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LOCAL SENTIMENTS, GLOBAL IMPACT: THE CASE OF TIMISOARA AS THE EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE IN 2023

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ABSTRACT. *Measuring the impact of the European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) program on host cities has been a prominent focus and constant challenge in academic literature, with several studies exploring how the program aligns with broader European objectives and contributes to promoting European identity and unity. Since its establishment in 1985, the program of ECoC focused on fostering cultural diversity and promoting intercultural dialogue, allowing the host cities to enhance international relations and promote cultural exchange transcending national boundaries. The current paper is focused on examining the effects of Timișoara's designation as a European Capital of Culture, providing valuable insights into the program's broader societal influence and its effects on the fabric of urban life in Timișoara. The 2023 ECoC effects in Timișoara, Romania, were evaluated through an innovative approach wherein sentiment analysis was integrated, leveraging data from the city's social media platforms.*

KEYWORDS: European Capitals of Culture (ECoC), Culture, Sentiment analysis, Urban revitalization, Timișoara.

JEL classification: C55, C8, G28, O5.

Introduction

The “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) program, initiated in 1985, is widely recognised as one of the European Union’s most successful cultural endeavours, attracting growing attention from policymakers, academics, and the media alike (Palmer *et al.*, 2009, p.5) and so far has been awarded to more than 60 European cities that have had the privilege of hosting it. Four generations of European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) have been appointed, each corresponding to different iterations of European legislation (Sassatelli, 2009, p.137).

As the European legislative framework has evolved, there have been modifications to the program's objectives and the cultural development strategies implemented by participating cities (Grodach *et al.*, 2007, p.350; Malcom, 2004, p.892). Presently, attaining the ECoC title involves an internal national competition wherein candidate cities are afforded several years to craft a culturally rich program with a European dimension, emphasising cooperation among various stakeholders. Importantly, these programs must prioritise sustainability and integration into the city's long-term cultural and social development.

Originally named the City of Culture program, its primary objective was to explore the essence of Europe, as it was bestowed upon a different city each year, aiming to foster greater unity among the Member States' populations (García, 2020, p.3). In 2001, the European City of Culture program underwent a name change, becoming the European Capital of Culture. This renaming aimed to underscore the richness and diversity of European culture, highlighting the commonalities shared among European communities. Simultaneously, it sought to foster mutual understanding among European citizens, shifting from economic development and urban regeneration to goals of social regeneration (Bianchini *et al.*, 2013, p.515; Tommarchi *et al.*, 2018, p.156).

Initially intended to showcase European cities' cultural richness and diversity while underscoring their shared cultural legacy and the vibrancy of the arts, the initiative has evolved (Katsarova, 2019, p.2). Presently, holding the title of "European Capital of Culture" is perceived as providing significant marketing advantages for the winning city and its reputation.

Over the past three decades, host cities have increasingly seen the European Capitals of Culture event as a means to rejuvenate and redefine themselves economically and culturally (Immler *et al.*, 2014, p.10). Scholars assert that the event has become an appealing "soft power" asset for the European Union (Sianos, 2017, p.4). This significant cultural event draws considerable domestic and international visitors, improving the city's image and urban revitalisation (Richards *et al.*, 2004, p.1933; García *et al.*, 2013, p.37; Liu, 2014, p.498).

Also known as "Little Vienna," Timișoara is one of Romania's four most important cities, having a history of being a city of "firsts." Back in 1884, it was the first city in continental Europe to light up its streets with electricity, thus inspiring its "European Capital of Culture" slogan "Shine your light, light up your city!" (Rădoi, 2020, p.547; Turșie, 2023, p.126). Also, in 1989 the Anti-Communist Revolution started right here. Timișoara's rich history, where pivotal events have influenced its cultural landscape, reflecting the blend of diverse cultures that have left their mark over the years and the preservation of cultural heritage, alongside various local urban management interventions, played a crucial role in Timișoara being selected as the "European Capital of Culture" for 2021 after the competition that was held back in 2016 (Pavel *et al.*, 2020, p.1), thus being the second city in Romania after Sibiu (ECoC 2007) designated with this distinction. In response to the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Timișoara, slated to be the "European Capital of Culture" (ECoC) in 2021, faced a pivotal decision. The global health crisis necessitated a re-evaluation of priorities, prompting authorities to postpone Timișoara's ECoC title to 2023 (Kővári *et al.*, 2023, p. 3). This decision was pragmatic and reflected the city's commitment to ensuring its residents' and visitors' safety and well-being. The pandemic underscored the need for adaptability and resilience, urging cultural institutions and organisers to navigate uncharted waters while upholding the spirit of cultural celebration. By examining the effects of Timișoara's designation as a "European Capital of Culture," this research aims to shed light on the transformative power of cultural events and initiatives on urban environments, local

communities, and the overall well-being of cities. It also seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the European Capitals of Culture program by highlighting the specific case of Timișoara and its unique position within its history, challenges faced, and opportunities for growth and development. Moreover, this case study adds to the existing literature concerning the significance of the “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) designation for the fourth generation of ECoC cities mandated to design and adhere to monitoring and evaluation plans for their cultural programs. Such approaches hold promise as valuable tools, especially in public policy.

This research represents a unique pioneering effort in examining the effects of Timișoara’s designation as a “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC). Employing sentiment analysis, it investigates the relationship between public perception of the ECoC program and its influence on the city’s economic, cultural and infrastructure indicators. Specifically, this study focuses on the connection between public sentiment towards the program and its ramifications on crucial facets such as tourism influx, cultural vibrancy measured by event participation and frequency, and the strategic infrastructure investments pivotal for the city’s long-term growth and development.

The use of sentiment analysis has emerged as a valuable instrument across various disciplines for effectively capturing and understanding public opinion (Rodríguez-Ibanez *et al.*, 2023, p. 1). Sentiment analysis is “an active and flourishing research field and can be applied in many domains.” It has become increasingly popular for “processing social media data” (Chaturvedi *et al.*, 2018) because it is “the task of extracting and analysing people’s opinions, sentiments, attitudes, perceptions, etc., toward different entities” (Liu, 2015, Chaturvedi *et al.*, 2018, Birjali *et al.*, 2021).

