

THE NIGHT OF MUSEUMS — A BOOST FACTOR FOR THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF TOURISM IN BUCHAREST

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Abstract: Several media and research sources have recently flagged out and insisted significantly on a new process of concern to tourism planners in Bucharest. The Night of Bucharest Museums has initially been a quite isolated, museum focussed and rather individualistic event which has progressively developed over the past ten years into a cultural process involving several cultural institutions. Among the institutions involved in this growing event museums are still predominant but not sole. Most of the participant members into the event have developed complex and dynamic programmes comprising sections of joint institutional events mostly having to do with exposing the public to local culture. This brief comparative analysis of this progressive event development identifies changes to the extent and with particular regard to the cultural dimension of it in close connection to the potential of local tourism development. This paper is mainly attempting to answer the question regarding to what extent the public of such event has become tourist. The paper also aims to focus on more specific aspects and issues concerning the main aim by sketching a brief overview regarding the attitudes and perceptions of people regularly attending an event such the European Night of Museums in Bucharest. The paper attempts to determine the profile of participant to such event trying to identify the trends of this event on the Romanian wider market but particularly on the tourism market given the fact that museum visitor are mostly tourists. The study is making use of data collected during 2013 and 2014 editions of the event. The final aim of the paper is to emphasise issues regarding the wider concept of motivation in visiting museums and how they are linked with the cultural dimension of tourism, highlighting several difficulties faced by a multitude of institutions and how these are attempting to use tourism to overcome problematic situations.

Key words: Night of museums, Tourist motivation, Event, Tourist behaviour.

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Introduction

The European Night of Museums is known to the public as a cultural event annually organized under the patronage of UNESCO, Council of Europe and International Council of Museums (ICOM). During this wide spreading event museums along with other cultural institutions open their doors to the public until late at night in their attempt to expose public to a cultural venture based on museum collections, performing arts and a wide variety of creative initiatives.

The first such event in the whole series was hosted by Berlin in 1997 under the name of *Lange Nacht der Museen – Long Night of Museums* (Kultur Projekte Berlin, 2014). Due to its success it was taken over and

adapted by other countries being a source of inspiration for many local authorities in considering it for further development, including strategic development to attract tourist. Another pioneer of this initiative was France where the Minister of Culture and Communication launched in 1999 "*Le Printemps des Musées*" (*The Spring of Museums*), a similar event meant to encourage people rediscover the richness of the collections and the variety of museums (Ministère de la Communauté française, 2011). In 2001 the event was organized by all the signatory countries of the cultural convention of the Council of Europe and it had as main target group the people living in the proximity of the institutions involved into the initiative. Another concept alike was born in 2002 when the Mayor of Paris launched the *Nuit Blanche (White Night)*, a night devoted to creativity and art aiming to promote and celebrate contemporary art, focussing on "rendering art accessible to all, whilst enabling residents and visitors to see the city in a different light" (PMP Genesis, 2009).

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From 2005 onwards the event has been promoted as *The European Night of Museums*, more and more countries have joined it being currently held in 33 countries. *The European Night of Museums* is aiming to attract a new public for the museums: "a younger and a more nocturnal one" (Blanquin, 2014). It is organized and held concomitantly during the closest Saturday to the International Museum Day (18th of May) which has been established in 1977 by ICOM to encourage public awareness of the role of museums in the development of society (International Council of Museums, 2014). Most of the 33 joining members in organising the event envisaged initially and mainly their capital cities in an attempt of developing a networking type event given the fact it is held concomitantly everywhere. The event it does not exclude other towns and cities of the participant members.

The 2014 edition of *The European Night of Museums*, held during the night of the 17th of May, managed to have a great impact on all participant countries, especially in Eastern Europe where Bulgaria gathered 150.000 participants in the 65 museums opened and Russia hosted 100.000 people only in Ekaterinburg (2014).

Romania itself has joined *The European Night of Museums* in 2005 by organising such event with the membership of few museums and other public cultural. The early editions of the event seemed to have been more attractive and more successful in Bucharest even though not all of the most popular museums were open to join the and be part of the event. The early Bucharest editions of *The European Night of Museums* included museums such as The Romanian Peasant Museum, Antipa Museum (Natural History), National Art Museum of Romania, National Contemporary Art Museum of Romania and Astra Museum Sibiu. Currently there is a total of 150 museums, culture institutions and education bodies in all together 48 different locations in the country which are bonded together to organise a wide range of free of charge specially designed events inside the Romanian version of the European Night of Museums. Out of these 33 institutions, organisations and bodies are located in Bucharest.

