieval festival. Vama Veche is a “cultural oasis”, seen as a shelter of intellectuality and a symbol of freedom, therefore the perfect destination for the rock fans who do appreciate traditional beach resorts, comfort and modernity.

Given the tourist dimensions of the two events, their attraction, management, catchment areas and their media visibility a certain profile for the potential tourist became evident. This type of tourist seem to be aged between 18 – 30, student, low income, without private means of transportation, not interested in quality of the facilities and services but willing to be part of new, unconventional types of spending free time.

As a result the main objective of the research was to identify, define and obtain the relevant profile of the **event tourist** for Romania. Consequently, a survey has been designed and conducted within which 203 questionnaires and several complex interviews there were elaborated and run, during the 5th edition of Stufstock (16-19 August 2007) and the 15th edition of “Medieval

Sighișoara” (25-27 July 2007). The questionnaires were tailored to meet the requirements of identifying the genuine tourist profile, therefore they were applied on a random sample in order to be relevant. The questionnaires contain information on tourist preferences regarding accommodation, transportation system, food and beverages and the value of their personal perception of services’ quality and of the destination.

The evaluation of the primary and the secondary data led to the conclusion that in Vama Veche the symbol is the “familiar tourist” – tourists that have returned to the destination or that have visited it due to a friend’s recommendation. According to the statistics, 86% of the tourists who have visited Vama Veche in 2001 came back in 2002. Another interesting issue is the way in which the hosts are trying to attract the visitors - even if some of them are willing to accommodate random tourists who “knock on their door”, or turn to “agents” for finding them clients, most of them prefer the “familiar tourists”. According to the sociologic report made by APCAPBC the tourist services are embedded into the host - “familiar tourist” relationship.

In Vama Veche the courtyard has a special space dimension, being essential for communicating and socializing – the gazebo, usually situated in the middle of it, is the perfect place to meet the cohabitants who often share more than the kitchen and bathroom – hopes, fears, beliefs, etc. The attitude of the host is also very important for the entire process; they live in the same “courtyard”, usually having the same facilities as the tourists. The transparency of their lives leads to special relationships, based on affectivity – the tourist is not just a client, he is a special member of the big ad-

hoc family and this is what gives specificity to the product.

“Bedroom-tourism” has developed based on the idea that tourists come to Vama Veche for nature – see, sand, sun and, more important, for its symbolism. That is why the locals are not very interested in promoting their “offers”, they prefer the continuity, the “familiar tourists”.

According to the same report there are 2 major tourist profiles:

1. The sentimental tourists – aged 30-40 years old, being either nostalgic or claiming the lost spirit of the destination;
2. The “new generation” tourists – teenagers who are now fascinated by the “spirit of the destination”, which was transmitted by their friends or relatives; they choose Vama Veche because it’s “cool”, “cheap”, “student-like” or just because they need to “hang loose”.

When it comes to event tourism in Vama Veche, and especially to Stufstock festival, it is obvious that the majority belongs to the “new generation” category, because the “sentimental tourists” prefer to come to this destination to “rediscover” it the way it was before, so outside the “effervescence” of the youngsters. It is also obvious that Stufstock mainly attracts the sympathizers of the group tourism, who come with their mates or to make friends and socialize. Apart from “group tourists” and “solitary tourists”, the medieval festival in Sighișoara is also chosen by the “family tourists” who are passionate about culture and especially folk music.

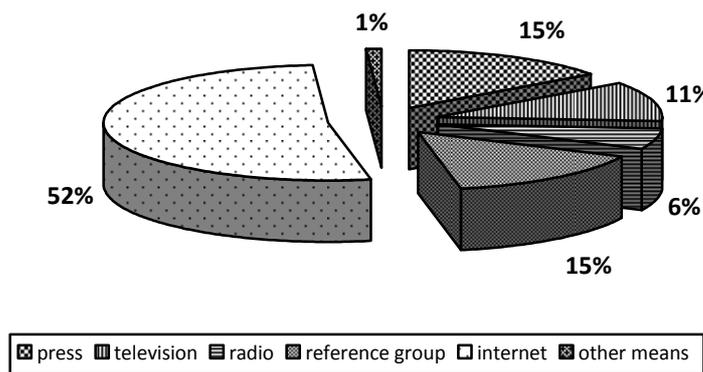
After analyzing this primary data and the secondary one (the sociologic report made by APCAPBC and some official statistics) there were

highlighted some similarities and differences between the two festivals. In Sighișoara 53% of the participants were for the first time in the citadel, while in Vama Veche only 33% were newcomers. The results indicate a greater interest for Stufstock and a bigger “devotion” to it, considering the fact it was just the 5th edition (compared to the 15th).

