

The Cultural-Historical and Political Spheres of Influence of Alba Iulia

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Introduction

ALBA IULIA is an important city in Romania, ranked as a municipality, and one of the oldest cities in the country, dating back to the Roman conquest of Dacia (106-107). With a population of 74,212 inhabitants in 2016,¹ it ranks sixth in the Transylvanian urban hierarchy (after Cluj-Napoca, Braşov, Sibiu, Târgu Mureş, and Bistriţa), and is currently the capital of Alba County. Located on the Mureş Valley, in an area where the Apuseni Mountains and the Târnavelor Plateau meet, the city holds an excellent geostrategic position, which has given it plenty of military, administrative, and economic advantages.

The aim of the current study derives from the necessity to outline, a century after the most important event in Romanian history (the Great Union of 1 December 1918), the cultural-historical and political significance of Alba Iulia City, in regional and national contexts, according to the local inhabitants' perceptions.

Among our research objectives lies the idea of disseminating and promoting the concept of *urban cultural-historical and political sphere of influence*, from a mental perspective. In this case, the cognoscible exploration matrix is qualitatively defined, slightly different from the usual spatial determination (quantitative) of the polarization areas that emanate from an urban center towards the surrounding area. Therefore, the cultural-historical and political polarization areas of Alba Iulia are identical, at regional level, to the entire Transylvanian space (close polarization area), and for the entire national territory (distant polarization area).

Another major objective of this paper is to identify, with the help of an opinion survey, the people's perceptions of the high significance and importance of local symbols, of the city's prestige and especially of the pride of living in a city with such a historical, political, and spiritual heritage.

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Theoretical Background

1. Place Attachment and Development

STRONG TRANSFORMATION processes are characteristic of a post-socialist country such as Romania and qualitative and participatory research methods are welcome for exploring territorial identity issues. The notion of *topophilia* has been already explored in relation to integrated urban planning and sustainable development,² highlighting the role of strong identification among citizens to “reinforce social cohesion and social integration in cities exposed to strong processes of transformation.”³ In addition, the literature discusses and questions topophilia and tropophilia (roots and mobility) in order to explain the relations between people and place depending on their lifestyles.⁴ This has led to the finding that “a desired connection between people, on the one hand, and place, on the other, may only occur when their respective paces and trajectories positively coincide.”⁵

The early 1990s marked the resurgence of territorial identity and its operationalization in local and regional development (both in research and policy agendas).⁶ This trend is even stronger now, “in the era of globalized economy and culture,”⁷ when the “sense of territorial belonging” and “territorial attractiveness” are relevant strategic elements for development at diverse levels.⁸ Research also underlined the importance of identity, values, harmony, solidarity (besides autonomy and innovation), considered principles of territorial sustainability significant in territorial planning.⁹

Exploring the bonding between place and people is relevant for multifunctional landscape management and sustainability approaches, especially in our rapidly and constantly urbanizing world.¹⁰ Place-based collaboration is supported by territorial identity (in the form of place attachment, place identity and place meanings) as a resource for development,¹¹ as findings show that “socially-mediated and experiential aspects of place attachment and place-making can influence place-based collaborative action.”¹²

Moreover, the formation of identities and social responsibility were the focus of geographic inquiry using literary works and qualitative analysis to determine why people’s relations to place are meaningful.¹³ Therefore, “our relation to our living environs and the meanings that we attribute to the space we identify ourselves with”¹⁴ are both natural and necessary.