The Romanian 2014 edition of *The European Night of Museums*, the 10th in a row, proved to have had a powerful drawing power compared to the previous ones with 191.956 people taking part into the activities suggested by the museums and their partner institutions involved in this joint cultural event. However, besides the cultural dimension of the event, the importance of the manifestation also lays in its role as a leisure activity and, more recently, as a tourist attraction. This issue was possible to be investigated through analysing participant behaviour, emphasizing participants' preferences and attitudes towards the event.

Even if the European Night of Museums has just celebrated 10 years of existence in most of Europe,

there is a shortage of literature addressing this particular topic. Evans (2011) has explored the way in which the adoption of late night festivals and events in national and regional capital cities forms the latest move in rediscovering city centres that had been in decline. He highlighted the fact that the community engagement during *White Nights* distinguishes this event from other night-time manifestations, maintaining their particularity while promoting and sharing universal values and experience with other cities. Moreover, he pointed out that events such as Night of Museums "represent in some cases a shift in the legitimate use of the city at night, but in others, an established late night city culture that has found a new and increasing audience." (Evans, 2011:47) This is also the case of Night of Museums in Bucharest, where the event has reached a new type of audience who is constantly increasing every year as shown below.

Jiwa *et al.* (2009) focused more on the ability of the Light Night event to be used as a place marketing experience, by exploring the economic, cultural and social benefits of the manifestation using different case studies, such as *Notte Bianca* (Italy), *Nuit Blanche* (France and Canada) and *Longe Nacht* (Germany). They concluded that these cultural-led events provide an opportunity for different stakeholder groups to celebrate city and town centres as spaces and places through a common sense of belonging and shared vision by focusing on shared culture, heritage and identity. This is also the case of Bucharest where the local town hall authorities have envisaged that such an event would contribute to the development of historical city centre by adding a sustainable cultural dimension to it. The same authorities have included this type of event along with other events into a more elaborated programme scheme of urban cultural development envisaging several strategic points as part of their more comprising strategy of developing the tourist industry of the city. Thirdly this type of events was meant to improve the not only the cultural identity of the capital city but also its tourist image as destination.

Events, event tourism and museum visits

Events are unique phenomena which result from the interactions among the setting, people and management systems, offering specific experiences to the participants and certain benefits to the organizers. Each event is organised having a certain purpose resulting from the organiser's vision and needs. For example, the entrepreneurs mostly speculate the role of events as income-generators, so they are more likely to focus their attention on managing participation fees, sponsorship, media and the services which are being offered to the participants. On the other hand, there are the media events which don't generate income, but are usually part of the marketing strategy. Another type of

events which have a different purpose is the community-oriented one, used for fundraising, propaganda or active participation. Meetings, conventions, workshops, openings, exhibitions are also compounds of the marketing strategies of corporations, associations and different stakeholders. (Gheorghilaş et al., 2014)

In the tourism field, the need for events has been identified both on the side of providers and beneficiaries. Travel agencies, other companies and destinations use events as triggers for economic development, image creation and even brand generation, whilst tourists see them as attractions per se or at least as extra motivators for visiting a place. On a theoretical level, events can be seen as a symbol of sliding from mass tourism to a self-tailored tourism.

However, in the research literature in the 1970s the events sector was not treated as a distinct area of study within leisure, tourism and recreation (Formica and Uysal, 1998). At first the phenomenon was analysed from a sociological and anthropological perspective, highlighting its negative impact on authenticity (Greenwood, 1972, Boorstin, 1972) and opening the door to a wide area of research that is still of real interest. The 1990s were essential in this respect as event tourism was theorized through several essential books in the field: Goldblatt (1990)'s *Special Events: The Art and Science of Celebration*, Getz (1990)'s *Festivals, Special Events, and Tourism* and Hall (1992)'s *Hallmark Tourist Events: Impacts, Management, and Planning*, creating the basis for event studies that became a distinct field of study in the 2000s (Getz, 2007).

