

Evaluating Bucharest's Downtown Cultural Assets and the Satisfaction and Benefits Gained by Their Consumers

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“Whoever visits the city for the first time has a double surprise: that of meeting a new reality (a pleasurable sensation that we are less and less used to experience) and that of the person who is expecting, confusedly, something else entirely.”
(G. Cinà)

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Introduction

THE CULTURAL heritage can be tangible (such as buildings, monuments, landscapes, works of art, and artifacts) and intangible (such as folklore, traditions, language, and knowledge). Along with the products of contemporary arts and other related cultural manifestations, the historical and cultural heritage is a key element that defines the culture of an area as compared to other parts of the world. For most residents and visitors, the character of a city is defined by the quality of its buildings, the spaces between them and what is happening there. Acting in conjunction with a corresponding urban strategy,

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the cultural capital is essential for the future well-being of the city and constitutes the identity and the expression of its particular character.

The identity of a place relates to its historical background or heritage and to the particularities that traditionally characterize the city concerned. According to Deffner and Metaxas (2007), there are two complementary views regarding place identity: on the one hand, the identity of a place may be regarded as an objective thing and, on the other, Pritchard and Morgan's (2001) observation about the relationship between culture, place identity and tourism representation, according to which the representations used in destination marketing are not value-free expressions of a place's identity; instead, they are the culmination of historical, social, economic and political processes.

An identity built on the cultural heritage is seen as an important 'soft' place factor in the competition for highly qualified human capital, companies and investments. Consequently, it is seen as a branding and marketing tool, and a good binding element likely to support and attract people and business. The cultural identity serves to distinguish between one area and another, between one city and another in the global competition, by creating a distinct image. The production of culture has therefore become central to many development strategies worldwide (McCann 2002). Many places and cities are now actively using their tangible and intangible cultural assets as a means of gaining a comparative advantage within faster development strategies, and to create local distinctiveness in the face of globalization. For the cities enjoying cultural attractions, tourism could be a preferable alternative to other economic development activities, provided that the resources are highly capitalized (Ioan-Franc and Iştoac 2007, 89).

Also, the cultural capital of an area, with its diversity and quality, is an important factor for the leisure and tourism industry. Heritage sites and museums, along with theaters and other performing arts venues, are a significant reason why tourists visit the major urban areas (see also Hughes 2000). Also, some towns which attempted to improve their position through innovative urban development strategies see tourism as a tool for place promotion (for instance, see Agyei-Mensah 2006).

Three types of cultural consumer can be identified among the visitors of cultural attractions: firstly, the committed cultural consumers/visitors are those people who visit a city or an area for specific cultural reasons, such as a particular cultural asset (theatrical performance, concert, museum, exhibition etc.); secondly, the cultural component consumers/visitors, who are motivated in part by culture; these tourists come to an area for a combination of reasons which include cultural opportunities. Thirdly, the accidental cultural consumers/visitors are those people visiting the city area who do not intend to go to a cultural landmark or event but do so, either because someone recommended it, or be-

cause the cultural asset happens to be in front of them, or for another fortuitous reason (Iștoc 2004).

Anyway, a deciding factor for the success of a cultural attraction is the satisfaction of visitors. On the other hand, Moscardo (1999) argued that the key factor for visitor satisfaction is the attentiveness of visitors and what is learned during the visit. This is caused by two groups of factors: cultural asset factors (variety of exhibitions, media, novelty, questions, multimedia, labeling), and visitor factors (interest and fatigue). Both have a direct impact on the consumption decision, but cultural asset factors and physical evidence also have an effect on visitor factors and together affect the visitor's satisfaction.

Another very important factor that affects satisfaction is quality, and the intermediate factor between the quality of the cultural asset and the intentions of the visitors is benefits. According to Herzberg's theory (1966), quality does not affect satisfaction directly but indirectly through the perception of gained benefits. But, as noted by Baker and Crompton, "in the marketing field, the topic of service quality has probably been discussed and researched more than any other issue in the past decade. Despite this substantial investment of effort, there is vigorous debate on conceptualization of the performance quality and satisfaction constructs, and the nature of their interrelationships" (Baker and Crompton 2000, 786).