Studies about the relation between people and their living environment, focusing on their experience of space and attachment, have developed strongly since the 1970s, with the contribution of a series of classics in Human and Regional Geography.¹⁵ Starting from their ideas and in the context of more recent research on the role that territorial identity has for development,¹⁶ we focused our research on the inhabitants’ perception of Alba Iulia city in Transylvania, Romania, a place with a significant historical and cultural heritage. Researchers in the fields of Geography, History and Theology explored diverse topics related to its past, present and future development, with a focus on development policies within its influence area,¹⁷ on the vulnerability of settlements,¹⁸ on urban regeneration and the benefits of adopting the strategy of pedestrian areas,¹⁹ on the importance of the Church’s cultural and religious programs in putting together

“cultural, national, and religious resources to develop social conscience and solidarity,”²⁰ on the Greek Catholic Transylvanian Romanians’ (from the Diocese of Alba-Iulia and Făgăraș) development of the ecclesiastical and cultural education,²¹ on implementing a rehabilitation and organization project for the historical fortress of Alba Iulia, on its rich cultural heritage and tourists’ satisfaction with the touristic offer of the fortress,²² and on important historical events (e.g. the Great Union of 1918).²³

2. City Diplomacy Sphere

DUE TO the complexity that defines cities, developing a definition accepted by all the fields that tackle urban affairs (Geography, Urban Planning, Geopolitics, Architecture, Sociology, Urban Ecology, etc.) becomes a difficult task because of the different existing views. From a historical perspective, the nature of the city is seen as *political*, this being its essential and permanent function. In the 1980s, Georges Duby stated, in the foreword of *Histoire de la France urbaine*, that “Throughout history, the city was not characterized by the number, nor by its inhabitants’ activities, but by its special characteristics of judicial status, sociability, and culture. These features derive from the main role played by the urban organism. This role is not economic. It is *political* ... The etymology is not misleading. The city distinguishes itself from the surrounding environment by the fact that it is the root point of power in the landscape. The state creates the city. The city is the center/nucleus of a sovereignty system. The capacity to react and ensure de general order is concentrated in this focal point.”²⁴

Surd and Păcurar²⁵ make a case for the so-called “frontier,” presenting how this concept manifests itself upon the city, how the city’s areas of influence are created by frontier phenomena (cultural, historical, etc.) in different manners, as well as the permanent deterministic relations that will always exist between the frontier and the city.

In this research, we extrapolated the sphere of political influence to the city level in order to contribute, through this approach, to the application of this concept to the case of cities, despite the fact that this concept is mainly used in a geopolitical context, pointing out at the political, economic, military, and cultural influence of a powerful state over other states, usually neighboring ones. One relevant example of such a powerful state is Russia.²⁶

Certain studies use concepts linked to that of *political urban sphere of influence* such as *the right of the city*²⁷ and *city diplomacy*.²⁸ Beside Lefebvre’s and Purcell’s epistemological approach of the right of the city, the concept of *city diplomacy* underlines six dimensions: security, development, economy, culture, networks, and representation.²⁹

Nowadays, the academic discussion has focused less on the increasing role of an important actor in diplomacy, namely, the city.³⁰ City diplomacy is defined as the institutions and processes by which cities or local governments, in general, engage in relations with actors on an international political stage, with the aim of representing themselves and their interests to one another³¹: “diplomacy thus existed before the existence of states. In ancient Greece, for example, city-states like Athens and Macedon were regularly sending and receiving embassies of an ad hoc character and appointed ambassadors to engage in negotiations on behalf of the city-at-large. Later, in Renaissance times, pow-

erful Italian city-states like Venice and Milan were the first to establish permanent diplomatic missions abroad and to create an organized system of diplomacy.”³²

The political influence sphere of Alba Iulia is created by its functions: security, political-administrative, military, and as a border city,³³ which this city had from the beginning of its functioning as an urban center, under Roman administration (105-106 AD). The most significant function for creating its political influence sphere has been the political-administrative one, at the level of the entire territory of Alba County. This function is an institutional expression of the superior organization of human-made geospatial structures. Its geographical character is a *historical one* and embraced multiple geopolitical forms, according to the historical organization of human society. This function has large spatial mobility, shifting among geo-systemic levels according the political-administrative organization of a state. In the case of Romania, the political-administrative function of a city is allotted and decided according to the county, regional, and Euro-regional levels.³⁴

Its political influence sphere at the local and county level is strengthened by its political continuity and stability, by the remarkable progress of the local public administration and especially due to the implementation policy of E.U. funded development projects. Through partnerships with diverse companies and institutions, with the aim of implementing new development projects, Alba Iulia amplifies its urban functions, contributing to the spatial and mental extension of its political sphere of influence.