In this respect, event tourism has been recognized as being "inclusive of all planned events in an integrated approach to development and marketing" (Getz, 2008:405). Therefore due to the fact that event tourism has become a quite recent concern on the researchers' agenda, it has to be analysed from both demand and supply sides – there should be a real interest in determining the event tourist's profile and the value of event in terms of economic, sociocultural and environmental impacts. However, there are situations in which many planned events are produced without taking into account their tourism appeal or potential. Getz et al. (2006) showed that this happened as a result of the organizers' specific aims or due to the absence of a tourism plan and a comprehensive event policy. It could also be the case of the Night of the Museums which has been introduced on the Romanian market in 2005 as a cultural event without having a clear tourist oriented purpose, but rather being suggested to the public as a leisure activity.

In order to make this type of events a part of a development strategy there is the need to determine the multiple impacts and implications focusing on participants' profile and behaviour. Donald Getz (1997) was

one of the first theoreticians to address the role of events, showing how they can be treated as tourist attractions, image makers, animators or catalysts. Given the fact that Night of Museums encourages first and repeated visits, but it also spreads demand and increases visitor spending, it can be stated that they function mostly as animators and attractions. It is still to be argued whether it generates or not a form of event tourism but given its evolution on the European market in the last decade we can easily draw the conclusion that it is slowly leading there. However, it definitely brings its contribution to the "festivalization" of the city - the temporary transformation of the place into symbolic space in which the public domain is claimed for particular forms of consumption (van Elderen, 1997). In this context, along with festivals and other manifestations, together with the urban landscapes on which they can be staged and promoted – night events have become "a means of improving the image of cities, adding life to city streets and giving citizens renewed pride in their city" (Richards and Palmer, 2010).

The success of the event is also linked to the sophistication of the new cultural tourist/visitor who prefers self-tailored products. Therefore, a cultural night in the streets can be a suitable choice in many respects – the product can be customized "on the go", deciding the amount of culture and socialization which is needed. The intensive use of technology embedded in the new tourist's behaviour generated new types of activities during the Night of Museums, which also meant to create a sense of place and a sense of belonging to a wider, international community. In this respect, the latest edition of the event was particularly promoted through the social networks (Facebook¹, Twitter², Flickr³) where participants brought their contribution uploading pictures, using hashtags and writing reviews.

Another element which is responsible for the success of the event is the perception of the free admission, which has both positive and negative impacts. For instance, it reduces financial, social and cultural barriers but it also generates crowds and less committed behaviours (Gall-Ely et al., 2008). There were certain institutions that expressed their concern regarding their participation into this event, considering it a threat for the reputation of the museum due to the possibility of attracting „undesirable“ public without generating revenues. However, certain studies show that the associated costs of cultural visits would, in most cases, double the ticket price, because free admission fosters peripheral consumption (Gombault, 2003). This was also the case of the Italian *Notte Bianca* where the programme cost €3 million to host, but it generated €30 million in revenue (Cherubini and Iasevoli, 2006).

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/nuitdesmusees>

² www.twitter.com/nuitdesmusees

³ www.flickr.com/photos/nuitdesmusees/

However some of *The European Night of Museums* capital cities edition have managed to get the public from the status of visitor to the status of tourist visitors mainly by using the growing importance of their image based on the event and the type of cultural and art activities included in the programme of the event. Capital cities such as Paris has managed to increase the number of American tourists during spring season (as opposed to the summer season) using this event in a considerable way over the past decade. The same raising numbers of both domestic and foreign tourist visitors have been registered by, Brussels and Berlin. There is even empiric evidence of cross border attendance of *The European Night of Museums* by foreign tourist planning to visit several museums and be part in several cultural initiatives in both Paris and Brussels for example given the incentives provided by fast trains coupled with convenient low cost flights.

Still, across Europe, consumers of categories of events such as *The European Night of Museums* are mainly residents or people from immediate proximity and domestic tourists attracted by the cultural dimensions such as performing arts and special temporary exhibitions or concerts held and organised within museum premises, with the museums input which might or might not comprise their collections. The status of these is rather of visitor tourists being also attracted by the timetable, the night life dimension and entrance fee. The other category, tourist visitors seems to increase significantly being mostly attracted by the museums themselves where the event in itself only makes the museums more tourists attractive, more accessible and more pleasant to visit outside tourist season.