This paper proposes an analysis of Bucharest's downtown cultural assets and an evaluation of the experience and benefits gained by their consumers, based on some field and desk researches. The originality of the work is directly connected to the originality of the project, and it provides a product audit through an honest analysis of what the city center, in terms of culture, has to offer. By analyzing the consumer experience and benefits, it determines what is unique and attractive and what needs to be improved. The main aim of this study is to offer a valuable qualitative analysis of the cultural capital in the downtown area of Bucharest focusing on the satisfaction, experience and benefits gained by visitors and cultural consumers. The secondary purpose of the paper is to provide a tool and useful information for the development of an innovative place marketing for the studied area, based on the cultural assets, in order to ensure its socially and economically sustainable development. The intention is to contribute to the efforts meant to rebuild the identity and to shape the image of the city, making it a more attractive and therefore competitive livable place, and increasing its market share in a globalized economy.

The Studied Area

BUCHAREST IS the capital of Romania and its cultural and economic center. It is the largest city in Romania and is located in the southeast of the country. Bucharest was first mentioned as early as 1459. Since then, it has undergone a number of changes, becoming the state capital of Romania in 1862. As a result of this, many changes can be seen today: an eclectic architecture, a mix of neo-Classical, Bauhaus and Art Deco, communist-era and modern buildings. In the period between the two World Wars, the city's architecture and the sophistication of its elite earned Bucharest the nickname of "Little Paris." Contemporary Bucharest preserves much of the old "Little Paris," although, unfortunately, many buildings and districts created at that time were damaged or destroyed by war, earthquakes, the communist program of systematization, people's indifference, some assaults on the traditional urban fabric, a continuous negotiation of rules, out of control development and all kinds of imbalances. But "whoever visits the city for the first time has a double surprise: that of meeting a new reality (a pleasurable sensation that we are less and less used to experience) and that of the person who is expecting, confusedly, something else entirely" (Cinà 2010, 20).

The city has a total area of 226 square kilometers and approximately 2 million inhabitants. Therefore, it is a big city, the 10th largest city in the EU by population within the city limits. At first sight it looks like a jumble of cars, with people making their way among those cars in an attempt at normality and adventure at the same time, through a mixture of styles and more or less abandoned places. Now more than ever, most of these sites raise the question of the identity they provide.

The studied area is located downtown and is bordered by *Calea Victoriei*—the city's most famous street—and the north-south axis of the city—*Catargiu-Măgheru-Brătianu*—leading south to *Piața Unirii* (Union Square) and north to *Piața Victoriei* (Victory Square).

A walk across this area provides contrasting states of mind, such as pleasure, relaxation, a sense of comfort, unease, etc. at a quite dizzying pace. There are a lot of well-known buildings here, and the most important cultural institutions (the Athenaeum, I. L. Caragiale National Theater, the Museum of the Romanian Peasant, the National Museum of Art, Antipa Museum, the Museum of Romanian History, etc.), as well as the Old Town. Besides, *Calea Victoriei* is Bucharest's kernel, the richest in terms of monuments and national celebrations. It is also an anthology of Bucharest's symbolic landmarks, because of the historical events that actually took place there and due to the importance of the buildings which rise on both of its sides.

Statistically, an analysis of the inventory revealed that there are about 20 religious buildings, over 20 cultural institutions (theaters, operas, libraries, etc.), around 15 works of decorative art (monuments, fountains, etc.), more than 30 historical and architectural monuments, over 10 museums, and that many cultural events (festivals, concerts, etc.) take place in the studied area.

Methodology

USUALLY, THE first step in developing a marketing plan is the SWOT analysis. This is a useful audit and helps to focus the mind, but is only effective if followed up by a consideration of the issues it raises and the actual plans on how to use the findings. The moment when a SWOT analysis is conducted allows us to consider how we can make the most of the strengths and opportunities that were identified, and what can be done to minimize the weaknesses and threats. These findings should be integrated into the marketing plan (Briggs 1997, 49).