The political sphere of influence of this city is constructed symbolically, only at the mental level, within Transylvania and Romania, being an attribute of its rich history of more than 2,000 years. On 1 December, this city becomes the Capital of the Soul for all Romanians and one of the big centers of political convergence alongside Bucharest. This mental polarization is due to the historic and cultural memory of the city, within a system of values diachronically identified and recognized by state institutions and citizens.

Method

ACCORDING TO the methodological approach, our research lies within the field of social sciences,³⁵ and it is both qualitative (due to a mental determination of the cultural, historical, and political spheres of influence) and quantitative (because we used a survey).³⁶

Procedure

In order to present the people’s perceptions of the city’s cultural-historical, iconographic, and political identity, we conducted a survey, between 16 and 24 March 2017, and we received 402 answers. From a logistical point of view, our endeavor was organized into two stages. The first stage involved 102 questionnaires distributed by seven volunteers from Alba Iulia City Hall. The survey took place on 16 March 2017, between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., and collected data and information from local people transiting the

following previously-chosen areas: Transylvania Boulevard, Alba Carolina Fortress, Calea Moșilor (an area close to the City Hall), Cetate (the area near Horea, Cloșca and Crișan High School), and Alba Mall.

As many people were reluctant to participate (74 persons refused to be interviewed), we decided to conduct the same survey online. Thus, we created a Google Forms questionnaire, which was then distributed on Facebook, on many individual and official pages of people and institutions directly connected to the City of Alba Iulia. The online feedback was good, as in nine days we received 300 responses.

The centralization of survey data and the charts were performed with the help of Microsoft Office Excel 2013, after saving, in table format, all the answers from the Google Forms file.

Sample Population

Approximately 2/3 of the respondents were female (61%). In terms of respondents' age, the majority were young people, with ages between 20 and 29 years (34%), followed by those with ages between 14 and 19 (28%), and adults with ages between 30 and 39 (19%). The fewest respondents were the elderly, 60 years of age and older (4%) and the adults between 50 and 59 years of age (3%).

The respondents' level of education gave them a clear understanding of the questionnaire items. More than half (60%) graduated from university or at least a post-secondary school, more than a quarter (27%) were high school graduates only, while 1/10 graduated 10 classes, and less than 3% graduated 8 classes.

Research Material

In order to determine the current and historical spheres of influence for Alba Iulia, we researched the scientific literature, and consulted information provided by the following institutions: Alba Iulia City Hall, the Alba County Department of Statistics, and the Alba County National Archives.

Results and Discussion

1. A brief political history of the city (*From Apoulon to Apulum (Chrysopolis) – Bălgrad (Gyulafehérvár) – Alba of Iula – Alba Iulia (Weissenburg, Karlsburg)*).³⁷

The change of the city's name, in different historical periods, points out to the existence of several waves of cultural, historical and political influence, created by several populations. If during the first century BC, the old *Apoulon* was one of the largest urban centers of Dacia, after the Roman conquest the new *Apulum* experienced tremendous development, rivalling even with the provincial capital of *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*.³⁸ An inscription dating from 252 AD states that this prosperous colony was named *Chrysopolis*, meaning "The Golden City." This name was given due its varied and booming economic life.

The name of *Bălgrad* was given after the Slavs' arrival. This name was subject to several derivations, such as *Gyulafehérvár* (in Hungarian) and *Weissenburg* and *Karlsburg*

(in German).³⁹ A century after John Hunyadi was buried in the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Alba Carolina, the city was no longer named *Bălgrad* in official documents, but *Alba of Gyula-Iulia*, and afterwards *Alba Iulia* (the current name dates back to 1199).

