

## EVENTS & FESTIVAL TOURISM IN ROMANIA: AN ASSESSMENT OF BENEFITS, EXTERNALITIES, AND PLACE BRANDING

Marius-Ionuț GORDAN<sup>1</sup>, Tiberiu IANCU<sup>1</sup>, Tabita ADAMOV<sup>1</sup>, Ioana Anda MILIN<sup>1</sup>, Anka PASCARIU<sup>1</sup>, Elena PEȚ<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" from Timișoara, Romania

### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### Abstract

*This paper focuses on festivals in Romania and their reported links to tourism outcomes and benefits, externalities (both positive and negative), and place branding, in both rural and urban contexts. The scope covers music, cultural, and multi-genre events across multiple destinations. Owing to the heterogeneity in designs and indicators, the findings were integrated narratively, rather than through a meta-analytic statistical approach. Most studies describe short-term increases in visitation and local spending during event periods, with occasional references to longer stays. Branding effects are generally discussed in terms of media reach and online visibility, but measurement approaches vary. Reported externalities include congestion, noise, waste and pollution generation, and pressures on housing and public space, while the documentation of mitigation practices is uneven. Overall, the evidence base is geographically and methodologically uneven and remains largely descriptive, which limits inference. Finally, this review paper suggests future approaches in assessing the impact of events and festivals on local communities.*

**Keywords:** event tourism; importance of events in tourism; events marketing; festival tourism

#Corresponding author:

#### INTRODUCTION

Events and festivals have shifted over the last decades from being occasional cultural celebrations to becoming central pillars of tourism development strategies and destination marketing worldwide. Framed under the umbrella of "event tourism", they are now seen as key motivators of travel and catalysts for urban regeneration and competitiveness (Getz, 2008; Negrușă et al., 2016).

A substantial body of research has analysed the multi-dimensional impacts of events, showing that festivals can generate sizable economic benefits (e.g. visitor spending, tax revenues, infrastructure investments), enrich local cultural life and social capital, and contribute to environmental initiatives, but can also produce negative externalities such as congestion, noise, pressure on public services, rising prices and perceived "festivalisation" of everyday life (Negrușă et al., 2016; Suli et al., 2024; Zetiu & Berteau, 2015)

This has led to a growing emphasis on sustainable event management and the need to assess not only direct benefits but also wider spillovers and related effects on residents, businesses and the urban environment.

Parallel to this literature, events have been increasingly conceptualised as strategic tools in place branding and destination-image building. Place-branding research underlines

how festivals and hallmark events can act as "flagship experiences" that signal a city's or region's personality, values and lifestyle, contributing to brand equity through memorable, emotionally loaded experiences and strong symbolic associations (Ciuculescu & Luca, 2025; Suli et al., 2024; Zetiu & Berteau, 2015). Events help differentiate destinations in a crowded marketplace, reinforce desired brand narratives, and can support long-term repositioning from "generic tourist destination" towards culturally distinctive, experience-based brands (Ciuculescu & Luca, 2025; Dumbrăveanu, 2009)

Romania represents a particularly interesting context for studying the externalities generated by events and place branding. Despite a rich natural and cultural tourism potential, Romanian tourism has historically been underexploited and remains constrained by infrastructural and institutional weaknesses (Cozac, 2024)

Early work on event tourism in Romania described the field as being in its infancy but with visible expansion, using case studies such as the Medieval Sighișoara Festival and the Stufstock festival in Vama Veche to profile Romanian event tourists and highlight management and marketing shortcomings (Tudoricu, 2008). More recent analyses argue that event tourism is one of the promising

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avenues for diversifying the country's tourism offer, especially in urban destinations, and explicitly mention large festivals such as Untold in Cluj-Napoca as successful examples already integrated into development strategies (Cozac, 2024)

### **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

The study adopts a qualitative research design based on document analysis, in order to examine how events and festival tourism in Romania are framed in terms of benefits, externalities and place branding. A qualitative content-analysis procedure was applied: documents were screened for relevance, classified by source type, territorial scale (national, regional, local) and event type, then examined, focusing on economic, socio-cultural and environmental benefits, positive and negative externalities and explicit or implicit references to destination image, brand associations, brand equity and the strategic use of events in branding.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Empirical studies on individual Romanian festivals have documented both the benefits and the externalities of these events. Impact assessments of the Transylvania International Film Festival (TIFF) in Cluj-Napoca show substantial economic effects as well as strong contributions to the city's cultural vitality, education levels and international visibility (Negrușă et al., 2016)

In a similar vein, research on the Untold music festival highlights significant increases in hotel occupancy and tourism revenues during the event period (Barbu & Nicolescu, 2024), but also points to perceived social and environmental costs, such as crowding, noise, tensions regarding public space and concerns over the balance between residents' quality of life and tourism growth (Moiescu et al., 2019; Pavelea, 2017)

Together with case studies on Transylvanian cultural events and festivals in other Central and Eastern European post-socialist cities, these findings suggest that festivals can play a structurally important role in reshaping city images and tourism trajectories, while simultaneously generating contested externalities that need careful governance (Suli et al., 2024)

At the national level, Romania's attempts to build a coherent tourism brand—most visibly through the “Explore the Carpathian Garden”

campaign—have been widely debated in terms of effectiveness, consistency and governance (Dumbrăveanu, 2009; Stefan et al., 2024).