In this study a new marketing tool was used, which operates in conjunction with the SWOT analysis to create more usable results: the ASEB (Activities, Settings, Experiences and Benefits) model. This model was developed by Beeho and Prentice (1995). It is a consumer-oriented management analysis tool especially designed to facilitate the understanding of the experiences of the consumer of a cultural product or attraction, and it focuses on the identification of the benefits which the consumer gained from visiting it and also on their socio-demographic characteristics. Moreover, any potential mismatches between the experiences and benefits gained by the visitors of cultural assets and those perceived to be offered by attraction managers through their site interpretation can be both identified and reconciled through this approach (see also Beeho and Prentice 1997).

Four hierarchies of demand have been introduced to the behavioral approach: Activities, Settings, Experiences, and Benefits. The first one (Activities) relates to the motives for visiting and the consumer experience with the activities undertaken at the destination (things for visitors to see and do). The second (Settings) must be understood in terms of which activities take place and what are the expectations of the consumers, including social, environmental, access and transport factors. The next level (Experiences) represents the customer's experiences during visiting. These are the components of the "real" cultural product. The last one (Benefits) expresses the consumer's satisfaction and motivation to visit/consume/return and/or recommend it to others.

The model—which looks like a grid—is informed by qualitative in-depth interviews, conducted with consumers of cultural assets. Thus, insight can be gained (as expressed in the respondent's own words) into the fundamental experiential product being provided by the cultural attractions.

Therefore, for this study we used a qualitative primary research that seeks to find out the people's personal reactions and feelings about the cultural products and/or attractions of Bucharest's city center. The questionnaire included open questions, close ended, multiple options, a differentiated scale and questions on the socio-demographic profile. The method used was the face-to-face interview. The survey was conducted during July 2011 and June 2012 on 220 peoples, yielding 182 valid returns (82.73%).

Results

AFTER THE data for the analysis were collected, a socio-demographic profile of the people surveyed was developed. Thus:

- 55% of respondents were female and 45% male;
- 75% lived in Bucharest, 21% were domestic tourists and 4% foreign tourists;
- regarding the respondents' age the situation is:
 - 0–20 years old: 7%
 - 21–30 years old: 23%
 - 31–40 years old: 37.5%
 - 41–50 years old: 20%
 - 51–60 years old: 3.5%
 - 61–70 years old: 7%
 - more than 70 years old: 2%.

It can be noticed that the highest percentage among the visitors was held by adults of working age.

In terms of the educational level, university graduates came first—44%, followed by those with post-graduate studies —33.5%, high school—19%, while those with primary and secondary studies each represented 1.75%. This reflects the high educational level of the cultural products consumers. Also, in terms of occupational level, the following results were obtained: 59%—employees, 14%—students, 11%—freelancers, 9%—employers, 7%—retirees (homemakers and unemployed people were not registered).

Regarding the consumption of culture and respondent preferences, the results are as follows (see Table 1). Note that the type of question asked was the multiple response one.

Table 1. RESULTS OF CULTURAL CONSUMPTION PREFERENCES

Cultural assets	% Visitors/Audience
Museums	30.9
Cinemas	23.6
Art galleries	7.3
Religious buildings	12.7
Festivals	27.3
Concerts	43.6
Theatrical performances	41.8
Monuments	23.6

It can be seen that among the top preferences of cultural consumers we find concerts and performances—a fact directly related to the increase in the number of performance arts institutions and companies, as well as in the total number of concerts and performances—followed by visits to museums. In the last position among visitors preferences are the art galleries, probably because the latter address an elite audience.

In order to measure the level of satisfaction of visitors with the cultural offer of the area studied, the responded *semantic differential* was used: the respondent was asked to choose where her or his position lies on a scale between the bipolar adjectives very dissatisfied/very satisfied (see Table 2).