1. Literature Review

1.1 The “European Capital of Culture” Program

Since its inception in the mid-1980s, the “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) initiative has garnered greater acknowledgement of culture’s pivotal role within cities. It is increasingly seen as a driving force for fostering creativity, promoting social and territorial cohesion, and stimulating employment and growth.

According to the European Commission, this initiative is designed to emphasise the variety of cultures across Europe, commemorate the cultural traits that Europeans collectively possess, enhance the feeling of European citizens being part of a shared cultural sphere, and promote the role of culture in advancing urban development. The objectives of the ECoC program have evolved over time. Initially focused on fostering unity among member states and showcasing the vast cultural tapestry of Europe, its aims have expanded to include targeted goals like revitalising urban areas, elevating cities’ global standing, improving their local reputations, and stimulating tourism (Falk *et al.*, 2017, p.2178).

Currently, the title “European Capital of Culture” is awarded each year to two cities located in separate EU countries, and the selection criteria have been developed in several phases. The competition is launched six years in advance, and the ECoC cities are designated four years before the event (European Commission - Decision No 1622/2006/EC). The selection process consists of two stages overseen by a panel of impartial experts within the respective countries: an initial preselection phase where candidates are evaluated, leading to the creation of a shortlist, and a final selection phase occurs nine months later, during which

the panel recommends one city to be awarded the title (European Commission - Decision No 445/2014/EU).

Encouraging the integration of the Programme into the city's long-term strategy is highly encouraged since it directly impacts the local context in terms of economic, social, and cultural development. Consequently, many cities prioritise long-term cultural, social, and economic impacts when competing for the ECoC title (Nechita, 2015). Moreover, incorporating the Programme into long-term strategies may promote polycentric spatial development, encompassing peripheral areas such as rural or former urban regions surrounding the bidding city, thereby enhancing their appeal for business investments, new residents, and tourists (Burksiene *et al.*, 2018, p.69).

Within the past decade (2013-2023), numerous cities across Europe have had the honour of hosting this prestigious event: Marseille, Košice, Riga, Umeå, Mons, Plzeň, San Sebastian, Wrocław, Aarhus, Paphos, Leeuwarden, Valletta, Matera, Plovdiv, Rijeka, Galway, Kaunas, Esch-sur-Alzette, Novi Sad, Timișoara, Elefsina, Veszprém.

The literature review includes various studies that collectively contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the European Capitals of Culture program and its multifaceted impact on city life, encompassing economic, socio-cultural, and artistic dimensions.

Research studies have explored the economic impact of the European Capitals of Culture program on host cities, focusing on factors such as tourism revenue, infrastructure development, and job creation. Additionally, scholars have delved into the socio-cultural dynamics of cities designated as European Capitals of Culture, examining how the program influences local communities, artistic expression, and cultural heritage preservation.

By 2004, the increasing popularity and global recognition of the ECOC event prompted the European Commission to conduct the first comprehensive research on the ECOC program as a whole. Spearheaded by Robert Palmer, who had previously served as the Glasgow 1990 and Brussels 2000 director, this initiative involved surveys and interviews across all previous host cities. The resulting report, commonly referred to as the 'Palmer Report' (2004), emerged as the principal reference guide for ECOC stakeholders (Richards *et al.*, 2004, p.1933; Steiner *et al.*, 2013, p.7). Following the Palmer report, a series of subsequent ECoC reports were authored by the same group of experts and scholars in 2007, 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2015, with support from the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS). The most recent comprehensive evaluation was carried out by García and Cox (2013), analysing the ECOC program's enduring effects over three decades and identifying successful strategies and exemplary practices.

Studies attest to the predominantly positive influence of the "European Capital of Culture" (ECoC) on host cities and regions. Evaluations of past events indicate that local cultural frameworks were presented with promising avenues to enact novel cultural strategies and policies, leading to increased participation in diverse cultural events (Gomes *et al.*, 2018, p. 58). Furthermore, regarding the correlation between ECoC and local development, analyses have demonstrated that cultural initiatives associated with the ECoC enhance the touristic allure of host cities, thereby bolstering their international and regional standing (Błaszczyk *et al.*, 2023, p.2).

2. Assessing the Impact of the ECoC Program within the Past Decade

2.1. Economic Impact

Culture and cultural heritage are pivotal within the cultural sector and serve as catalysts for economic effects that ripple through various interconnected sectors. These effects span employment opportunities, income generation, and increased production, but also produce effects across other sectors, including finance, construction, tourism, and transportation (Herrero *et al.*, 2006, p.42). The most commonly cited positive economic outcomes of hosting a mega-event (before, during, and after) include income growth, job creation, and expanded retail opportunities. Additionally, there is potential to diversify the local economy, boost advertising for both local and national products and services, develop new cultural amenities and infrastructure, and elevate overall living standards (Hudec *et al.*, 2019, p.3).

The first study ever made on this topic regarding the economic impact was performed by John Myerscough back in 1992 on Glasgow, a city plagued by severe unemployment, urban deterioration, and a reputation for crime, lacked any cultural association (García, 2004, p.107; Gomez, 1998, p.110). Despite this, Glasgow secured the nomination for the “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) with promises of commercial sponsorship and plans to leverage the event for urban revitalisation. Significant efforts were made to restore key areas of the city and showcase its industrial heritage through exhibitions, and one of the major investments was the construction of a £30 million concert hall (Mooney, 2004, p.329). The substantial financial investments were primarily justified by the anticipated economic returns rather than solely the cultural benefits, and according to Myerscough’s calculations, Glasgow’s hosting of the 1990 event resulted in a net economic impact ranging between £10-14 million (Myerscough 1992, p.3). Continuing this initiative, in 1999, the European Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS) started its own research on the topic, analysing the implementation and outcomes of this progressively prevalent event across Europe.