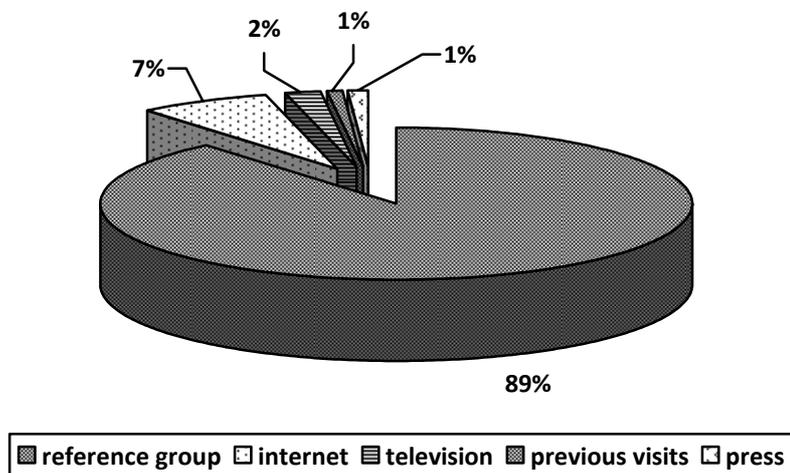
Regarding the promotion, for Stufstock only 15% of the interviewees were influenced by press, 11% by television, 6% by radio, 15% by their reference group (friends and relatives), 1% by other

means and most of them, 52%, obtained the information from the internet. This suggests the fact that society is going through major changes, based on efficient communication. However, this is also related to the tourists’ age - 20 to 30 years old, fact that indicates the high adaptability to the new information mediums. In Sighișoara 89% of the participants were influenced by their reference group, 7% by the internet, 2% by television and other 2% by previous visits and press.

Information sources on Stufstock festival



Information sources on "Medieval Sighisoara" festival



The most significant difference between the tourist preferences of the two destinations can easily be noticed in the accommodation field – in Sighișoara 17% opted for tourist villas, 35% for camping, 45% for B&B structures (especially at locals) and only 3% for motels. In Vama Veche an overwhelming percentage (70%) preferred the camping (mainly on the beach), 22% have sympathized the “courtyard tourism”, 3% the tourist villas, 4% - motels and only 1% stayed in hotels. An interesting fact is that 23% of the interviewees in Sighișoara were just visitors, so they didn’t need any accommodation services. This was influenced by the destination’s location (Sighișoara is situated near many important cities – Târgu Mureș, Mediaș, Sibiu while Vama Veche is in the extreme South of Romania), but also by the poor marketing and the lack of entertainment diversity in the area.

The “packed food” (like sandwiches, crisps, etc.) was an alternative to the overcrowded restaurants for 35% of the participants in the “Medieval Sighișoara” Art Festival, compared to 21% in Vama Veche who chose this for economical reasons (it is much cheaper than eating out) or because it was more suitable (it can be an important social activity for the “courtyard” tourists).

The Romanian event tourists prefer travelling by train – 78% for Vama Veche and 70% for Sighișoara chose this means of transport because of the low price (especially for students who have a 50% discount), the schedule, the ticket reservation service and the nice atmosphere (a more open space) for the group tourists. However, the problems that appeared during travelling (crowded trains, delays, antisocial behaviours) affected the global image of the festivals, having a serious impact on the participants’ mood and, eventually,

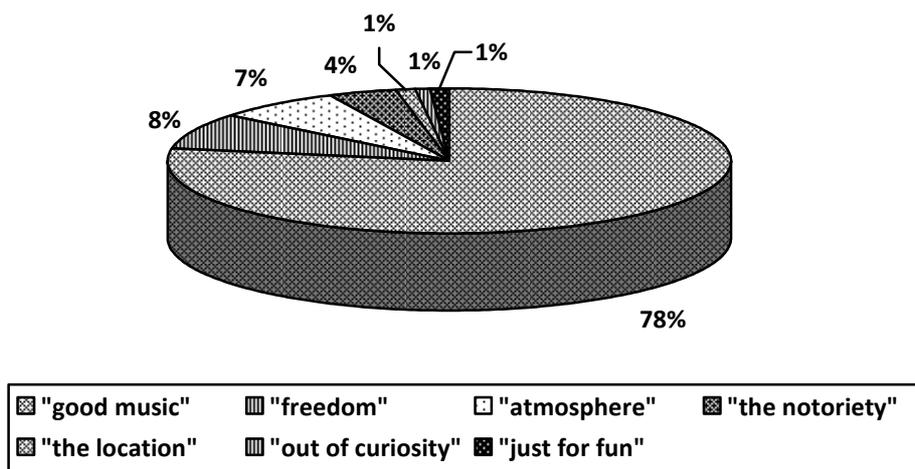
on their perception. The fact that 81% of the interviewees in Vama Veche travelled for more than 200 km (compared to 48% in Sighișoara) shows a stronger motivation among “the rockers”.