Table 2. SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL OF THE SATISFACTION LEVEL

Very dissatisfied	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Very satisfied
No. of visitors	5	10	10	9	23	22	22	36	38	7	

The rating obtained is 6.54, which means that the overall level of satisfaction among visitors is somewhere between no-no and satisfied.

On the basis of questionnaires and interviews, of the information collected and processed, it was possible to analyze the cultural consumer experience and point to what they actually want or expect from their visit/consumption, and to make a transparent evaluation of the cultural assets from the studied area. For this purpose the ASEB model was used, operating on the concept of a matrix where the hierarchy of needs (which defines four levels of demand: firstly—the demand for a particular activity; secondly—the consumer in a particular environment, the demand for certain activities; thirdly—from these activities the demand for access to the experience, and fourthly—the experience to meet the needs of the final consumer) combined with the traditional SWOT analysis in a diagram composed of sixteen successive study units (see Table 3).

Table 3. THE ASEB GRID ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the main elements of the cultural capital are in this area • rich cultural heritage • diversity of cultural capital items (from archaeological pieces to festivals, fairs and shows) that can be used in the creation of cultural products that would address a wide range of visitors • unique sites and original atmosphere; large number of cultural events in this area • the emergence of various cultural spaces (spaces that are polyvalent, for example art gallery, performance hall and restaurant at the same time) • Calea Victoriei—the most representative thoroughfare in Bucharest • followed by the boulevards: Brătianu, Magheru, Bălcescu • Museums: Antipa, the Museum of the Romanian Peasant and the National Museum of Art • the offer of performances is very diverse, with a good repertoire and high value artists
Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the existence of many restaurants • good location • good transport links • low seasonality for accommodation
Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observing the transformation of the city in real time • finding the history of the city and the cultural offer by way of circuits/walks organized by various organizations • warm and pleasant atmosphere • deep emotions • visual and auditory pleasure
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leisure time spent in a pleasant, relaxing and educational way • for foreign visitors the chance to visit the area and understand the history and culture of this unique city, otherwise not very publicized • the existence of some spaces where you can satisfy your physiological needs, conducive to self-actualization and addressing a large audience rather than exclusive one (i.e. loyal to art galleries) • information and learning something new • feeling good • forget about everyday duties • feeling the authentic character of life in past epochs • rest and relax

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Table—*Continued*

WEAKNESSES	
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of proper promotion of capital elements, very small amount of promotional materials and information and lack of appropriate marketing programs • air conditioners that damage the aesthetic facades of great architectural value and the buildings of historical significance • limited cultural opportunities for families, there are places in the city with a much richer cultural and leisure offer for families • the transformation of <i>Curtea Sticlarilor</i> (glassworks courtyard) into the “Brewers Courtyard” • the abandonment of heritage buildings • events in inadequate spaces/locations • failure to notify program • poor management of the UAP (Artists Union) network of art galleries (obsolete exhibition spaces, lack of qualified personnel, untrained custodians, etc.) • many historical buildings require restoration and/or consolidation, many of them are utterly decrepit • low attractiveness • the area has a very low profile and is not viewed as a tourist destination in its own right
Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of uniform renovation work in the Old Town: some impeccably restored buildings, others incompetently restored, the red dot homes, vacant lots full of weeds and rubbish, obsolete infrastructure, and so on • ads and advertising banners that exceed the limits of common sense and sometimes vandalize some cultural capital assets • lack of facilities for people with disabilities and children • unkempt green areas • overcrowded traffic • obsolete infrastructure • congestion • very limited parking space • crowds, mess and pollution • unsatisfactory network of tourist information centers
Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • irresponsible marketing • in many cases it is difficult to obtain information on the history, features, etc. of various cultural assets • a lot of passive rather than active cultural assets • lack of visitor knowledge as to where attractions are located
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • difficulty in acquiring knowledge and appreciating cultural history

