



ROMANIAN FAIRS AND FESTIVALS – KEY ELEMENTS IN PROMOTING THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract

Despite the importance of fairs and festivals in promoting the Romanian intangible cultural heritage and their great support for the economy of our country, little research has been conducted in order to understand the behavior of the Romanian tourists regarding fairs and festivals attendance and their intention to travel in one location only to attend fairs or festivals. This article is based on the findings of a quantitative survey, conducted in 2016. The main objective of this study is to determine if the Romanians are interested in attending fairs and festivals, and if they are willing to travel for this purpose. The graphical representations have been created in Microsoft Office Excel by the authors.

Key words:

Intangible cultural heritage, festivals, fairs, traditions, promotion.

JEL Codes:

L83, I21

1. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this study is to emphasize the contribution of fairs and festivals in promoting the Romanian intangible cultural heritage. In Romania, fairs and festivals are the main places where Romanian producers and craftsmen come to sell their products and present their traditional customs, values. Each year there are organized several fairs and festivals in every big city. They have a different theme, depending on the season or the religious celebration. This is an opportunity for the producers to make new contacts and become more visible to the consumers. Additionally, we will try to emphasize the great economic impact of the fairs and festivals for the communities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

We begin this paper by questioning: are Romanian fairs and festivals, key elements in promoting the intangible cultural heritage? It is

known that fairs and festivals bring a great economic gain for the host cities and regions. They also have a big contribution to reveal and honor cultural traditions (Crampton, McKay, 1997), whilst, being very important for the preservation and promotion of the cultural identity of one place. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) the Intangible Cultural Heritage was described in 2003, as “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage”. In Article 2 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, it is stated that “intangible cultural heritage” is manifested in the following domains:

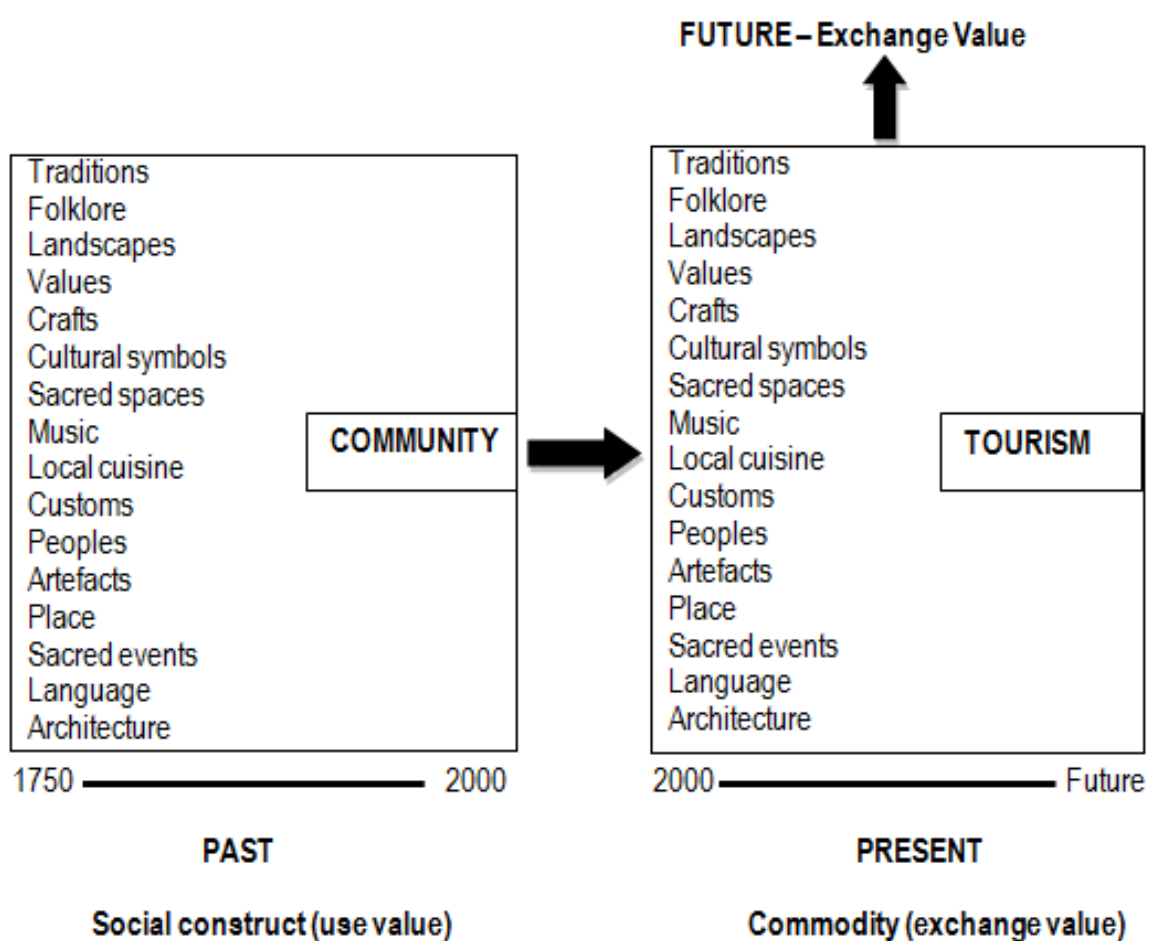
- Oral traditions and expressions, including language;
- Performing arts;
- Social practices, rituals and festive events;

- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the Universe;
- Traditional craftsmanship.

For a better understanding of the relationship between intangible cultural heritage and tourism we will present in the figure 1 how the commodification of cultural heritage occurs over time. If, between 1750 to 2000, culture, such as customs, language, artifacts, architecture, and music belong to the community for their social construction only, starting with the year 2000, culture begins to be

transformed and reconstructed as a tourism product. Because of this, it may be possible that in the future, the authenticity of culture will be lost (George, 2003). This is why we think that fairs and festivals have such an important role when it comes to the preservation of the intangible cultural heritage. With their help people can keep in touch with their traditions and customs.

Figure 1 Commodification of cultural heritage for tourism



Source: George, W.E. (2010)

Festivals are defined as the organization of a specific event within the cultural domain, and which may have a significant contribution in terms of originality or innovation in its field. Also, festivals entails a certain level of organization, coupled with a minimum duration, and certain stability as well as frequency over

time in the organization (Frey, 1994; Getz, 2008).

The festival's goals may include presenting old traditional customs, craftsman way of work, old food recipes, and values. Through all these thing, they help to build-up intercultural relationships between communities.

In the last years, cultural festivals might have been the most important source of cultural consumption. This happens because, they reflect a good experience, in which visitors attend with the aim of enjoying a live performance that expires at the moment it is attended by Romanian folk song performers from the country and the Diaspora. This festival took place for the first time in 1969 and became the most important springboard for young performers of folk music from all over the country and beyond.

Food festivals are also very popular in our country. They represent the best way of promoting the Romanian traditional gastronomy. These fairs and festivals take place in different locations in Romania, having different themes. This has become a good way of promoting the image of the locality or the region where they are organized, and attract hundreds, sometimes even thousands of tourists, eager to meet the customs or traditions of the people from other regions. The indubitable value, quality and diversity of Romanian gastronomy are the prerequisites for creating a recognized brand at European level by promoting them in gastronomic fairs and festivals.

Most often, these three types of Romanian fairs and festivals are combined in order to form a single one.

According to the UNESCO website, one of the most recent Romanian intangible cultural heritage that was inscribed on the List of the Intangible Cultural Patrimony of Humanity is the folk carpet tissue. It is described as “an expression of creativity, identity and social cohesion, the techniques have been passed down from generation to generation in some families, but also by workshops and educational institutions”.

Romanian fairs and festivals are therefore a complex phenomenon, a cultural expression and process where culture is created, consumed and sometimes, reproduced.

3. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

For the collection of data, a quantitative research method was used. The pilot study had a number of 116 respondents and its purpose was to observe if the respondents are interested in attending fairs or festivals during their vacation. The research was conducted between 16.09.2016 and 25.09.2016. The online questionnaire was done through the following platform:

<http://www.isondaje.ro/sondaj/340216251/>, and it was distributed through the social networking website Facebook.