100 years after the Great Union of 1918, Alba Iulia is one of Romania's strongest historical, political and spiritual symbols. "The Other Capital" (of the soul) for Romanians⁴⁰ has a great historical heritage, hosting, at the same time, the largest fortress in the country.⁴¹ For two millennia, Alba Iulia has been the place where many crucial historical and cultural events took place and many important decisions were made, some decisive for the creation of the Romanian state.

The latest archaeological excavations uncovered, on the former site of the city, the existence of a Neolithic settlement from 5000-1900 BC. On other sites, archaeologists discovered Bronze Age artefacts (1700-1000 BC) or, in other cases, vestiges dating back to the Roman period (106-271).⁴²

The cultural, historical, political and iconographic influences of the city are backed by the existence, on the same site, of four settlement layers, each one representing an important stage of the city's past and evolution. The oldest layer dates back to the period following the transformation of Dacia into a Roman province (106-107), when the castrum of the *XIII Gemina Legion* and the canabae surrounding it were built.⁴³ The Medieval Fortress of *Bălgrad* emerged on the same spot (16th-17th centuries), while the Habsburgs, at the beginning of the 18th century, began work on the Alba Carolina Fortress, the largest fortress in Southeastern Europe and the second largest and best preserved Vauban type fortification in Europe (after the one in Luxembourg).⁴⁴

The name *Apulum* was appropriated by the Romans from the former *Apoulon settlement*, located roughly 12 km northwest of the current city. *Apulum* developed during a favorable political and administrative juncture, marked by the construction of the castrum on the 'Cetate' Plateau,⁴⁵ as well as on account of being the permanent residence of the *XIII Gemina Legion*. During the Roman occupation, *Apulum* becomes the largest and most important administrative, financial, political, and military center of Dacia,⁴⁶ having two urban cores, formed of two separate Roman settlements,⁴⁷ located close to each other. The first settlement was erected on the current location of Partoș district and was home to veterans, traders, craftsmen, and different imperial clerks. For six decades, the city thrived demographically and economically, because, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, it was awarded the title *municipium Aurelium Apulense*, while Commodus named it *colonia*, at the same time enjoying the right of *Ius Italicum*. In 253 AD, due to its economic development, *colonia Aurelia Apulensis* at Partoș also received the name *Chrysopolis*.

The second urban core developed around the canabae of the *XIII Gemina Legion*. During the reign of Septimius Severus (193-211), there was an urban settlement around the castrum – *municipium Septimium Apulense*, which, four decades later, under Traianus Decius, was bestowed the title *colonia nova Apulensis*. Therefore, at *Apulum*, two towns coexisted: *colonia Aurelia* at Partoș and *municipium Septimium* surrounding the castrum of the *Gemina Legion*, each maintaining its individuality until the end of the Roman period.⁴⁸

Previously, the synergetic demographic, military and mostly economic collaboration of the approximately 35,000 inhabitants of this "conurbation," supported by an

extremely favorable geographic location – in the wide and fertile Mureș Valley, close to the mining areas of *Ampelum* and *Alburnus Maior*, plus the uninterrupted 17 decades presence of the *XIII Gemina Legion*, made *Apulum* the largest urban center in Roman Dacia, the headquarters for the governor and the strongest military center of the province. At its peak, the rural hinterland of the city competed with the surrounding urban centers (*Ampelum*, *Potaissa* and even *Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*).⁴⁹

The town of *Apulum* was destroyed during the migration period, while the castrum was employed as protection for the local population. In time, a new fortification developed on its location, the medieval fortress of *Bălgrad*, which becomes “the center of the emergent feudal state formation.”⁵⁰ The martyrdom of Horea and Cloșca helped consolidate the fight for the Romanians’ rights and union, becoming forever imprinted upon the historical iconography of the city and giving it the highest prestige among Romanian cities.⁵¹

In 1541, Alba Iulia became the first capital of the Autonomous Principality of Transylvania (until 1690). Its function as capital is further strengthened after Michael the Brave proclaimed Alba Iulia the first capital of the three provinces unified under his scepter: Wallachia, Transylvania, and Moldavia.⁵²

