

# SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ON A CULTURAL SITE INCLUDED IN UNESCO HERITAGE. CASE STUDY: MEDIEVAL CITY OF SIGHISOARA

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the sustainable tourism is the integrated management of the resources, satisfying the economical, social and aesthetical needs without causing any damage to the preservation of culture and to the architectural, urban and natural monuments. Implementing the programmes for sustainable tourism development in a UNESCO heritage area requires a special attention, because the preservation of these places is very meaningful to the worldwide community. The Citadel of Sighisoara is a historical and cultural site with perfectly preserved architectural monuments, historical ones as well as the customs of the old Transylvanian Saxon population; the medieval city is still inhabited nowadays.

**Key Words:** sustainable tourism, heritage, development, culture

## INTRODUCTION

The present article aims to emphasize the importance of the sustainable tourism's development for UNESCO heritage sites. Lately, the sustainable tourism concept became very often employed in all the projects of sustainable development of entire areas and cities. In what concerns the touristic sites included on the UNESCO heritage list it's mandatory to practice nothing else but sustainable tourism in order to reduce as much as possible the negative impact that the touristic activity entails.

The study focuses on the medieval Citadel of Sighisoara, Romania, and presents various aspects, as follows: the actual situation, at what extent the local authorities implement sustainable tourism programs, the way that the sustainable tourism influences the local community and last but not least the necessary precautions to be taken in order to achieve the sustainable development of the above mentioned site. The basis of this research consists in a questionnaire applied to the Municipality of Sighisoara, located in the medieval town. The Municipality manages all the politics that refer to the site administration and to its development. The questionnaire cleared the actual status of the sustainable development of the city as a whole, but also the sustainable tourism development within the medieval city.

The stages of this investigation involved a bibliographical study followed by the questionnaire, shifting on the field for observations, interpreting and analyzing the information gathered through the questionnaire and finally drawing up the conclusions and the suggestions for a sustainable tourism development.

The questionnaire aimed to solve two major aspects: sustainable development of Sighisoara and sustainable development of the medieval city that is included in the UNESCO heritage. It's important to mention that the fortified city stretches on a considerable area of Sighisoara. The questions pointed to the main indicators of the sustainable development process that are directly linked to the touristic activity within the urban site. The queries in the first part of the questionnaire aim the existing projects on sustainable tourism, the sustainable development of the entire city, the street lighting based on a saving energy system, the selective waste collection and recycling, the Transylvanian Saxon architecture and at what extent it is still followed in the new constructions, the practice of ancient traditional crafts typical to the craftsmen guilds, the children

education in the sustainability direction. The second part of the questionnaire refers precisely to the medieval fortified city that belongs to the UNESCO heritage, to the pressure indicators (that establish the number of tourists per year and during the month with the highest number of tourists), to the indicators that show the social impact that the tourism has on the local population. The final part of the questionnaire focuses on the actual situation of the nine defense towers entirely preserved; the towers were given the name of the ancient guilds responsible for each one of them.

### **MEDIEVAL CITY OF SIGHISOARA - GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL REFERENCES**

The Citadel of Sighisoara is part of the city of Sighisoara, located on Tarnavelor Plane in a hilly area crossed from East to West by the river Tarnava Mare, in Central Romania in the region known as Transylvania. The relief where nowadays lies the settlement, used to be part of the old Pannonian Sea platform and it is crossed by the waters of Tarnava River, while the central point coincides with Citadel Hill at 425 m of altitude. Along the time, there started to develop on the Citadel Hill the medieval city. Down the hill the city stretches from North-West to South-East and it is surrounded by other higher hills that form a sort of natural defense wall: Train Station Hill (528 m), Hula Danesului and Stejaris Hill (524m), Lunca Postei that goes up towards the Middle Hill (511-603m) and Bradet Hill (524m). Besides the relief there are to be mentioned the climate conditions and the hydrographic network that favored the development of this settlement. By its geographical location, the settlement is included in the climate type of the Transylvanian Plane, which means temperate-continental climate. Regarding the precipitations, the annual average is registered between 650 – 700 mm/year and the rainiest months are May and June while the driest are November and December. The average annual and monthly temperatures show that the climate is chilly, the annual average temperature is as low as 8,2C°, and the average temperature range between January (-3,4C°) and July (18,6C°) is 22,9C°. The hydrographic network of the city – that also stands as the main running water supply – consists of Tarnava Mare River and its tributary streams: Devil's Creek, Saes creek, Brostean creek, Dog's creek, Hertesului creek, Rus creek and Citadel's creek.