Methodology

The topic of this study is adjacent part of a wider and deeper research initiative undertaken by one of the authors. It developed independently while undertaking fieldwork for the main research topic of event tourism and museum interpretation. For further developing this theme the authors have used as incipient stage to be able to theoretically develop the topic reasoning and arguing, a variety of secondary data, consistently limited by the fact that the topic it is clearly under researched especially from a geographical perspective. Most of the accessible literature coming rather from the field of sociology or event planning and management.

The study based its findings on primary data, empiric hypothesis, comparison and observations. The authors have designed a methodology plan based mainly on structured and semi structured interviews and questionnaires.

The structured interviews have being done with the mayor of Bucharest in autumn 2010 and 2011 on a wider topic concerning the tourist development strategy of

the city. During the interviews the theme of the European night of Museums has been treated independently. These interviews are also crossed over interviews since the mayor of Bucharest was seconded for most the responses by his couple team of councillors responsible for the 'culture' and 'museum' departments who have significantly contributed to the responses. The questions have been e-mailed to the mayor's office one week in advance. At the end of the meetings the councillors have handed in to one of the authors several detailed inner office papers to serve as base documentation for the study.

The semi structured interviews were also held with the mayor of Bucharest in separate meeting slots at the same as the above mentioned ones for structured interviews were the mayor was seconded by the city chief architect (in charge of the department concerning heritage), head of town hall tourism department and the councillor in charge of the tourism information centre. All interviews (structured and semi structured) have been recorded and transcribed with the permission of the interviewees in addition of being backed up by town hall information providing papers.

The questionnaires have been undertaken as part of two separate field gathering data sessions organised right during the 2013 and 2014 editions of the European Night of Museums at Bucharest. Exclusive focussing on Bucharest is argued by the fact that for this stage of this study given the context of research situation Europe wide keeping the study at the level of the capital city of the country is advisable.

Both field gathering data sessions were fulfilled by a team of 4 members (same members both times) coordinated by one of the authors of this paper. During the 2013 session there have been done 215 questionnaires to which 2014 edition added 224 adding up to a total of 239. For the 2013 session a total of number of 11 people have refused to take part into the questionnaire responding process most which male while during the 2014 session 17 people refused collaborating also mainly male. Both field gathering data sessions have been done in the same selected locations inside the city centre: the Revolution Square with 2 sub locations and Sutu Palace are also with 2 sub locations.

The questionnaire has being designed based on interpretation and analysis of the interviews with the local town hall authorities. The conclusion of this analysis resulted into a hypothesis according to which the authorities have reached the stage of planning according to which the event should be used in such a way that it attracts more and people who do not normally visit museums.

The questionnaire comprises 9 questions: 2 questions with end answers, 5 multiple choice and 2 with open answers. The questionnaire aimed to investigate participant's perception on the event, to what extent they are regular museum visitors, how often they visit

museum, what attracts them to visit, what are the attractions which makes come back and finally what are the reasons which keeps them away from museums in addition to questions which would provide information on the respondent's personal situation and status.

Participant profile - Night of Museums 2013-2014, Bucharest

The results of the questionnaires undertaken as part of the research of this study will be interpreted and analysed comparatively for efficiency. The need of a comparative analysis is the result of sketching the idea of the evolution inside the perception of participants to an event taking place annually and in the past two years. This being useful to outline the participant profile as accurately as possible. An in situ questionnaire survey was undertaken during both editions in the past two years: 215 respondents (2013) and 224 respondents (2014).

The number of participants to this event has increased in Bucharest from about 145.000 in 2013⁴ to over 190.000⁵. The results of the questionnaire survey show that, in addition to the recurring visitors which are the majority, there are also a significant number of new participants adding to the Night of Museums event each consequent year. In 2013, 41% of respondents said they were participating for the first time to the event, as compared to 39% of the respondents in 2014. The paradox this event creates is that even though it aims to increase the number of museum visitors at least for the near future, that doesn't happen at all. Instead, it is seen as a stand-alone event that attracts more and more participants every year by offering all the advantages a museum cannot seem to offer on a normal workday. During both analysed editions (2013 and 2014) the target group with the greatest participation ratio is the adult female population between 30 and 50 years old, but coming in on a close second place and on a rise since last year are the under 18 population and the 18-30 years old age group. The 30-50 years old population is dominant because this is the active population who find it difficult to visit a museum during weekdays due to lack of time and the relatively short visiting hours of museums. (Figure 1)

