

# TIMIȘOARA, A EUROPEAN TOURIST DESTINATION

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## Abstract

*The tourist destination is, for the modern tourist, not only a geographic space but a mixture of natural and anthropogenic elements in which human nature plays a special role. Currently, the tourist, besides his/her expectations regarding infrastructure, tourist resources and services, wants to be integrated into the local community, to become part of that destination.*

*Located in west Romania, close to the rivers Timiș and Bega, Timișoara has always been the place where people lived in harmony regardless of nationality. In the present European context, its designation, under the brand „Light up your city”, as European Capital of Culture in 2021 is beneficial for the local and national tourism.*

*In 2015 the number of tourist arrivals in Timișoara was 279.349, which represents a small percentage of barely 2,81% of the total tourist arrivals in Romania. This title compels the local authorities, the private sector, the NGOs and the local community to collaborate in order to support, develop and promote cultural events. All these are necessary to attract a greater number of tourists in Timișoara.*

**Key words:** *cultural tourism, tourist destination, tourist resources, brand, urban environment*

**JEL Classification:** *L83, Z32*

## 1. Introduction

Over the years, tourists' motivations have suffered a number of changes, but at the basis there still are those regarding rest and recreation, knowledge and welfare. Once motivations evolved, destinations did too.

According to the WTO, in 1992 the destination was considered the geographical area that provides infrastructure and all necessary services for a tourist to spend at least one night and where to develop a form of tourism. Later on (2003), the same organization defined the tourist destination as “... a physical space in which visitors spend at least one night and is made up of tourism products such as support services and attractions, and tourism resources with physical and administrative boundaries that define its management, images/perceptions of market competitiveness”.

The tourist destination is actually the place a tourist chooses to spend his time, the final point of his journey.

The tourist destination includes in its area several individual tourist attractions, one of which is the main one that actually lead to the development of a technical material facility specific to tourism and its respective services. One may say that the tourist destination is considered to be a complex and utterly important element of tourism.

The main types of tourist destinations are:

- Classical destinations that include big urban settlements, seaside and mountain resorts;
- Natural;
- One night stay;
- Business;
- Short-term stays (e.g. weekend).

Their classification can be done taking into consideration the distance from the tourist's residence, thus resulting close and far away destinations.

The main elements of the tourist destination take into account:

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- Location, climate, natural and anthropogenic resources;
- Surroundings and resident population;
- General infrastructure, infrastructure specific to tourism and its respective services.

An element that tends to become extremely important since it contributes to the development of the destination and the influencing of its potential tourists is its image. This must be real and credible, simple, attractive and distinctive. The tools that can make the image of a tourist destination known are slogans, visual symbols and events.

Currently, the alert lifestyle of the vast population, the daily stress, pollution, the internet and social networks, the culture literacy and access to information are leading to an isolation and alienation from nature and the simple „real world”. That is why the current tendency of tourists is to integrate into the mundane of the local community of their holiday destination. Thus, the tourist relaxes, can get to better know and understand the history and the evolution of the destination, enjoy nature and the local culture, interact with the local population, make new friends, live new experiences and not get bored. All these emphasize the fact that the elements making up the tourist destination become more attractive if the entire population involves more and lives new experiences together with the tourists.

Adapting tourist destinations to the new trend becomes an obligation for them to maintain themselves on the tourist offer market.

## 2. Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is one of the tourism forms attracting a great number of tourists, and that can support a tourist destination.

Cultural tourism is a general term referring to leisure travel motivated by one or more aspects of the culture of a particular area (Dictionary of Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Terms, 1996).

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (2002) considers that “Cultural and cultural-cognitive tourism is that form of tourism, which focuses on the cultural environment and that, in its turn, may include the cultural and historic sights of a destination or the cultural-historic heritage, the values and lifestyle of the local population, arts, crafts, traditions and customs of the local population”.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO Report 2012) considers cultural tourism as “trips whose main or secondary purpose is visiting sites and events whose cultural and historic values have made them part of the cultural heritage of a community”.

The main themes of cultural tourism and the forms of tourist activity it generates were well highlighted by Claude Origet du Cluzeau in her work entitled “Le tourisme culturel”.