The main complaints of the tourists were related to information and entertainment structures. In Sighișoara there is a tourist information centre founded by Venice Regional UNESCO Bureau and “Mioritics” Association from Romania as a result of the “Cultural Heritage – a Bridge Towards a Shared Future” programme. Unfortunately, the lack of advertising materials and programs designed especially for event tourists (that could extend their staying period) reduces the utility and the impact of the information centre. For “Medieval Sighișoara” Art Festival, the leaflets with the schedule of the manifestations were hardly printed the first day and in short supply. Moreover, some unannounced changes of the second day’s activities affected the global image of the festival. In Vama Veche there was a different approach to advertising – the information could have been obtained directly from the “Disinformation Tent”, situated in the most popular area, or from Marina Park, the place where Stufstock took place. Leaflets with the festival’s schedule and information about the guests and the purpose of the festival were distributed on the beach, in the hotels, restaurants, pubs and bars by volunteers. The quantity and the quality of the advertising materials show the same problems Romania has at the national level – the lack of interest and professionalism, lack of coordination and a functional strategy to restore the entire system. Another problem is that there are no multilingual advertising materials, fact that leads to a negative impact on international tourists’ perceptions.

Asked to justify the participation in Stufstock festival, 77% of the interviewees had as a main motivation the “good music”, 8% - “freedom”, 7% - “the atmosphere”, 4% - “the notoriety” and the rest of 3% attended it because of the location, out of

curiosity or just for fun. Moreover, 77% of them knew the purpose and the slogan of the festival (“Save Vama Veche!”), showing the efficiency of mass-media involvement.

Stufstock festival - tourist motivation concepts



According to the primary data, Vama Veche is connected to the idea of freedom (24%), rock (21%) and friendship (18%), suggesting the psychological impact of this “cultural oasis” on the tourist motivation. Other symbols are “non-conformism”, “difference”, “fun”, “tolerance”, “relaxation”, “nature”, “wildness”, “sun”, “shells” but also “filth”, “crowd”, “alcoholism”. The visual image of Vama Veche is represented by cane, along with the wild beach, tents and rock concerts.

In the participants’ opinion, on a 1 to 10 scale, Stufstock festival was rated with 8,80 and “Medieval Sighișoara” with 8. There are many reasons that led to these values, the main complaints being related to the management of events. Almost 75% of the tourists in Sighișoara made objections regarding the schedule that was modified during the festival without being announced, quality of manifestations (the folk concerts with well-known

artists were cancelled only a week before the festival, being replaced with a beginner competition), hygiene conditions in the citadel (lack of public toilets and the inexistence of a free potable water source), overcrowded areas (lack of parking lots), kitsch-souvenirs and the presence of the beggars. On the other hand, the medieval atmosphere along with the tourists’ enthusiasm, theatre plays, location and the special architecture made Sighișoara a desirable destination during the festival.

In Vama Veche the major constraints were related to the excessive security (before getting to Marina Park), to the volunteers behaviour, to the lack of beverages and food diversity (imposed by the sponsorship) and to the technical aspects of the concerts (sound quality). The positive aspects involve the music, the atmosphere, the destination, the purpose and the originality.

It can easily be noticed that there are many common issues that influence the event tourists' motivation. The atmosphere created during the event is essential, giving a special flavour to the entire manifestation.

As a whole, the 2 events obtained a positive appreciation from the participants, both of them being a reference point in the Romanian tourist sophistication process, in its transition from mass-tourism to the alternative one.

As a conclusion, the brief image of the Romanian event tourist can be summarized as it follows:

- Aged 18-35 years old;
- Graduate or post-graduate;
- Low income: usually less than 300 Euros;
- Uses the internet as the main information source;
- Chooses cheap accommodation services (camping, B&B structures);

- Travels by train;
- Goes long distances in order to participate in a festival;
- Prefers the fast-food or the packed food
- Pays attention to the details, being very critical;
- Appreciates the festivals for the atmosphere and knows their messages and purposes.

Event tourism is a developing field which can attract important tourist flows, as an alternative to traditional tourism. Even if in incipience in Romania, it has an obvious tendency of expansion, Stufstock and "Medieval Sighișoara" Art Festival being relevant in this respect. Analysing the event tourist profile is necessary for a better planning and a suitable marketing strategy that will eventually lead to a better adaptability to the consumer's preferences.

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