The next paradox is that even if this is the active population, the second most mentioned reason for the lack of involvement in the cultural life of the city is the high price of tickets. However, the price of a museum ticket in Bucharest is more often lower than that of a cinema ticket. The conclusion here is that leisure

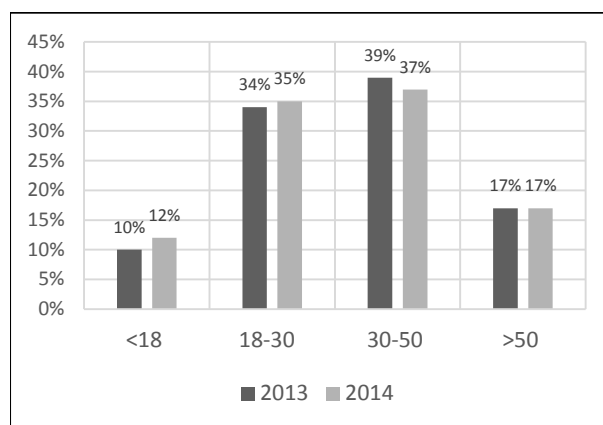


Figure 1. Participants by age group

budgets must have been considerably reduced on account of the economic crisis. Nevertheless, the answers of the respondents signal a very important and generalized problem of Romanian museums – the general lack of interest of the adult population caused by a lack of programmes specifically addressed to this age group, especially considering it's the adult population that's required to pay the ticket in full for a visit at the museum.

The presence of the 50+ population at this event has been found to be numerically inferior to the other age groups, but constant over the two years (chart). Seniors might find a night time event inconvenient, but their reduced presence might also be explained by the fact that this age group has enough time to visit museum during the day. On the other hand, health issues don't allow them to spend so much time on their feet, in the streets, waiting in line for a very long time (the queues that form at the entrance of most museums during this event are indeed very long). Moreover, their main motivation to take part in the event is the free access to culture since most of them are retired, but most of the time the overly crowded museums and long queues don't allow them to carry out their visitation plans.

Gender distribution seems to have remained constant over the two years. In 2013, 61% of respondents were women, as compared to 64% in 2014, and 39% were men, as compared to 36% in 2014. The high percentage difference resulted from the survey is consistent with reality, but we must also take into account that women tend to be more open to participating in surveys.

Participants usually come to this event in small groups (3 or 4 people), but they also come alone. Out of those who come alone, most say (but especially women), they would get involved in such activities

⁴ <http://www.mediafax.ro/cultura-media/bilant-noaptea-muzeelor-2013-aproximativ-500-000-de-vizitatori-la-nivel-national-10887565>

⁵ <http://www.mediafax.ro/cultura-media/noaptea-muzeelor-2014-pestre-190-000-de-participanti-in-bucuresti-bellu-si-antipa-cele-mai-vizitate-12643997>

more often if they had a companion. This happens because, even though this is a cultural activity, it's also seen as a leisure and relaxation activity and it's closely related to the motivation for participating in the event. Unlike in 2013, when the most frequent motivation cited by the respondents was to see special artistic events (34%), in 2014 the attitude has changed. Participants are equally (27%) motivated by seeing a special artistic event and by staying out late in the city with their friends and family (Figure 2.)

This is also because this year, as opposed to last year, the event stayed mainly in the cultural sphere, but there were also many other cultural events offered by state institutions and private cultural initiatives such as Art Safari (the first public and professional pavilion in Romania) and Romanian Design Week (interior design, architecture and digital design exhibition). This juxtaposition was auspicious for the Night of Museums because these events took place in the centre of the city, in the proximity of Bucharest's museums nucleus, and the Night of Museums benefited from their efficient promotion campaign as well as its own. The great number of participants in the last edition who think this event is a good opportunity to spend the night out in the city just goes to show an older issue regarding the city and the public space perception in Romania. (Figure 3.)