 OPPORTUNITIES

Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the restoration of buildings with a cultural value and their opening to the public • street performances • the development of pedestrians only streets • the Old Town, buildings from the interwar period • exceptional artists • the development of new tourism products • rehabilitate the key public squares on a modern basis and turn them into illustrative spaces for a European city center • creating a pedestrian and bicycle traffic system • promoting public spaces • a functional rethinking, as some streets and squares in the central area should act as places of socio-cultural interaction and community sites
Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public transport, including bus tours that facilitate access to the elements of the cultural capital (Bucharest's public transport system is the largest in Romania and one of the largest in Europe; it includes the metro, buses, trams and trolleybuses) • the large number and diversity of catering units • Bucharest's crime rate is rather low as compared to other European capital cities
Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • picturesque, melancholy, and charming city atmosphere • active participation
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • long term learning/life long education

 THREATS

Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new buildings piled up without any architectural sense or logic among historical buildings • increased risk of collapse or detachment of parts of abandoned buildings • the transformation of the Old Town into a pub and the destruction of the historical landmarks in the area • noise, dirt • digital performances on the web • closing the theatres during the summer season • local quality—very few brand-name products • other cultural venues in city/region offer more activities for daily family outings • lack of urgent intervention can lead to the irreversible degradation of valuable cultural assets • increased competition from other areas
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Table—*Continued*

THREATS	
Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor infrastructure • no truly pedestrian street or proper sidewalks • destruction of historical vestiges by irresponsible refurbishment actions • the high number of illegally parked cars and the lack of response by the authorities hampers the access to cultural attractions and makes the area unfriendly to visitors • all kinds of cables hangings above the streets • many often unprotected construction sites that can create discomfort, hinder access and be a danger to people • traffic congestion, reckless drivers and the deplorable state of the roads • stray dogs • numerous and aggressive beggars and homeless people
Experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low level of safety • downtown area is aggressive, very crowded and very hectic, which can cause discomfort and disorientation • compared to the central areas of other European cities, the city center of Bucharest is less attractive • children may get bored after a short time, as compared to other venues
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • there are more appealing areas outside this location, offering greater potential benefits for leisure time with the family

The obtained data provide useful information for developing the marketing mix.¹ In what follows, some suggestions will be made for the eight components of the mix (often used in place or destination marketing).

Product. The product can be a complex mix of a physical goods (the city), services (transport, accommodation, catering, etc.) and the experience of the cultural event or assets. The product could be mainly oriented towards the distinctive cultural capital of the area and to the sustainable urban tourism development, in order to make Bucharest's city center a more pleasant place to live in, to spend time and to attract more visitors, meeting the current requirements and shaping the future without losing the distinctive identity of the area. It is "the thing" that will fulfill the needs of visitors and make them gain maximum benefits. The benefits can be recreational, educational and/or social.

Place. It refers to distribution channels. The identification of the distribution channels concerns the transmission of the "final product provided," the "message" of the place, to the potential target markets. It can identify two main

distribution channels regarding the separation of the selected target markets: the internal one and the external.

Promotion. On the Internet, in journals, brochures, television, exhibitions, fairs and events, etc.

Price. It is only a part of what visitors may pay with when purchasing a cultural product; one must also consider time and convenience.

Partnership. Stakeholders in this partnership can be: local and governmental authorities, cultural institutions and organizations and other suppliers of cultural products, travel agents and suppliers of tourist products, research centers and residents. Four levels of partnerships can be identified: partnership with actors and decision makers at the local level; partnership at regional level; partnership at national level and partnership at international levels.

People. They are crucial. This element refers on the one hand to human resources and on the other hand to residents who contribute to the development of the place. For example, “a condition to obtain a higher value added from the cultural tourism is the local population’s involvement. The cultural potential may be changed into a source of various activities throughout the year, not only in the tourist season, preserving the cultural attractions, providing funds for investment, mobilizing volunteers, finding partners to prevent the cultural heritage deterioration—the basis of the cultural tourism and not only. All of them imply the involvement of the locals and communities, since the transformation of an area into a museum does not guarantee the sustainable development” (Ioan-Franc and Iştoc 2007, 91).