Matera, as a “European Capital of Culture” in 2019, has experienced “the most significant surge in tourism in the history of the initiative.” The city saw a remarkable increase of 30% in foreign tourists, while the region of Basilicata witnessed a 34% rise (Savastano, 2020). Matera’s accessibility has been “one of the main challenges facing the city, in terms of both growth and development, as well as becoming a mass tourism destination” (Baldassarre *et al.*, 2017, p.38). The planners of the ECoC predicted a 200 per cent increase in tourists by 2020, which the city eventually achieved (Wise, 2019, p.199).

Every “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) project necessitated significant investments from public authorities. On average, the combined contribution from national, municipal, regional, and European Union sources comprised 77.5 per cent of the total investments sourced from all channels (Steiner *et al.*, 2013, p.1). European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) host cities typically depend on public funding to establish new cultural facilities or expand transportation infrastructure. The budget required for hosting the ECoC event can be substantial, exceeding EUR 100 million in certain instances (Falk *et al.*, 2017, p.3).

2.2 Cultural and Image Impact

The original concept of the “European Capital of Culture” was to present the European

Union with an appealing image, being designed to reflect the cultural position as a ‘unity in diversity,’ showcasing each host city’s distinct local or national culture, alongside the common threads of European culture (Sjøholt, 1999, p.341).

Hosting the “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) has been shown to have far-reaching effects beyond the immediate event itself. Studies by Hall (1992) and Boland (2010) suggest that the impact extends to long-term increases in tourism demand and serves as a catalyst for urban regeneration, city branding, and overall economic development. This phenomenon has prompted destination marketing organisations and local stakeholders to increasingly recognise major cultural events as prime opportunities for city promotion and tourist attraction (Boland, 2010, p.628). Moreover, cultural tourists, often drawn to ECoC cities, are considered particularly desirable due to their characteristics. Research by Richards and Wilson (2004) indicates that cultural tourists tend to be well-educated and willing to spend more money during their travels than other types of tourists. Therefore, the influx of cultural tourists during an ECoC year boosts visitor numbers and contributes significantly to the local economy.

Examining the cultural influence on cities designated as European Capitals of Culture over the past decade reveals a profound impact. Primarily, efforts have focused on creating infrastructure for cultural events, such as repurposing post-industrial sites into cultural institutions (as seen in Rijeka), constructing community infrastructure (in the case of Novi Sad) and establishing new theatre venues (in the case of Matera) (Veselinovič *et al.*, p.83; Vujičić 2022, p.728; Wise, 2019 p.202). In most cases, there has been considerable investment in enhancing existing infrastructure. Consequently, the image of these cities has experienced a significant improvement.

Overall, the ECoC designation has emerged as a strategic tool for cities to position themselves globally, attract tourists, and stimulate economic growth through cultural investment and promotion.

2.3 Urban Revitalisation

Major cultural projects drive social innovation by formulating strategies to establish novel cultural spaces (Popa *et al.*, 2022, p.3). Preparation for hosting ECoC often entails infrastructural upgrades such as transportation networks, conference venues, and accommodation facilities. These investments enhance the city’s infrastructure, benefiting residents and future events.

In the case of Košice, designated as a “European Capital of Culture” in 2013, significant investment in infrastructure occurred, especially considering the city’s prior lack of funding for cultural activities. Before 2006, Košice allocated only €100,000 annually for cultural endeavours, mainly for maintenance purposes. However, with the “European Capital of Culture” project, the city witnessed a remarkable shift, attracting over €70 million in investment toward enhancing its cultural infrastructure. This funding facilitated the reconstruction and modernisation of existing cultural facilities and the establishment of new ones. Notable projects included transforming an old military barracks into the vibrant cultural hub known as Kulturpark and converting a disused swimming pool into the innovative exhibition space called Kunsthalle. These endeavours signify how hosting cultural events like the “European Capital of Culture” can serve as a catalyst for significant investment in urban revitalisation and cultural development, transforming cities like Košice into thriving cultural centres with enhanced infrastructure and amenities (Hudec *et al.*, 2016, p.533).

Another illustration of urban revitalisation and rejuvenation can be observed in Matera, which served as the “European Capital of Culture” in 2019. Most parts of the ancient centre have undergone restoration efforts, while caves have been repurposed to accommodate hotels, bed and breakfasts, restaurants, cafes, and cultural venues such as theatres, museums, and exhibition spaces. These endeavours have transformed the city into a regional hub for leisure and culture, solidifying Matera’s position as a sought-after destination for visitors from the surrounding region (Ex-post evaluation of the 2019 European Capitals of Culture – Executive summary, 2020).

The following examples are regarded as the most pertinent, illustrating the direct influence of the “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) on city infrastructure. In other instances of Capitals of Culture, the program directly impacted the refurbishment of existing cultural venues, facilitated accessibility for the city (e.g., by introducing new flights), or enhanced the transportation system (Liu, 2014, p.500).

The analysis demonstrates that ECoC plays a crucial role in enhancing urban infrastructure’s functionality, resilience, and sustainability across various domains, including transportation networks, green spaces, and urban development.

In conclusion, the impact of the “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) is primarily positive since cities can experience regeneration and the development of new cultural infrastructure, along with a boost in tourism and an enhanced reputation among residents. Moreover, cities can also accomplish various policy objectives at both the regional and national levels (Urbančíková, 2018, p.46).

Even though studies have revealed a favourable impact of the “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) designation in most instances, there are potential downsides, such as construction noise and commuting challenges due to ongoing building projects. Additionally, an influx of tourists could lead to decreased life satisfaction for some individuals due to increased congestion in public transport, additional disruptions, littering, or heightened concerns about crime (Steiner, 2015, p. 5). Other negative effects that can also occur include a rise in the prices of goods, services, and property, which generally means an increase in the cost of living (Hudec *et al.*, 2019, p.21).

3. Timișoara – a City in Transition

Heritage is the foundation of a community’s authenticity, fostering connections among its members and playing a crucial role in maintaining cohesion between past and present. Historical buildings are among the most prevalent aspects of heritage, offering present generations insights into the lifestyles of their predecessors (Mosoarcă *et al.*, 2019, p.86).

Due to its strategic location in the western region, near the border, Timișoara has consistently held significant importance, regardless of the occupying authority, making it a pivotal city in the area (Radoslav *et al.*, 2013, p.e2).