The Citadel emerged after the settlement of the Saxon colonizers that arrived as guests of the Hungarian King, Geza II<sup>nd</sup> either in 1191 according to the historian Georgius Krauss, either in 1198 according to different historical references. The first documentary reference to Sighisoara dates from 1280 under the name of Castrum Sex afterwards changed; therefore in 1298 it was found the designation of Schespurch in German and only later, in 1435 the denomination of Sighisoara appeared in the written documents. Thanks to the privileges granted by the king, around the citadel there start to emerge defense walls that surrounded the settlement where people used to live back then and where they started to develop handicrafts; in 1367 the settlement achieved the status of Citadel. Meantime, the city passed some difficult events such as the Tartar invasion in 1241 when the town was not yet fortified. The defense walls were only built in 1350; 950 m long and 4 m high, their height increased in the XV<sup>th</sup> century, now reaching 7-8 m. Not only have they built defense walls, but also 14 towers and 4 bastions in order to get a better protected. Nine towers and three bastions were preserved and can be seen and visited nowadays. The responsibility for the maintenance of the defense towers belonged to the craftsmen guilds and took the name of the guild under which's incidence they were: Tawers' Tower, Barbers' Tower, Tinmen's Tower, "Frangheri" Tower, Butchers' Tower, Furriers' Tower, Tailors' Tower, Cobblers' Tower and Blacksmiths' Tower.

The craftsmen guilds in the medieval city of Sighisoara represented a relevant element in the history of the citadel; they were recognized and registered as guilds in 1376. Along the time, there were 19 guilds identified in Sighisoara and the number of the members was kept constant. The 19 craftsmen guilds used to belong to the butchers, to the bakers, to the skinners, to the tawers, to the cobblers, to the blacksmiths, to the furriers, to the glovers, to the knifsmiths, to the cloak makers, to the rope makers, wool and fabric weavers, to the coopers, to the potters, to the bow makers, to the tailors and bags makers. The relation between these guilds at a local level was characterized by harsh competition and at a regional level by real conflicts. The guilds from Sighisoara had gained their right to a weekly fair where they could sale their products to locals from other villages. The weekly fair used to take place each Wednesday. The craftsmen belonging to guilds started to get wealthier so that in 1393 their first representative, Nikolaus belonging to the goldsmiths' guild, was accepted in the City Council. This was a significant event for the political class of the citadel, because until then only the feudal aristocrats were allowed to attend the City Council.

The most dramatic event in the history of medieval Sighisoara was the fire from April 30<sup>th</sup> 1676 that spread in the Citadel but also Down Town. The fire burned constantly because of the strong wind. Almost all the wooden houses in the Citadel and Down Town burned down in the fire, as well as the Monastery Church and most of the towers in the city. The only major buildings that could be saved were five towers and the Church on the Hill. To this great fire followed a period of reconstruction and replacement of the easily burning materials by stone and bricks, but also the streets network had been modified. The medieval stage of Sighisoara lasted till the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century.

### THE MEDIEVAL CITY OF SIGHISOARA AND UNESCO HERITAGE

The UNESCO heritage includes numerous monuments and places not only naturally valuable, but also culturally or historically, whose preservation is very important for the worldwide community. There are many stages in the selection process for UNESCO heritage and ten criteria established by the selection commission that decides which places and monuments should be registered as UNESCO heritage. Out of these ten criteria at least one has to be fulfilled in order to receive the UNESCO heritage status. The medieval city of Sighisoara was included in the UNESCO heritage in 1991 according to the following criteria: it engenders an interchange of human values on a longtime period, within a cultural area, interchange that's reflected in the architectural progress, in the monumental art evolution and in the urban planning and landscaping; it stands for a unique cultural heritage and for a civilization that still exists; it is a remarkable example of buildings, architectural units, and urban landscaping that reflect a important stage of history; it is an extraordinary illustration of a traditional settlement that represents an entire culture.