Packaging. It could have a lot of forms and duration and should be applied to specific target markets.

Programming. This involves the elements and the quality of the style of the area.

Conclusions and Further Remarks

THE PAPER was based on the collection of primary and secondary research data. First of all it provides an audit of the cultural profile of the studied area (Bucharest’s downtown). The key issue was the ASEB model, which focuses on four specific areas of visitor appeal: activities, settings, experience and benefits. “Essentially this gives an overview of the site in terms of its Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats set against other important criteria, namely its leisure activities, its setting, (that is where the activity takes place) experiences offered for visitors and benefits (what people gain from the

visit)” (Sterry and Leighton 2003, 4). This method provided invaluable tools for the qualitative evaluation of the cultural assets in downtown Bucharest and it contributes to a place marketing plan focused on the cultural capital-based sustainable development and meant to revitalize, sustain and utilize the cultural assets in order to reflect our sense of place.

The method (in-depth interviews) helps provide insight into the consumer’s mind, rather than figures (asking the person to rate the attraction with a figure), which can be impersonal and not informative, since people generally think in words rather than in figures. Thus, the study provides insight into customer satisfaction, and it does not merely give a quantitative measure of it. However, some disadvantages of the method came out during the interviews. The residents, in particular, found it difficult to express themselves in words, detailing the experiences and benefits gained from cultural consumption. For others, articulating benefits in terms of weaknesses or threats seemed illogical. And some people had a problem with distinguishing and separating the experiences from the benefits. Another disadvantage of the method is that it requires more time for the collection of data.

The results of the study can be useful for the elaboration of competitive policies and strategic plans in order to attract potential target markets (new investments, visitors, residents, etc.).

Strategic planning is a very important step because the local authorities, on the one hand, and the private sector, on the other hand, must cooperate starting from common interests and policies, in order to define the motivations and goals of the development, which in most cases differ from one another.

However, the most important aspect is that the city’s vision and objectives and the development strategy depend on the distinctive local characteristics, the particularities of each place on the one hand and the expectations of the potential visitors, on the other hand. In order to be effective, the final strategic marketing plan should be based on these features.

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Note

1. The marketing mix concept was introduced in 1957 by Neil H. Bordon (Snak, Baron, and Neacșu 2001) and Professor McCarthy proposed the now classic early ’60s model of 4Ps (product, price, place, promotion) (Kotler 2003). The marketing mix strategy consists of dosing and handling the coherence and unity of the four variables in order to achieve the targets set in the marketing program and, as Kotler said, as economists use in their work mainly two components, supply and demand,

marketers consider the 4Ps a kind of toolbox that we use to guide all marketing planning (Kotler 1986). In marketing culture, for tourism and destinations, experts have added other variables to the model: 5Ps (product, persons, place, price, promotion) (Hagoort 2005), 7Ps (product, place, price, promotion, people, processes, physical evidence) (Snak, Baron, and Neacșu 2001), or 8Ps (product, partnership, people, packaging, programme, place, price, promotion) (Morrison 1999) (for more detail see Iștoc 2005).

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Abstract

Evaluating Bucharest's Downtown Cultural Assets and the Satisfaction and Benefits Gained by Their Consumers

This paper proposes a qualitative analysis of cultural assets of downtown Bucharest. For this purpose the framework and methodology for research support was the ASEB (Activities, Settings, Experiences and Benefits) grid analysis, as a focused SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) derivative. It is based on a field research informed by 182 qualitative in-depth interviews undertaken in Bucharest. The survey explores satisfaction, experiences and benefits gained from visiting the cultural asset in Bucharest downtown. It also points to what cultural consumers actually want or expect from their visit. The study is meant as a starting point for the creation of a place marketing plan.

Keywords

cultural assets, cultural heritage, consumer satisfaction, benefits, ASEB grid analysis, marketing mix