The city’s history dates back to the 13th century when it was initially recognised as a rectangular fortress under Hungarian administration. In the early 14th century, King Carol Robert de Anjou ordered the construction of a royal palace, leading to a demographic and economic boom. By 1552, the city fell under Ottoman rule, undergoing urban development and division into districts and suburbs. Under Habsburg rule from 1716 to 1781, Timișoara became the capital of the Banat region and later a free royal city. A new fortress, designed in the Vauban style, was constructed, shaping the historic city within (Cetate) and its suburbs (Iosefin and Fabric). Over time, the city absorbed various architectural influences, resulting in

various styles such as Secession, Art Nouveau, and Baroque. With over 300,000 inhabitants, Timișoara boasts thousands of historical buildings, though their seismic vulnerability remains a concern (Vert *et al.*, 2000, p.124; Ilieșu, 2003; Neumann, 2014, p.18).

Over the centuries, the Banat region has cultivated a rich and diverse cultural landscape, home to more than 30 distinct cultural communities. These include Romanians, Germans, Hungarians, Serbians, Croatians, Italians, Spaniards, and Bulgarians. This cultural diversity is a defining characteristic of the city, giving rise to public institutions specifically tailored to European citizens' needs in Timișoara (Berceanu 2022, p.6).

In 2021, Romania marked its second occasion hosting an ECoC, following Sibiu's designation in 2007. The criteria for selecting an ECOC have evolved significantly, now encompassing a broader and deeper understanding of culture's role in urban and European development.

Postponed to COVID-19 from 2021 to 2023, Timișoara was appreciated for its strong community participation, multiculturalism, cross-border and international cooperation based on the intention for over 75% of projects to be co-produced with partners from Europe (The "European Capital of Culture" 2021 in Romania, The Selection Panel's Final Report, October 2016). Also, Timișoara was the first Romanian city to develop a long-term Cultural strategy, which was essential for its selection as an ECOC (Turșie, 2021, p.201).

The submission package was jointly developed and endorsed by the Timișoara 2021 Association (TM2021) in collaboration with the Timișoara City Hall (PMT); these entities assuming responsibility for executing the program sanctioned by the European Commission (Popa *et al.*, 2022, p.4).

The event's opening proved to be a real success, with 8,223 mentions of the Timișoara 2023 - "European Capital of Culture" program in national media and social media, reaching a cumulative audience of 101,000,000 people, distributed locally at 21.5% and nationally at 78.6%. The equivalent advertising value of these appearances was approximately 869,387 euros. The dedicated page for the Opening program had 72,600 visitors, while the homepage presenting the information succinctly had 153,100 visitors. Apart from Romania, the countries most interested in the website's content were Germany, Austria, France, and the United States of America (Timișoara 2023 - "European Capital of Culture" Opening Report, 2023, p.9).

The first partial results of the event were made public in March of the current year: with a total of 2,331 events organised in 2023 by the over 1,000 national and international organisations actively involved in the Timișoara 2023 Program, Timișoara residents, as well as tourists who visited the city throughout the past year, enjoyed a rich array of diverse events. A total of 1.5 million participants attended events within the Timișoara 2023 Program, according to information provided by the organisers up to this point (Centrul de proiecte - First partial results of the Timișoara 2023 - "European Capital of Culture", 2024).

4. Research Methodology

This paper offers an extensive examination of sentiment analysis within the complex landscape of social networks (Instagram and Facebook). Our review encompasses existing methodologies from an academic standpoint and delves into emerging dimensions such as temporal dynamics, and causal connections, providing a comprehensive understanding.

The "European Capital of Culture" is a transformative force for host cities, leaving a lasting imprint on their socio-economic fabric, cultural identity, and urban landscape.

Building upon previous research conducted on the impact of the “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) on host cities, we propose the following research hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): A favourable perception of the “European Capital of Culture” program is expected to generate positive economic outcomes for the host city directly;

Several studies have shown the direct impact of the “European Capital of Culture” program on the hosting city’s economy since the city has become more attractive. The benefits of hosting such an event include enhanced income generation, heightened job opportunities, and an expanded retail landscape. Moreover, there is a prospect to foster economic diversification locally, amplify the promotion of both local and national goods and services, cultivate fresh cultural offerings and infrastructure, and raise the overall quality of life (Immler *et al.*, 2014, p.10; Richards *et al.*, 2004, p.1933; Garcia *et al.*, 2013, p.37; Liu, 2014, p.498).

Hypothesis 2 (H2): A favourable perception of the “European Capital of Culture” program is expected to directly generate positive social and cultural engagement for the host city;

Initially dubbed as the City of Culture program, its core mission centred on delving into the essence of Europe. The hosts of the “European Capital of Culture” must meticulously prepare an extensive cultural program that showcases the richness and diversity of their city’s heritage and contemporary artistic expressions, creating a favourable climate for cultural events that engage citizens and tourists as well (Bianchini *et al.*, 2013, p.515; Tommarchi *et al.*, 2018, p.156; García, 2020, p.3).

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The designation as the “European Capital of Culture” program will positively impact the host city infrastructure and urban revitalisation.

Hosting the “European Capital of Culture” typically involves upgrading infrastructure, including transportation networks, conference venues, and accommodation facilities. These investments improve the city’s infrastructure and bring lasting benefits to residents and upcoming events (Boland, 2010, p.628; Baldassarre *et al.*, 2017, p.38; Popa *et al.*, 2022, p.3).

The initial step in validating our hypothesis involved conducting a sentiment analysis concerning the perceptions of both locals and tourists regarding the content shared on social media platforms related to the Timișoara “European Capital of Culture” program.

Data was collected from the comments posted on the event’s Facebook and Instagram pages throughout 2023. Our dataset consists of 1,033 comments, each corresponding to one of 193 distinct posts. These comments were posted over several months, with notable fluctuations in frequency distribution across different time periods, indicating varying levels of engagement over time. We extracted the posts and related data from the social media administrating page using Python and the Graph API.