As the cultural and administrative capital of Romania, Bucharest offers many options for going out, especially in the evening and at night, more than most European countries. The city is alive at night as well, but most events take place inside, in different locations, be it in bars, clubs or cultural institutions. Bucharest streets are only a transit zone and city squares are only populated when there's a concert or another similar event. Therefore, the Night of Museums is the only event of the year that offers the possibility of exploring

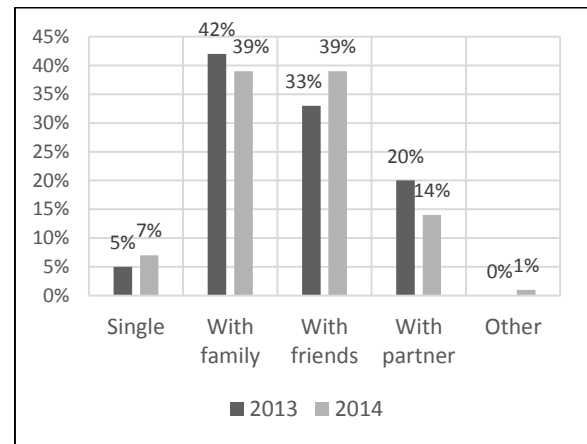


Figure 2. Event attendance

a different dimension of the city, transforming the streets and squares in the centre in a space for relaxation and socializing. Contrary to all predictions, only 17% of the respondents said that they are participating because of the free entry policy of the event. However, the main two factors that would contribute to their visiting museums more often are lower ticket prices and more free time. Lack of time and the fact that museum visiting hours usually coincide with regular work hours leads to an average of 3 visits per year (68% of respondents in 2013, 76% in 2014), which goes to show once again the event is actually stand-alone and mostly draws participants who aren't constant museum goers. Furthermore, 12% of respondents in 2013 said they never visited a museum, but the number went down to 5% for 2014.

As a consequence of less and less free time, most parents with small children only go to a museum attracted by the special educational activities designed for children and more and more museums seem to be developing after-school programmes.