The area that was included in the UNESCO heritage is the old medieval city, naturally bounded by the limits of the Citadel Hill, where tourists can notice the urban architecture typical to the Transylvanian Saxons medieval cities. The urban organization pattern is almost fully preserved and can be identified in the street network, in the demarcation and constructions built after the great fire in 1676. The architecture follows the Baroque and Renaissance styles and the rural gothic antique architecture can be observed within the Church on the Hill and the Monastery Church.

The churches used to represent in medieval times a very important element, therefore, on the blazon of the Citadel it was made this inscription "nomen domini turiss fortissimo", which means that the greatest tower is the name of our God. The Monastery Church built in the XIII<sup>th</sup> century and the Church on the Hill built between 1345 and 1525, managed to preserve up to the present their original shapes, the specific lines and their gothic architecture. The architecture of the buildings preserved the planimetric typology, the original material and structure, the arch system and the access. The 164 houses that are still inhabited are over 300 years old. They were built by the German colonists at the beginning of the XIII<sup>th</sup> century and the original shape given by them was rectangular with the narrow façade facing the street, with basement and ground floor and with shingle or cane roof. After the fire from 1676 the houses were built out of bricks and stone. There can still be seen, in the medieval city, old houses that stand as evidence of the Transylvanian Saxon architecture. Among the oldest are Vlad Drake's House, Venetian House (this house is famous for its profiled stone decoration that copies the Venetian gothic style) and the Stag House.

The streets network and the urban structure had been preserved along with all their representative elements just as they were in the medieval time. The city was surrounded by a defense wall, by towers and bastions; within the walls there were built the houses, the administrative buildings and the central square. These elements that define the medieval style are 90% preserved: the Clock Tower – the habitants of the medieval city used to believe that the architecture of the tower represents their character for they were harsh and rigid just like it – the nine defense towers that are fully preserved, the Covered Stairs that take to the Church on the Hill, the Citadel Square that used to be the place where the outlaws were brought in front of the crowd to be judged and where the craftsmen used to commercialize their hand-made products.

All the above mentioned elements reflect a settlement's historical evolution that was followed as example by other Transylvanian Saxon settlements. Here is where the traditional architecture typical to the Transylvanian Saxons that settled down at the beginning of the medieval times, stands out. The fact that the citadel was constantly populated since its very beginnings till nowadays highlights a definite element of a human settlement's evolution across time. The houses are still being inhabited by the Transylvanian Saxons that preserve their habits, their traditional apparel and the dialect.

#### **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM WITHIN THE MEDIEVAL CITY OF SIGHISOARA: BASIC ELEMENT OF PERSISTENCY**

The sustainable tourism concept emerged the same way the sustainable development concept did, which is out of the need to protect and preserve the environment or the historical cultural heritage, so that the future generations can enjoy this heritage as well. In 2004 the World Tourism Organization specified few criteria that need to be fulfilled in order to achieve sustainability in tourism. It's important to keep an efficient management of the natural and anthropic resources that define the touristic potential of a certain region, so that the economical, social and aesthetical needs can be achieved and maintain at the same time the cultural integrity, the basic qualities of ecosystems, keeping unchanged biodiversity, etc.

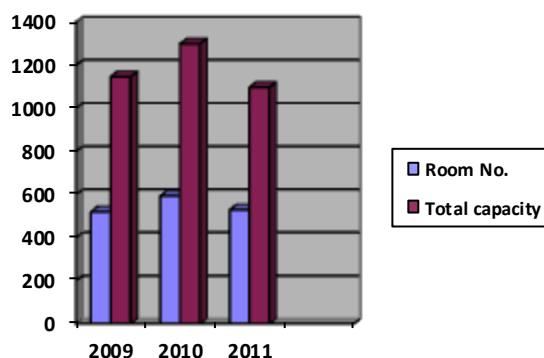
Analyzing the basic indicators of the sustainable tourism development in the medieval city of Sighisoara, the preservation level of the historical site and knowing the quantitative status of the touristic attractions, it results that from these points of view all the regulations were closely followed. In what concerns any intervention on the site, there are only few minimal interventions allowed such as sewage works and functional rehabilitation with the condition to keep unchanged the original appearance. Renovation works are allowed under the condition to follow exactly the same architecture and to use the same materials as the original ones. The situation of the nine towers from the citadel that are perfectly preserved reflect the status of the heritage preservation and its functionality. Thus, in the Clock Tower now functions the History Museum, the "Frangheri" Tower is now the house of the cemetery guardian, the Blacksmiths' Tower became the headquarter of an art gallery, the Cobblers' Tower came to be the head office of a local radio station, the Furriers' Tower was taken by Mihai Eminescu Trans foundation and will shortly be restored, the Tailors' Tower will belong to the Seven Citadels Association and now there function art galleries. In what concerns the Butchers' Tower its status is unknown.