Preprocessing involved normalisation, stop-word removal, and stemming. We preprocessed the data using Microsoft Excel to remove special characters, remove null posts, and transform emoticons into their text equivalent. Then, using Python 3.9 with the “textblob” and “googletrans” libraries, we processed the social media posts, and for the sentiment analysis, we used the “pandas” library. The analysis classified sentiments into positive, negative, and neutral categories. The data was compared to the initial dataset and validated.

The sentiment analysis findings on the social media posts were processed and compared to other monthly data we used as variables for the hypothesis:

- data provided by the National Institute of Statistics regarding “overnight stays in 2022 and 2023”.

- data from “Centrul de proiecte” partner for Timișoara ECoC 2023 - Opening Report and First partial results of the Timișoara ECoC 2023, “number of events”, and financial data regarding the “investments” in cultural projects and infrastructure provided by the County Council of Timiș, Timișoara City Hall and the Ministry of Culture Romania.

- MediaTrust, a partner for Timișoara ECoC 2023, provided data regarding “Advertising Value Equivalent”, “media appearances”, audience, and “media sentiment” from their reports on mediation analysis.

All data processing was done in compliance with data protection regulations (GDPR).

This comprehensive methodology section outlines the steps taken in the sentiment analysis research, ensuring clarity and reproducibility. It balances technical details with an explanation of the rationale behind each choice, providing a clear path from data collection to analysis and interpretation.

5. Results and Discussions

Analysis reveals that the prevailing sentiment among the public is “Positive,” accounting for approximately 52.86% of comments, followed by “Neutral” sentiments at approximately 37.27%, with “Negative” sentiments being the least prevalent, comprising around 9.87% of the dataset.

Regarding our research sample, the social media accounts have gathered 61,461 followers, with 49,861 followers on Facebook and 11,600 on Instagram. The majority of these followers are women aged between 25 and 44 years. Further details regarding the gender and age distribution of the followers are provided in *Table 1*:

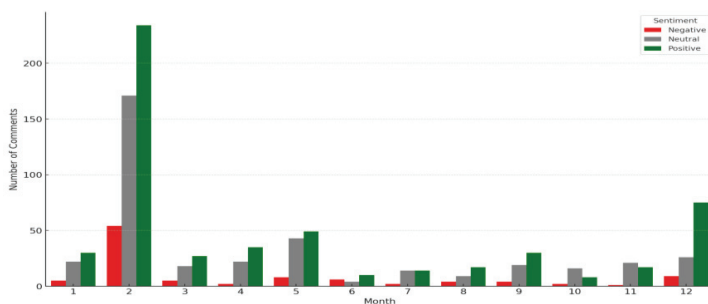
Table 1. Followers’ gender and age distribution

Age	Women	Men	% Women	% Men
18-24	3,741	2,050	6.09%	3.34%
25-34	12,771	7,901	20.78%	12.86%
35-44	10,280	6,130	16.73%	9.97%
45-54	6,027	3,867	9.81%	6.29%
55-64	3,365	1,849	5.48%	3.01%
65+	2,225	1,255	3.62%	2.04%
Total	38,409	23,052	100%	100%

Source: authors’ own interpretation based on the data from Timișoara “European Capital of Culture” social media.

Regarding the follower’s country of residence, most of them were from Romania (82.07%), followed by Germany (4.12%), the United Kingdom (2.17%), Italy (1.76%), France (1.10%) and other European countries, as well as followers from the United States.

This finding signifies a weak positive correlation, indicating a minimal linear relationship between the timing of comment posting throughout the year and the sentiment expressed. Further analysis entails examining the distribution of sentiments across various months to gain deeper insights into engagement and sentiment trends.



Source: authors' own interpretation based on the data from Timișoara "European Capital of Culture" social media.

Figure 1. Monthly Sentiment Analysis

As illustrated in *Figure 1*, notable reactions were observed predominantly in February, coinciding with the event's opening. The inaugural event exhibited considerable success, amassing 8,223 mentions of the Timișoara 2023 - "European Capital of Culture" program across various national and social media outlets. This widespread coverage reached a cumulative audience of 101,000,000 individuals, with 21.5% of the audience localised and 78.6% extending nationally.

Positive sentiments consistently prevail across all months, with neutral and negative sentiments following, corresponding with the sentiment distribution analysis.

The very weak positive correlation between the month and sentiment implies that while there may be minor shifts in sentiment distribution throughout the months, these fluctuations are not significantly influenced by the time of year (except the opening in February 2023).

This analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the dataset, emphasising the prevalence of positive sentiments in comments and offering insights into the fluctuations in engagement and sentiment distributions across different months.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): A favourable perception of the "European Capital of Culture" program is expected to generate positive economic outcomes for the host city directly;

The first hypothesis (H1) was tested by aggregating the positive reactions on social media platforms associated with the "European Capital of Culture" initiative. Additionally, comprehensive sentiment analysis was conducted, and overnight stay data from 2022 were compared with corresponding values from 2023, as presented in *Table 2*.

The counts for positive reactions and positive and neutral sentiments vary significantly across months. The maximum count for positive reactions reached a notably high value of 18,252 when the opening of the event took place. In contrast, negative sentiments display a lower mean of 8.5, indicating fewer negative sentiments overall. However, a maximum count of 54 suggests that certain months may experience spikes in negative sentiments. This figure corresponds to the event's opening, which took place in February. Despite its relatively high score compared to values observed throughout the year, it only accounts for 11.76% of the overall sentiment associated with the event's opening.

Regarding the overnight stays, 2022 and 2023 fluctuate, hinting at potential seasonal trends or tourism growth. The mean number of tourists in 2023 (46,177.08) surpasses 2022 (36,807.83). This suggests an increase in tourism activity, partially attributable to the Timișoara "European Capital of Culture" initiative, although not entirely dependent on it.