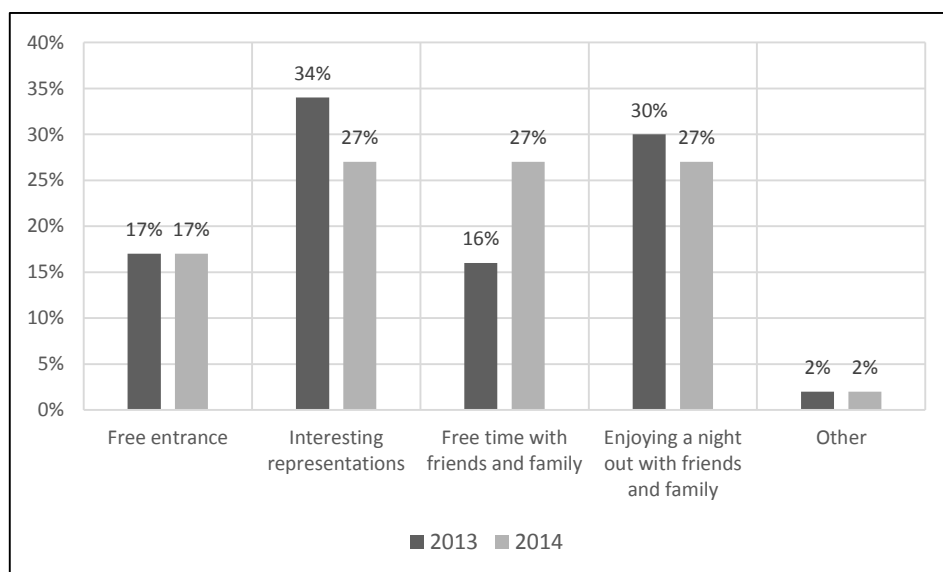


Figure 3. Participants' main motivation towards the event

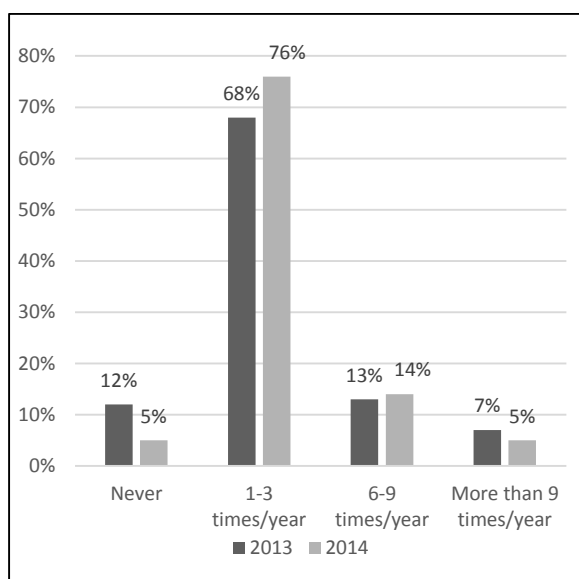


Figure 4. Frequency of museum visits

According to the 2013 survey, most respondents say they choose to visit a museum when they find the programme interesting or when they want to try something different and special. The percentage remains roughly the same in 2014, but the results show that the participants' motivation suffered some slight changes: this year there's more stress on information (19%) as compared to the previous year (13%). Due to lack of time and the decrease of leisure budget, more and more people choose to visit museums when they travel (15% in 2013 and 20% in 2014) and they reserve both time and money to do so because they see museums both as tourist attractions and as sources of information.

Museum visitation frequency is 1-3 times per year, lower than the Western and Northern European average, but consistent with the Eastern European average, as shown by a group of Serbian researchers in their 2009 survey (cited above) (Figure 4.)

This phenomenon shows up in the respondents' answers as „lack of time,, but the fact that museum visiting hours overlap with the general work hours of the population is only one aspect of the problem and is only a specific issue of the active population between 30 and 50 years old, even though the same reason is cited by the young and very young population as well. The explanation for this resides in the fact that some museums are still reluctant to get socially involved or present in people's lives along with adapting their programme to the real needs of the current visitors. In addition to this, adequate museum interpretation, accessible attractive information obstructs understanding among visitors making it less appealing; leaving them

feeling excluded which are in effect crucial conditions for a fulfilling active leisurely activity for the free time.

A decrease of the number of people who have never visited a museum can be noticed which can be explained by the fact that they got attracted by the event in itself.

However there is a small number of people who visit museums 6- 9 times a year. They are holders of higher education degrees or belong to the field of culture and education which sets some special sort of emphasis on the subject: the educational function and dimension of museum. This is a very important and certainly growing aspect all over European countries.

In conclusion and according to the results of the questionnaire the typical European Night Museum participant would be woman, mother, aged between 30 and 50, has participated in previous editions of the event with family and friends, will continue participating in the future because believes that the Night Museum is one of the rare opportunities to spend decent night time on the streets together with the loved ones having in the same time the benefit of 'consuming' art and special performances. During one year she visits 1-3 museums being motivated in doing so by the expected value and importance of the collection. She is an economist who would have more visits if time would allow choosing to undertake a visit every time the programme of a museum appeals as interesting.

Conclusions

After five years of moderate but promising success in organising a Romanian version of the European Night of Museums the Bucharest town hall authorities have learned that such an event could be a useful instrument to be used as strategic development instrument. Their main idea was to follow the example of other European capital cities such as Paris, Berlin and Rome in its attempt to attract tourist via a combined programme to join together tourist attractions, culture and cultural events. An additional aim stated by Mayor Sorin Oprescu was to 'improve the image of the capital city' by 'injecting it with some life' through adding a tourist dimension to it in an attempt to 'bring back the atmosphere and the flavour of, once well known, the Little Paris of East. The Bucharest town hall authorities have had envisaged a strategy to attract potential domestic and foreign tourist making use of the events industry inside which cultural events such as the Bucharest Night of Museums being a core part but also other cultural event being encouraged. After 5 more years most of the street events along with some heritage got to be integrated into one sort of cultural programme with the core being the Night of the Museums.

Though the statistics strictly related to the participants at the event, their perception or level of satisfaction are not officially recorded there is enough evidence to argue the fact that the event has grown in both size and importance. The main aim of the authorities and organisers to increase the number of museum visitors has been fulfilled. In addition to that the number of people consuming street art and performance has increased as well. Nevertheless more profound aspects concerning how much the image of the city has improved in participants or how many of the participants are rather tourists than local visitors are still debatable and certainly in need for further development. Still the questionnaire responses show that the event does attract tourist but the process is far from being comparable to other European capital cities. However there is enough evidence to show that a promising process is taking place. An increasing number of Romanians interested in art, performing arts, history and culture from the near vicinity of the capital city and not only are attracted to come and visit as tourists. Evidence to show that foreign tourists are increasing in numbers during this event or related to this it is not relevant.

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