The target was selected according to certain demographic criteria, such as males and females between the ages of 18 and 35 years old from various regions of Romania. These categories of people were chosen because they are relatively more open-minded to new experiences and with a higher desire to travel.

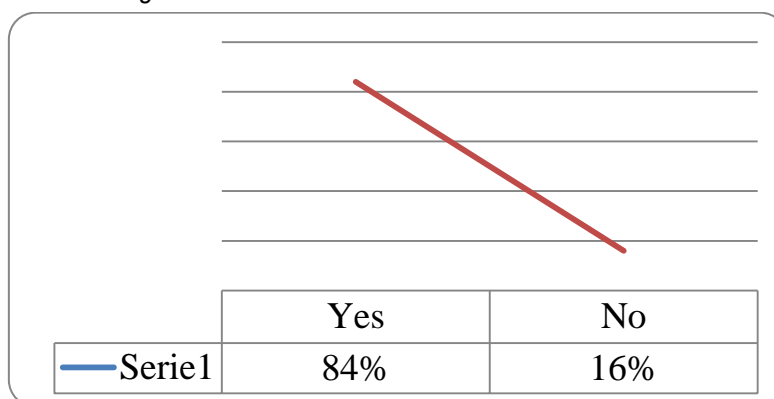
The main objective of this study is to determine if the Romanians are interested in attending fairs and festivals, and if they are willing to travel for this purpose. The graphical representations have been created in Word by the authors.

4. RESULTS

We selected for our article the most relevant 7 questions from a survey related to this topic.

The majority of respondents (84%) intends to attend fairs and festivals if they are organized within their tourist destination during their vacation. This means that they are interested to find more about the intangible cultural heritage of their tourist destination.

Figure 1 Desire to attend to fairs and festivals



Source: Own survey, 2016

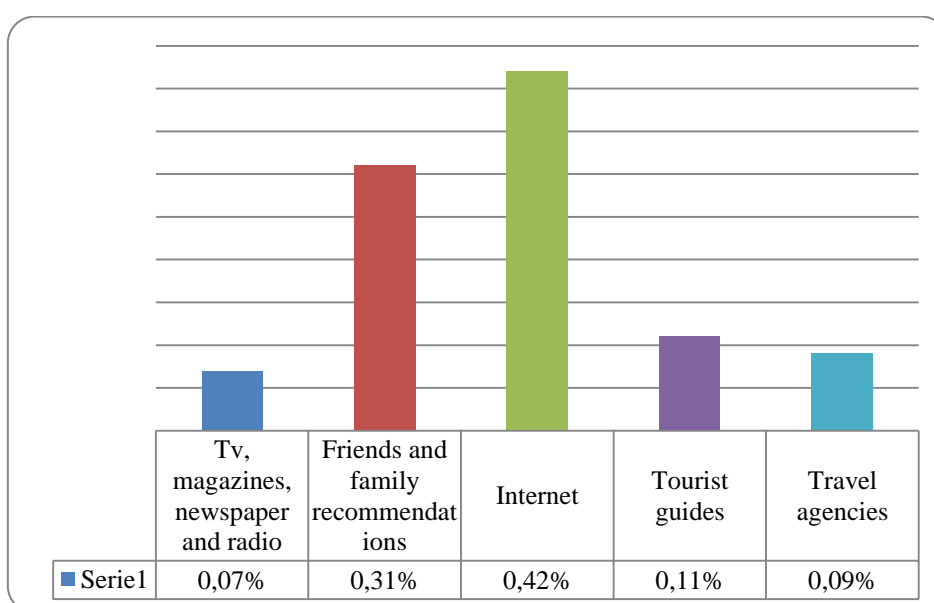
Considering that the internet is highly used by the respondents to choose their vacation destination, the former can also be used to promote the intangible cultural heritage through fairs and festivals. An important aspect of this, is that the tourists can access the information in a timely manner and at no extra cost.

The tourism behavior derives from human behavior and notices the perception that a tourist has towards a certain area. These perceptions are based on experience or information received from friends, relatives or the media.