Table 2. Perception of the “European Capital of Culture” program and its economic impact

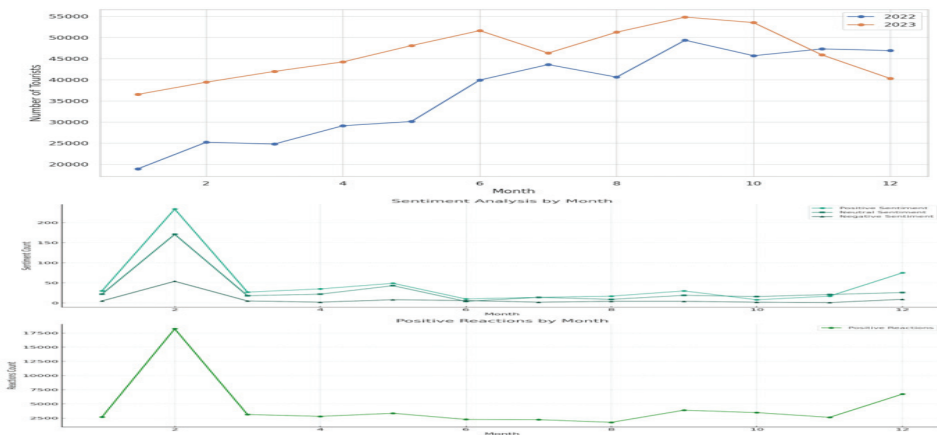
Month	Positive reactions	Positive sentiment	Neutral sentiment	Negative sentiment	Overnight stays in 2022	Overnight stays in 2023
January 2023	2,695	30	22	5	18,914	36,545
February 2023	18,252	234	171	54	25,215	39,436
March 2023	3,148	27	18	5	24,811	41,993
April 2023	2,810	35	22	2	29,138	44,244
May 2023	3,359	49	43	8	30,132	48,094
June 2023	2,282	10	4	6	39,941	51,641
July 2023	2,236	14	14	2	43,608	46,327
August 2023	1,763	17	9	4	40,631	51,269
September 2023	3,905	30	19	4	49,369	54,840
October 2023	3,477	8	16	2	45,704	53,545
November 2023	2,642	17	21	1	47,314	45,897
December 2023	6,737	75	26	9	46,917	40,294
Total	53,306	546	385	102	441,694	554,125

Source: authors’ own interpretation based on the data from Timișoara “European Capital of Culture” social media and data provided by the National Institute of Statistics – overnight stays 2022 and 2023.

Regarding sentiment analysis, positive sentiments exhibit variability across months yet consistently maintain a baseline occurrence level. Neutral and negative sentiments also fluctuate, remaining notably lower than positive sentiments, suggesting an overall positive perception or reception.

Regarding tourism growth, there is a clear upward trend in the number of overnight stays from 2022 to 2023, with 2023 consistently outpacing 2022 (with more than 25%). This growth pattern suggests successful tourism initiatives, increased attraction, or improved tourist conditions.

A descriptive overview of the positive reactions and the fluctuations of the overnight stays are presented in Figure 2.



Source: authors’ own interpretation based on the data from Timișoara “European Capital of Culture” social media pages and data provided by the National Institute of Statistics – overnight stays 2022 and 2023.

Figure 2. Monthly Sentiment Analysis and Positive Reactions to Posts Related to Overnight Stays

Combined with the correlation analysis, these insights suggest that positive public sentiment and reactions are key components of tourism growth, thus *confirming Hypothesis 1 (H1): A favourable perception of the “European Capital of Culture” program is expected to generate positive economic outcomes for the host city directly.* Furthermore, the consistent increase in tourists from 2022 to 2023 could be attributed to various factors, including effective marketing, enhanced tourist experiences, or broader economic trends. Identifying the causes behind the peaks and troughs in sentiments and reactions and understanding the factors contributing to tourism growth would require further analysis, potentially incorporating external data or qualitative insights.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): A favourable perception of the “European Capital of Culture” program is expected to directly generate positive social and cultural engagement for the host city;

The second hypothesis (H2) was tested by aggregating the positive reactions on social media platforms associated with the “European Capital of Culture” initiative. Additionally, comprehensive sentiment analysis was conducted, and overnight stay data from 2022 were compared with corresponding values from 2023, as presented in *Table 3*:

Table 3. Advertising Value Equivalent

Month	Value (€)
January 2023	1,899,820.00
February 2023	4,268,200.00
March 2023	1,190,230.00
April 2023	1,375,980.00
May 2023	1,803,560.00
June 2023	1,217,000.00
July 2023	1,459,230.00
August 2023	1,152,520.00
September 2023	2,133,010.00
October 2023	1,682,340.00
November 2023	1,440,120.00
December 2023	2,275,460.00
Total	21,897,470.00

Source: Authors’ own interpretation based on the data from MediaTrust.

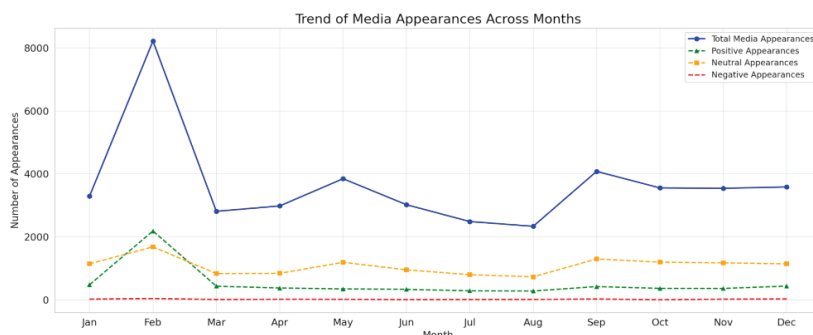
The mean advertising value equivalent is approximately €1,824,789, reflecting the monthly promotional impact generated. Within this spectrum, the minimum advertising value equivalent registers around €1,152,520, while the maximum escalates notably to €4,268,200. When juxtaposed against the actual expenditure of €3,650,000 on advertising, total savings amount to a significant €18,247,470. This underscores the remarkable advertising efficacy demonstrated by the event.

The monthly average of media appearances tallied 3,647, encompassing 524 positive, 1,081 neutral, and approximately 17 negative appearances. These media appearances specifically pertain to posts or articles associated with the events hosted during Timișoara “European Capital of Culture,” offering insight into the event’s perception among various media stakeholders (press, television, radio, online portals and social media platforms).