**Table 1. Cultural tourism – themes and forms**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Form of tourist activity</b>
Religious	Pilgrimage, charismatic meetings
Discovering cities, regions, countries	Circuit, holiday travel
Historic	Circuit, visiting the site
Memorial	Circuit and trip
Ethnic	Circuit, holiday travel
Artistic	Circuit, internship
Crafts / Industry	Theme circuit, trip in industrial sites
Parks and gardens	Circuit, holiday travel, trip
Festivals, cultural events	Holiday travel

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Form of tourist activity</b>
Gastronomic	Holiday travel, circuit, gastronomic internship
Shopping	Holiday travel in a city
Linguistic	Holiday travel with the school of the family
Culture pedagogy	Classes outside school

In the urban environment, cultural tourism can be considered a mass phenomenon, as a result of the permanent demand for different cultural activities. Developing urban cultural tourism has most of times positive effects, but there could also be negative effects as a result of inadequate exploitation of resources.

**Table 2. Effects of urban tourism**

<b>Positive effects</b>	<b>Negative effects</b>
- increase of the number of accommodation facilities;	- increase of the pollution degree;
- emergence of the belongingness;	- emergence of pressure over equipment and services;
- economic relaunch;	- changes of the traditional life;
- creation of new jobs;	- increase of criminal offence rate;
- enlarging the society's horizons;	- urban agglomeration;
- reduction of inhabitants' immigration.	- inadequate usage of existing spaces.

Big European cities are known destinations appreciated by tourists, which is reflected by the annual tourist arrival numbers. Thus, in 2014 London accounted for 17,4 million foreign tourists, and Paris accounted for 14,97 million foreign tourists.

The European Union has as main objective the harmonious development of tourism in all member states. The European Capital of Culture project comes as an initiative to support and promote European culture and urban tourism. It came into being in 1985, at the initiative of Melina Mercouri, the Greek Minister of Culture back then, and the first city to be awarded this title was Athens.

This project has been successful ever since 1985, and 54 cities have enjoyed the title of European Capital of Culture. Many more cities submit their candidacy for this title.

Timișoara was designated European Capital of Culture in 2021.

### **3. Timișoara – tourist destination**

Timișoara is one of Romania's cities, located in the south-west Pannonian Plain, more precisely in the south of the West Plain, close to the rivers Timiș and Bega, at an average altitude of 90m above the sea, and lies on an area of 130, 5 km<sup>2</sup>.

Regarding the first mention in documents, there are some uncertainties, the specialists say it was in 1212 or 1266, but the archaeological discoveries revealed that the area had been inhabited since the Roman conquest.

The city is located at short distance from four European capital cities, as the journey there takes just a few hours (table 3).

**Table 3. Distance from Timișoara to Romania and neighbour countries' capital cities**

<b>Capital city</b>	<b>Distance from Timișoara (km)</b>
Bucharest (Romania)	550
Belgrade (Serbia)	170
Budapest (Hungary)	300
Vienna (Austria)	550

The city can be reached by road, rail and air (Traian Vuia International Airport), and this aspect facilitates the circulation of potential tourists from the entire Europe.

According to the Autonomous Transport Company Timișoara, public transportation is provided by 11 tram lines, whose tracks have a total length of 134,3 km, 8 trolleybus lines with a total length of 70,46 km, 11 bus lines that have 118,7 km, and 8 taxi companies. Local authorities have bought seven “vaporettos” that will provide public transportation on the Bega Canal.

The city, also known as “Little Vienna” or the “City of Parks” inherits, from an architectural point of view, a vast heritage of historic monuments (about 14.500), being the largest architectural area in the country, grouped in three districts, Cetate, Iosefin and Fabric. Of all, the most known are:

- Unirii Square with a number of buildings: the Roman-Catholic Dome finished in 1754, the Serbian Orthodox Cathedral, the Serbian Bishopric Palace (1745), the Baroque Palace built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Holy Trinity Monument (1740), Bruck House built in 1910, all in baroque style, some of them showing secession and art nouveau elements;
- Libertății Square with Saint Nepomuk’s statue (1756) made in rococo style, the Former Town hall (1731-1734) that illustrates the provincial baroque style;
- Dicasterial Palace (19<sup>th</sup> century) and Deschan Palace (1802), the first one built in Renaissance style and the second in neoclassical style;
- the houses: Eugene of Savoy (1817), Mercy (1718-1734), with the iron guilds’ tree (house of workers);
- Maria Theresia Bastion built between 1730-1735 represents parts of the fortress of Timișoara;
- Victoriei Square with the Romanian Opera House and the National Theatre, built in baroque style with classical elements between 1872-1875, whose façade was rebuilt in Brancovenesc style, the statue of Romulus and Remus (1926), copy of the “LupaCapitolina”, a gift from Rome, Lloyd Palace built between 1910-1912 in eclectic style with secession elements, the Metropolitan Orthodox Cathedral built between 1936-1946 in Byzantine style with Romanian influences, Huniade Castle – built by Iancu de Hunedoare between 1443-1447 on the premises of the old castle that belonged to Charles of Anjou. Currently, the castle hosts the collections of the Banat Museum.
- Traian Square also called Crying Square where the Holy Cross is, the Sorrow Bell, St. George Church (1745-1755) in neo-Roman style, the Serbian Community Palace (1895) in eclectic style, Mercury Palace built at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in secession style, Millennium Church built between 1896-1901 in neo-Roman style, the Synagogue that was built between 1885-1889 in neo-Maurish style;
- The Roman-Catholic Church in Iosefin built in 1774 in baroque style;
- The House with the Anchor dates back to 1775 and was built on the premises of the first Port of Timișoara.

Timișoara’s population at the last census (2011) was of 319.279 inhabitants, being the third city of Romania according to the number of inhabitants. The population density is 2.368 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. The city is inhabited by Romanians (81,36%), Hungarians, Serbians, Germans, Roma, Jews, Slovaks, Ukrainians and other ethnic groups. The religious structure is also different, each citizen having the freedom to his own religion (table 4), the orthodox being the majority.

**Table 4. Religious denominations of Timișoara's population**

Religious denominations	Percentage of population (%)
Orthodox	74,99
Roman-Catholic	7,1
Reformed	1,3
Greek-Catholic	1,14
Pentecostal	2,04
Baptist	1,23
Other religions (mosaic, Islamic, Sabbatarian, evangelic, Jehovah's witnesses etc.)	2,75
Undeclared	9,45

The structure according to ethnic groups and religious denominations highlight the tolerant European spirit and the multiculturalism of this city.

The name of "city of premiers" suits Timișoara since, over time, numerous such events took place here:

- 1718- The first brewery on the territory of present Romania
- 1728 – The Bega Canal – the first navigable canal in our country
- 1745 – construction of the town hospital, the first one in Romania (24 years before the one in Vienna and 34 years before Budapest)
- 1753 – Timișoara, town with permanent theatre season (third town in the Habsburg Empire after Vienna and Budapest)
- 1760 – first town of the Habsburg Empire with street lighting with lamps (with suet and oil)
- 1815 – Josef Klapka's library, the first library in the Habsburg Empire, Kingdom of Hungary and Romanian territories
- 1857 –first town in the Habsburg Empire with street lighting with gas
- 1884 –first European town to have introduced general electrical street lighting, with 731 lamps
- 1938 – first welding machinery for train and tram rails, invention of professor Corneliu Micloși
- 1942 – first trolleybus line in Romania
- 1953 – the only city in the country in which three state theatres in Romanian, Hungarian and German
- 1969 – first alphanumeric computer in Romania;
- 2016 –first city Capital of Youth in Romania.

The city has numerous museums, art galleries and cultural institutions that attract both local people and tourists.

Most of Timișoara's museums are hosted in monument buildings:

- The Banat Museum is hosted by the Huniade Castle;
- The Art Museum is inside the Baroque Palace;
- [Religious Art Collection of the Orthodox Metropolitan Cathedral](#) in the basement of the Cathedral;
- The Religious Art Collection of the Serbian Orthodox Bishopric inside the Serbian Orthodox Bishopric Palace;
- [The Religious Art Collection of the Romano-Catholic Bishopric](#) in the Romano-Catholic Bishopric;
- [Banat Village Museum](#), the Banat folk architecture reserve (open air museum) at the Green Forest;
- „Corneliu Mikloși” Public Transport Museum ;

- Memorial of the Revolution of 1989 Museum.