Recommendations from friends and families is the second source from where the tourists inform themselves about a leisure destination. Swarbrooke & Horner (2007) conducted a study on tourism behavior that presents a number of factors that influence consumers in acquiring specific product-specific destinations.

From the figure above (figure 2), we can also see that the travel agencies and tourist guides have the smaller impact in tourist behavior regarding their way of informing themselves about their tourist destination.

Figure 2 Sources of information used to choose a vacation destination

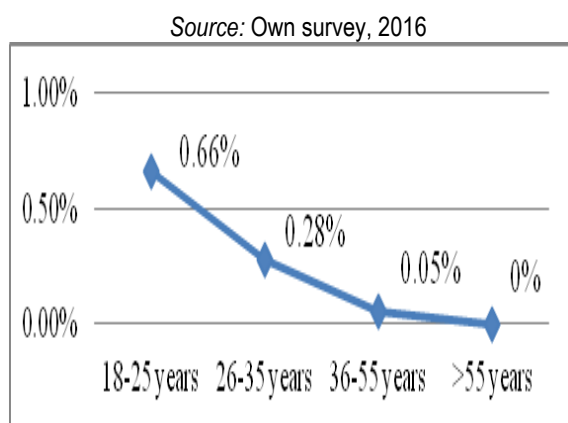


Source: Own survey, 2016

The majority of respondents are young, 18-25 years old (66%), followed by those of 26-35 years (28%). We can observe from Figure 3 that it is mainly young people in the 18-25 age group and those in the 26-35 age group that are most interested in participating in fairs and festivals during their vacation. Regarding the gender, women represent the majority of

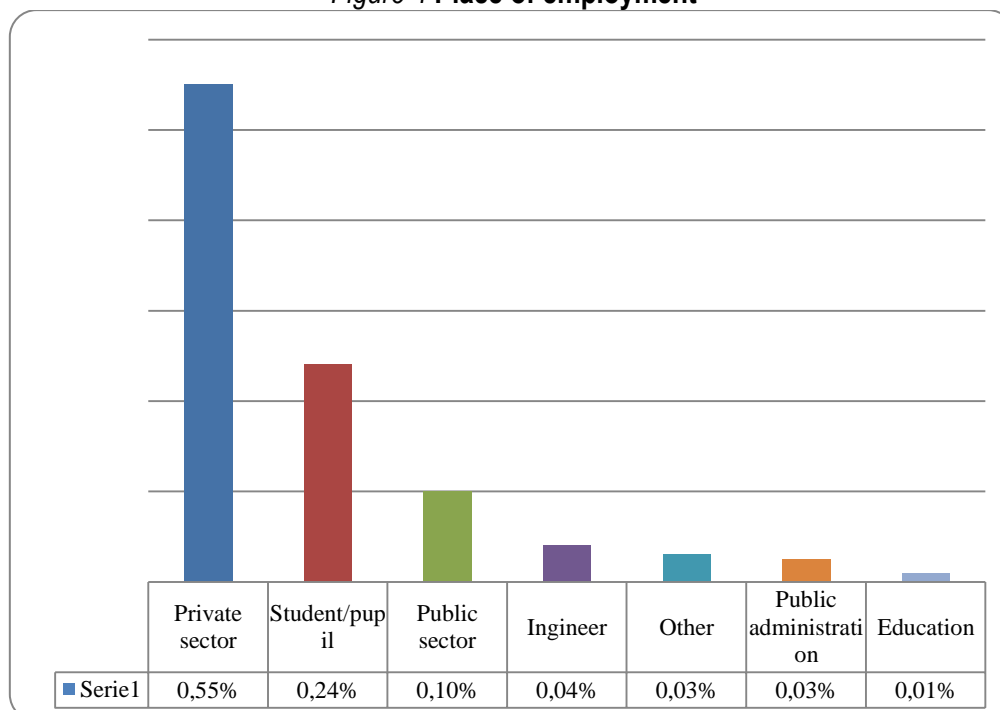
respondents of this study (63%). This fact is very interesting because from these results we can infer that the young respondents are interested in finding out more things about the traditions, values, identity of their tourist destination.