Table 4. Media appearances and other media sentiment

Month	Media appearances	Media positive	Media neutral	Media negative
January 2023	3,297	479	1,143	20
February 2023	8,223	2,187	1,682	40
March 2023	2,811	432	832	9
April 2023	2,982	374	840	17
May 2023	3,847	346	1,190	16
June 2023	3,021	331	951	6
July 2023	2,486	285	798	9
August 2023	2,335	279	729	12
September 2023	4,080	420	1,297	24
October 2023	3,555	362	1,196	3
November 2023	3,541	360	1,172	19
December 2023	3,586	435	1,142	26
Total	43,764	6,290	12,972	201

Source: authors' own interpretation based on the data from MediaTrust.



Source: authors' own interpretation based on the data from MediaTrust.

Figure 3. The Trend of Media Appearances across Months

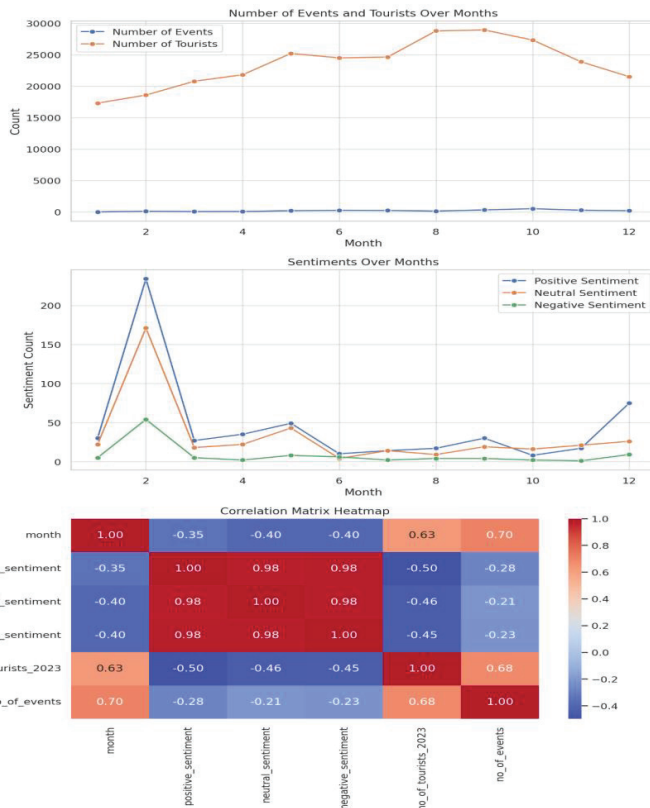
As seen in *Figure 3* and *Table 4*, the most pronounced impact was observed in February, coinciding with the event's inauguration, with over 55,94% being positive.

Table 5. Number of events by month compared to overnight stay and sentiments of posts on social media

Month	Positive sentiment	Neutral sentiment	Negative sentiment	No of overnight stays in 2023	No of events
January 2023	30	22	5	36,545	5
February 2023	234	171	54	39,436	120
March 2023	27	18	5	41,993	67
April 2023	35	22	2	44,244	81
May 2023	49	43	8	48,094	195
June 2023	10	4	6	51,641	261
July 2023	14	14	2	46,327	237
August 2023	17	9	4	51,269	135
September 2023	30	19	4	54,840	324
October 2023	8	16	2	53,545	519
November 2023	17	21	1	45,897	276
December 2023	75	26	9	40,294	195
Total	546	385	102	554,125	2,415

Source: authors' own interpretation based on the data from Timișoara "European Capital of Culture" social media, data provided by the National Institute of Statistics – overnight stays 2023, and data regarding the number of events from Centrul de proiecte.

The correlation analysis unveils several noteworthy associations among the variables: specifically, a positive sentiment experienced by followers directly influences both the frequency of events organised and the number of participants attending these events. Moreover, considering that tourists represent a part of the target group, this will also positively impact the volume of overnight stays. However, while higher sentiment analysis values are concentrated around the event’s opening in February, a disparity emerges concerning overnight stays and event frequency. This discrepancy is attributable to factors such as the attractiveness of the city, its cultural itinerary, and holidays, resulting in the highest rates recorded between June and October.



Source: authors’ own interpretation based on the data from Timișoara “European Capital of Culture” social media, data provided by the National Institute of Statistics – overnight stays 2023, and data regarding the number of events from Centrul de proiecte.

Figure 4. Number of Events, Sentiment and Overnight Stays Correlation

The trends in sentiments (positive, neutral, and negative) generally follow each other closely across the months. The trends suggest that while there are fluctuations in sentiment counts across the year, positive sentiments dominate, followed by neutral and negative sentiments. The heatmap corroborates the earlier correlation analysis, highlighting the strong relationships between the different types of sentiments and the moderate to strong correlations between the month, the number of tourists, and the number of events, thus *confirming*

Hypothesis 2 (H2): A favourable perception of the “European Capital of Culture” program is expected to directly generate positive social and cultural engagement for the host city.

These insights suggest that event planning and tourism management could benefit from considering seasonal trends and the potential impact of events on tourist sentiments. Additionally, the strong correlation between event counts and tourism numbers and sentiments underscores the importance of events as a factor influencing tourism dynamics.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): The designation as the “European Capital of Culture” program will positively impact the host city’s infrastructure and urban revitalisation.

The third hypothesis (H3) was tested by aggregating the sentiment analysis on social media platforms associated with the investments in infrastructure made by the County Council of Timișoara, Timișoara City Hall and the Ministry of Culture Romania. The summarised data is presented in *Table 6*:

Table 6. Investments per month related to the sentiment of posts on social media

Month	Positive Sentiment	Neutral Sentiment	Negative Sentiment	Cultural projects investments (€)
January 2023	30	22	5	286,667
February 2023	234	171	54	363,994
March 2023	27	18	5	363,994
April 2023	35	22	2	364,444
May 2023	49	43	8	1,079,052
June 2023	10	4	6	1,079,052
July 2023	14	14	2	1,079,052
August 2023	17	9	4	1,322,852
September 2023	30	19	4	1,322,852
October 2023	8	16	2	1,372,852
November 2023	17	21	1	1,372,852
December 2023	75	26	9	1,107,852
Total	546	385	102	11,115,515

Source: authors’ own interpretation based on the data from Timișoara “European Capital of Culture” social media and data provided by the County Council of Timișoara, Timișoara City Hall and the Ministry of Culture Romania.