Several art galleries organize various varnishing days. Some of the cultural institutions in Timișoara are:

- Romanian National Opera House, opened in 1946;
- “Banatul” Philharmonic Timișoara, opened in 1947;
- “Mihai Eminescu” National Theatre, established in 1947;
- “CsikyGergely” Hungarian State Theatre that opened in 1953;
- German State Theatre, opened in 1953;
- “Merlin” Theatre for Children and Youth;
- Timișoara House of Culture;
- Directorate for Culture, Religions and National Cultural Heritage of the Timiș County;
- French Intitute Timișoara;
- German Cultural Centre Timișoara;
- Intercultural Institute Timișoara;
- Students House of Culture;
- Centre for Culture and Arts of the Timiș County ;
- AUĂLEU – garage and court theatre.

The multitude of events annually organised in the city have drawn the attention of Romanian and foreign tourists. Annual festivals are from these categories: music, theatre, cinema, literature, dance, fashion, arts. The most popular festivals are:

- Jazz TMT Timișoara;
- Musical Timișoara;
- Opera and Operetta Festival;
- Vest Fest;
- Timișoara’s „Ruga”;
- Festival of the Hearts;
- Timishort Film Festival;
- FEST-FDR;
- TESZT;
- StudentFest;
- PLAI;
- International literature Festival;
- International Dance Festival.

The city has specific technical-material facilities (accommodation facilities, public food services, leisure facilities) that support tourism development. The number of classified accommodation facilities in 2015, according to the National Institute of Statistics, was of 95, with a capacity of 5.277 beds.

The number of tourists arrived in Timisoara in the past five years has increased, a significant increase taking place in 2015 as compared to 2014 (table 5).

**Table 5. Evolution of the number of tourist arrivals in Timișoara**

Year	No. of tourists (persons)
2011	210879
2012	227546
2013	224471
2014	235692
2015	279349

Source: www.insse.ro Tempo Online, time series TUR104E, updated 19.04.2016

Counting on all these realities Timișoara submitted its candidacy to the title of European of Culture. This candidacy was supported by a complex project, made of eight chapters: „Introduction – General considerations”, „Contribution to the long-term strategy”, „European Dimension”, „Cultural and artistic content”, „Implementation capacity”, „Range of action”, „Management” and „Additional information”, and the concept they chose for the city was „Light up your city”.

The brand of a tourist destination has a significant importance as, regardless of the chosen form (logo, image, name, concept), it creates an emotional bond destination-tourist.

Taking into consideration the geographic location, the peaceful cohabitation of all inhabitants, regardless of ethnicity and religion, there were many premieres in Timișoara that lead to changes all around Europe, they considered that the message „light up your city” is adequate and of great impact.

Any spark can bring light, something new, can transform a passive mood into an active one, and change is necessary in the present European context. Culture can contribute to the acceleration of changes, it can give people the feeling of belonging to a community and the desire to shape their future.

The cultural programme for 2021 is set up like a journey with „stations – programme/project” and trails along the Bega Canal by connecting ideas, people and places. The necessary budget is 48,5 million euros, of which 20 million will be granted from the local budget of the city, 5 million from the budget of the County Council Timiș, 1,5 million from the European Commission, and the rest from the Ministry of Culture and the Romanian Government.

The designation of European Capital of Culture in 2021 engages the local authorities, the private sector, the NGOs, and especially the citizens to involvement and implementation of the project. Thus, Timișoara will become a well-known European tourist destination, and the benefits will be cultural, social and economic.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Tourism has developed annually, and tourists’ desires have changed. Choosing a destination for leisure is done according to personal motivations, but is based on emotion. Currently, tourists want to integrate into the local community and have new experiences.

Culture has always been a common language for all people, and cultural tourism has had a permanent demand, which is why the European Union supports this type of tourism.

The European Capital of Culture title awarded to cities following a competition is the recognition of the tourist potential and a chance for these cities to become well-known tourist destinations.

In 2021 Timișoara will be European Capital of Culture, and the success is due to a well-thought project that has at its core people, places and ideas. The purpose of the programme is the reestablishment of the cultural diversity, dialogue and tolerance, by reintegrating these values of Timișoara in the daily life, values that have been adapted to this century.

We hope Timișoara will become tourist destination appreciated by Romanian and foreign tourists, an example to follow, especially now in the context of the social situation in Europe.

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