Figure 3 Age group



From the graph below, it can be observed that the majority of respondents work in the private sector (55%), followed by students/pupils (24%). A smaller percentage of the respondents are work in education. Concerning, the last graduate studies of the respondents, the results show that most of them have completed a form of higher education (83%). The majority of respondents which would attend fairs and festivals during their vacation have a university degree followed by those who have completed secondary education (16%).

Figure 4 Place of employment

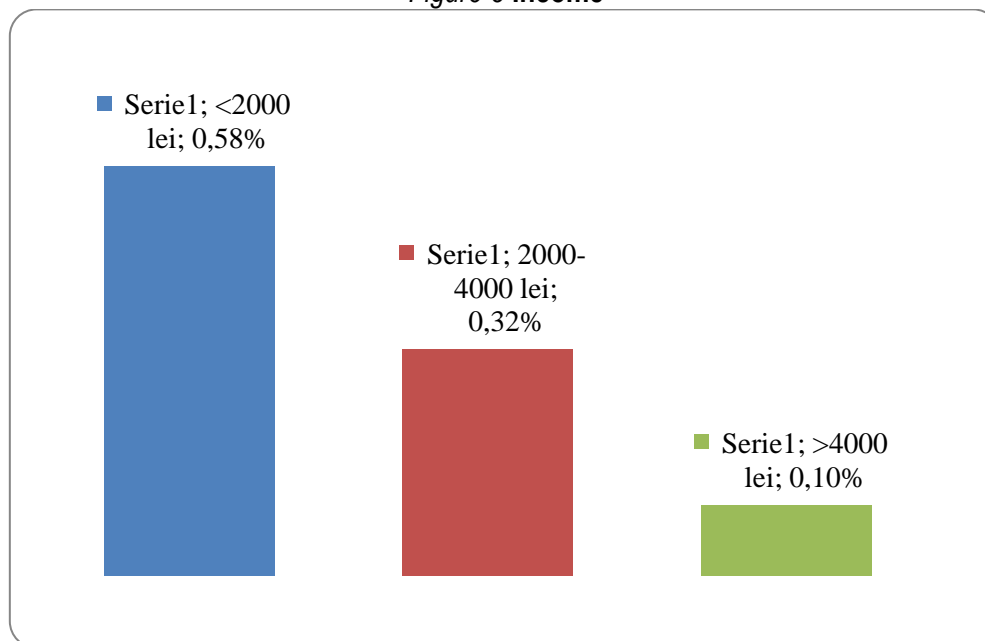


Source: Own survey, 2016

Regarding the income, the majority of the respondents has an income smaller than 2000 lei (58.6%).

From Figure 5 it can be observed that the respondents with a lower income are more interested in visiting fairs and festivals during their vacation.

Figure 5 Income



Source: Own survey, 2016

From all these results, we can draw the profile of the respondents. Firstly, most of the respondents enjoy attending to festivals and use the internet to organize and choose their vacation destination. They also graduate of higher education institution and work for a private company. Their income is approximately 2000 lei/month. Secondly, the majority of respondents who prefer to attend to fairs, events and festivals are young people, with the age between 18-26 years old.

From the data shown above (figure 5), we can observe that the intangible cultural heritage is also promoted through the internet. As such, online campaigns to promote the intangible cultural heritage can be done as most of the respondents have internet access.

Of great importance are the impressions that tourists leave with at the end of their vacation, as a significant number of respondents chose their destination based on recommendations from friends and family.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In Romania there are many forms and types of fairs and festivals, but the most important ones are those who promote our intangible cultural heritage as gastronomic, craftsmen and musical festivals, and most often, these three types of Romanian fairs and festivals are combined in order to form a single one.

The purpose of this study was to see to what extent are the Romanian inhabitants interested in attending these fairs and festivals, to see if they are willing to travel in order to participate to such events, and also to discover their profile and the source of information on choosing their tourist destination. The findings of the present study reflect that the respondents were interested in attending to such events in a very large percentage (84%), which means that Romanian people are still interested in finding out more things about the traditions, values and identity of their tourist destination

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