Investments made in 2023 were focused on improving the existing cultural infrastructure (such as closed cinemas, museums, theatres, and the historical city centre) and also creating new cultural venues, such as the “Cultural and Educational Center Kuncz”, a multifunctional centre offering socio-educational, recreational, and cultural activities for the Disadvantaged individuals from the Roma ethnic group.

Excluding the designation as the “European Capital of Culture,” the infrastructure budget for Timișoara encompassed solely the restoration of Cinema Victoria, requiring a total investment of €1,930,870.40 and the construction of the Cultural and Educational Center Kuncz, with a total investment of €1,602,912.20. Thus, the program contributed an added value of €26,386,831.40 to the city’s infrastructure, confirming *Hypothesis 3 (H3): The designation as the “European Capital of Culture” program will positively impact the host city infrastructure and urban revitalisation.*

Although investments showed a negative correlation with sentiment measures and media appearances, it would be interesting to explore this relationship further.

Conclusions

Growing evidence supports the notion that sustainability should be ingrained in individual and societal mindsets, values, and actions as a universally recognised concept. Culture, viewed as a collection of shared beliefs, values, and anticipated behaviours, can serve as a fundamental element in equipping individuals with a fresh comprehension of the global community and its challenges or motivating them to prioritise sustainability.

Enhancing sustainability within a designated territory is achievable, even while serving as the “European Capital of Culture”. The ECoC Programme has the potential to play a pivotal role in facilitating this shift towards a new mode of development.

The designation of 2021 – Timișoara “European Capital of Culture”, postponed due to COVID-19 to 2023, presented Timișoara with a significant opportunity to generate substantial cultural, social, and economic advantages. It also served as a catalyst for urban renewal, fostering a transformation and revitalisation of the city’s international perception. Embracing this title, Timișoara had the potential to emerge as a hub of cultural excellence, instilling a sense of confidence among its citizens and empowering them to drive change through active participation in the city’s cultural landscape.

The identified impacts include increased cultural activity, tourism growth, improved city image, and heightened resident pride. Due to EU membership, these impacts have been facilitated by local collaboration and the city’s strengthened ties to investment, skills, and talent. The city has taken significant steps to become an “eventful city,” utilising events to sustainably enhance the quality of life. However, maintaining the momentum of eventfulness in the future will be challenging, and it is not easy to separate the effects of event-related activities from broader cultural, social, and economic development factors.

This sentiment analysis delved into the qualitative aspects of public discourse surrounding the ECoC designation, providing valuable insights into the community’s emotional responses, perceptions, and attitudes towards the cultural events and initiatives associated with the title. By incorporating sentiment analysis alongside traditional research methods, a more nuanced understanding of the economic and socio-cultural impact of the ECoC on Timișoara was achieved, offering valuable implications for future cultural programming and urban development strategies.

Our research findings largely align with and substantiate the observations made by other researchers that highlight a favourable impact of the “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) programme on the designated cities in terms of economic development, cultural agenda and public image.

Limitations and Further Research Perspectives

The current research focuses only on the positive impact of the “European Capital of Culture” (ECoC) programme and does not consider potential negative effects or externalities in terms of pollution or decreased citizens’ life satisfaction. The study only focuses on the case of Timișoara and may not be generalisable to other cities or periods. Also, the sentiment analysis results may vary over time and may be influenced by factors such as changing public perceptions, evolving cultural dynamics, and the duration of the cultural event. Long-term impacts may not be fully captured in short-term sentiment analyses.

Future potential research perspectives will be focused on conducting longitudinal studies to track sentiment trends over an extended period, both during and after Timișoara’s designation as the “European Capital of Culture”, to assess the lasting impact on public

sentiment. The sentiment analysis will also be complemented with qualitative research methods such as interviews and focus groups exploring the perspectives of various stakeholders involved in Timișoara's cultural initiatives (residents, cultural organisations, policymakers, and tourists) to understand their perceptions of the city's cultural transformation and its effects on sentiment.

Finally, we consider it crucial to address the potential negative impacts of hosting such an event, alongside analysing its long-term effects on tourism.

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**VIETOS NUOMONĖS, PASAULINIS POVEIKIS: TIMIŠOAROS KAIP EUROPOS KULTŪROS
SOSTINĖS 2023 M. ATVEJIS**

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SANTRAUKA

Europos kultūros sostinių (EKS) programos poveikio priimantiesiems miestams vertinimas yra vienas iš svarbiausių ir nuolatinių iššūkių mokslinėje literatūroje, o keliuose tyrimuose nagrinėjama, kaip programa atitinka platesnius Europos tikslus ir prisideda prie Europos tapatybės ir vienybės skatinimo. Nuo pat įkūrimo 1985 m. EKS programa buvo orientuota į kultūrinės įvairovės puoselėjimą ir tarpkultūrinio dialogo skatinimą, leidžiantį priimantiems miestams stiprinti tarptautinius santykius ir skatinti kultūrinius mainus, peržengiančius valstybių sienas. Šiame straipsnyje daugiausia dėmesio skiriama Timișoaros paskyrimo Europos kultūros sostine poveikiui nagrinėti. Pateikiamos vertingos įžvalgos apie platesnę programos įtaką visuomenei ir jos poveikį Timișoaros miesto gyvenimo struktūrai. 2023 m. Europos kultūros sostinės poveikis Timișoaroje (Rumunija) buvo įvertintas taikant naujovišką metodą, į kurį buvo įtraukta nuotaikų analizė panaudojant miesto socialinės žiniasklaidos platformų duomenis.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Europos kultūros sostinės (EKS); kultūra; sentimentų analizė; miestų atgaivinimas; Timișoara.