Regarding the pressure indicators that show the number of tourists visiting the Citadel along one year and during the month with the maximum number of tourists, the authorities don't have any means of quantification. They consider the number of tickets sold by the History Museum, but this practice is relative as we all know that not all the tourists that visit a certain place also go to the museum. Also, the History Museum started to register its tourists in the past few years and therefore the gathered results are not conclusive in view of an interpretation. In order to keep an evidence of the number of tourists visiting the city they could take into account the evolution of the accommodation units, assuming that their number increases under the condition to have demand from the tourists.

**Table 1. The evolution of the accommodation units in Sighisoara**

ACCOMMODATION UNITS	2009		2010		2011	
	No. OF ROOMS	CAPACITY	No. OF ROOMS	CAPACITY	No. OF ROOMS	CAPACITY
TOTAL	<b>519</b>	<b>1146</b>	<b>593</b>	<b>1298</b>	<b>529</b>	<b>1097</b>





There aren't any indicators established in order to determine the social impact of the visitors on the locals. It is extremely important especially when it is about a UNESCO heritage site that also preserves a human settlement typology and culture, to monitor any changes in the locals' behavior, in their way of life and in the way they produce and commercialize their traditional products. It has been proved in time that the local population shows a tendency to follow the tourists' behavior, to offer them the most commercial products even if they have nothing to do with the popular traditions.

When it comes to the indicators that show the maximum number of visitors that a touristic objective can take without any negative impact on it, it has to be mentioned that no touristic objective is being monitored. It is vital for the sustainable tourism to implement as soon as possible the indicators quantification. These indicators have to be measured and observed on a longtime period and to be interpreted so to take the necessary measures to protect the site efficiently.

The sustainable tourism involves the social and cultural development of local population by encouraging it to keep practicing traditional crafts, by offering them financial facilities so they can easily start small family business. The authorities' duty is to stop any phenomenon that could damage the society. The ancient traditional handicrafts stopped being practiced once with the abolition of the Transylvanian Saxon craftsmen guilds, in 1884. In the latest years, as the locals say, there has been a demand from the tourists for traditional products especially hand-made ones, and also organic food. Many of the locals started to practice again the old crafts and to produce in their own houses traditional products. Also in this direction it doesn't exist any statistic fundament from the authorities in order to establish numbers. Because of the lack of information and statistic data upon the production of traditional manufacture and local producers, it was impossible to establish the preservation of traditional regulations of authenticity while manufacturing the products and the preservation of the typical Transylvanian Saxon style. By opening crafts schools where to teach the children how to work and obtain traditional products similar to their ancestors, the local population's financial need would be satisfied along with the sustainable development.

A secondary element for the development of the sustainable tourism is represented by the synchronization of the public facilities to the demands of general sustainability: using a saving energy system for the public lighting, selective waste collection and recycling, saving on water consumption. The city of Sighisoara managed to create an ecological warehouse and placed at local level many selective collection points. For the other elements there are at the present many sustainable development projects that are to be implemented. The accommodation units in the medieval city also have to adapt to the sustainable tourism's request.

## CONCLUSIONS

Analyzing the actual status of the indicators for the level of sustainable tourism development it's remarkable that although they have a project for the entire city's sustainable development socially and economically, the local authorities didn't manage to implement many indicators. They should first focus on the tourism field because it has the most elevated development potential. It urges to quantify and implement the above mentioned indicators so to reach a balanced touristic development, which means to preserve and protect the urban site. It is very important to maintain the status of inhabited medieval city, which makes the Citadel of Sighisoara unique. The aim by implementing the indicators and the earlier mentioned sustainable tourism

elements, is to practice a integrated management of resources, to fulfill the economical, social and aesthetical needs without compromising the preservation of culture and of the architectural and urban monuments that exist here.

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