Local development strategies and cultural policies for Cluj-Napoca, Iași, Sibiu or Timișoara explicitly frame large-scale events and dense “festival calendars” as levers for creative-city positioning, improved quality of life and enhanced tourism competitiveness (Sava & Badulescu, 2018; Tomiuc, 2016)

Case studies on Iași's International Festival of Education (FIE) illustrates how a multi-event programme is used to reposition the city as a national cultural hub and to support the bid for European Capital of Culture, with documented increases in visibility, partnerships among cultural institutions and a stronger association between the city and education-culture narratives (Zetiu & Berteau, 2015)

Similarly, analyses of “Night of the Museums” in Bucharest and Oradea report very positive perceptions of the event's cultural, social and image-building functions—participants rate its role in promoting museums, improving destination image and generating social cohesion as “very good”, while local tourism documents present it as a flagship product that diversifies the urban offer and extends visiting hours (Herman et al., 2023)

In line with these examples, national and regional tourism strategies consistently associate festivals with “hard” benefits (visitor numbers, overnight stays, local spending) and “soft” gains such as civic pride, cosmopolitan atmospheres and stronger place attachment.

At the same time, the broader place-branding literature and policy documents reveal tensions and gaps that nuance this celebratory narrative. Studies on residents' perceptions of tourism development in regions like the Galați-Brăila conurbation show that locals tend to support tourism when they see clear economic and cultural benefits, including opportunities created by fairs and festivals, but also voice concerns about environmental pressures and uneven distribution of gains (Șorcaru et al., 2022)

More recent work on Brașov's cultural brand argues that moving from a generic tourist postcard image to a sustainable cultural city brand requires not only more year-round festivals and nightlife, but also stronger participation of local cultural managers and Generation Z audiences in co-creating the city's narrative (Ciuculescu & Luca, 2025)

In rural Bontida (Cluj County), studies of the Electric Castle festival show that residents perceive clear economic and socio-cultural benefits—seasonal employment, new business opportunities, improved infrastructure and heightened community pride—while at the same time noting problems such as congestion, noise, waste generation and strain on local services during the event days (Chiciudean et al., 2021).

Festival-generated funds and partnerships are repeatedly highlighted for their role in restoring Bánffy Castle and promoting local heritage, and recent sustainability reports emphasise waste-reduction, public-transport incentives and other “green” measures, illustrating how event organisers explicitly frame Electric Castle as both an engine of rural tourism and a laboratory for sustainable festival practices.

In medium-sized and large cities, the Sibiu International Theatre Festival (FITS) and the George Enescu International Festival in Bucharest emerge as emblematic cases where festivals are explicitly linked to city and country branding. Analyses of Sibiu show that FITS, together with the 2007 European Capital of Culture title, has driven sustained growth in tourist arrivals, extended the season and supported the development of a diversified creative economy, while municipal marketing documents systematically use FITS as a core symbol of Sibiu’s multicultural, “European” identity (Mari et al., 2020; Nicula & Chindriş, 2017).

For Bucharest, case studies on the Enescu Festival document high hotel-occupancy rates, thousands of foreign visitors and strong international media visibility, leading authors and official communications alike to describe the festival as a “cultural diplomacy” instrument and a de facto national brand for Romania (Alexe & Tapardel, 2013; Popescu & Corbos, 2012).

Coastal tourism strategies and resident-attitude surveys from Constanța add yet another layer, linking the Neversea beach festival to spikes in visitor numbers, local spending and city image improvement, but also to concerns over overtourism, crowding, mobility restrictions and the heavy logistical footprint of hosting over 200,000 participants on a narrow strip of urban beach (Moraru et al., 2021)

Taken together, the findings indicate that events and festivals in Romania are widely

framed as strategic assets for destination differentiation and place branding, but that questions of who participates, who benefits, how externalities are governed and how coherent the resulting national image is remain only partially addressed in the official discourse.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study adopts a qualitative research design based exclusively on document analysis to examine how events and festival tourism in Romania are framed in terms of benefits, externalities and place branding. The empirical corpus comprises national and regional tourism strategies, local development and cultural policies, city branding and marketing documents, festival programmes and reports, funding applications, press releases and promotional materials produced by DMOs and event organisers, complemented by grey literature (consultancy and industry reports, NGO publications), media coverage of major festivals, and academic studies on Romanian event tourism and place branding; basic statistical reports on visitor flows and accommodation capacity are used only to contextualise this qualitative evidence. A structured qualitative content-analysis procedure was applied: documents were screened for relevance, classified by source type, territorial scale (national, regional, local) and event type, then coded using an analytical frame informed by international literature, focusing on economic, socio-cultural and environmental benefits, positive and negative externalities (e.g. crowding, noise, pressure on infrastructure) and explicit or implicit references to destination image, brand associations, brand equity and the strategic use of events in branding. Comparing coded material across destinations and event types made it possible to identify dominant narratives, tensions and gaps, and to inform the study’s hypotheses on the relationships between perceived benefits, externalities and the evolution of place brands in Romania.

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