The crucial moment of Romanian national history took place on 18 November/1 December 1918 and would forever bestow upon Alba Iulia the honor of becoming “The Union Capital,” the place where 100,000 Romanians (who had come to complete the act carried out 300 years before by Michael the Brave) expressed the desire that Transylvania joined Romania in a union, through the decision of 1,228 official delegates, gathered in the building now hosting the National Union Museum.⁵³

An important moment that defined the modern history of Romania took place on 15 October 1922, in the Union Cathedral of Alba Iulia. It was the coronation ceremony of King Ferdinand and Queen Mary, as the royal couple of Greater Romania. All these events had a strong impact on the consolidation of the city’s historical, political, and cultural prestige, at national as well as at the European level.

Alba Iulia also retained a strong ecclesiastical presence, having hosted, ever since the 18th century, the Roman Catholic Bishopric which “succeeds, with the help of donations and real estate transactions, to become one of the most powerful feudal owners in Transylvania.”⁵⁴ Alba Iulia now hosts the Archbishopric of Alba Iulia, with a canonical jurisdiction over the counties of Alba and Mureș. It is the successor of the first Orthodox Metropolitan Church of Transylvania, established by Michael the Brave, even though the existence of Orthodox Church leaders in Alba Iulia was first attested in 1376, when the archbishop was Ghelasie of Râmpeț.⁵⁵

Currently, Alba Iulia is one of the most dynamic cities in the country in terms of territorial governance, being the city with the largest European funds absorption rate per capita of all county capitals.⁵⁶ The city registers an ascending trend in urban development, Alba Carolina Fortress having been fully rehabilitated.

The iconographic heritage of the city is visible everywhere you go, as it is filled with historical monuments and sites that remind of its rich historical past and of its former atmosphere. Each year, the spirit of Dacian-Roman combats is resurrected in

the fortress and a series of festivals and shows take place, many of them highly infused with historicity.

2. Inhabitants' Perceptions

After having quantified the inhabitants' satisfaction with living in the city, we noticed that almost half of the respondents (49.3%) were satisfied, over a third (37.1%) stated that they were very satisfied, while less than 6.8% considered themselves not satisfied (Figure 1).

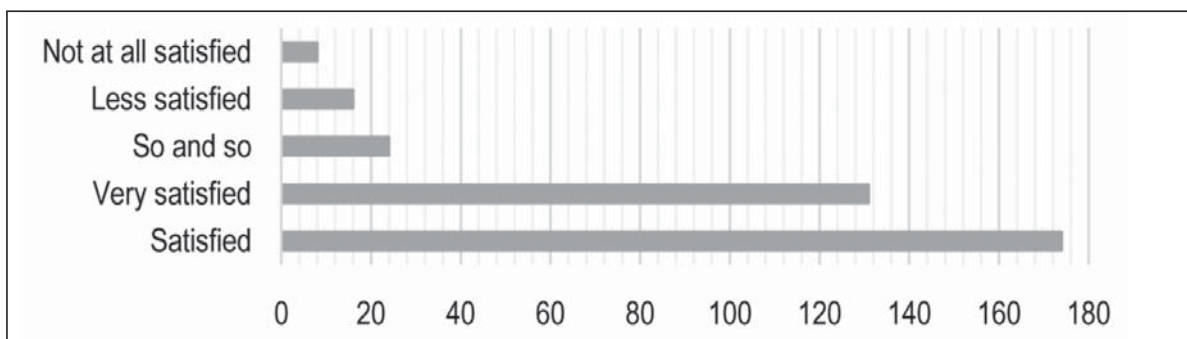


FIGURE 1: Inhabitants' satisfaction with living in Alba Iulia City

An aspect which weighs heavily for the image of Alba Iulia, both locally and nationally, is its inhabitants' pride in being citizens of this city. More than three quarters stated that they were proud or very proud of being locals, while less than 1% felt less or not proud at all of living in this city (Figure 2).

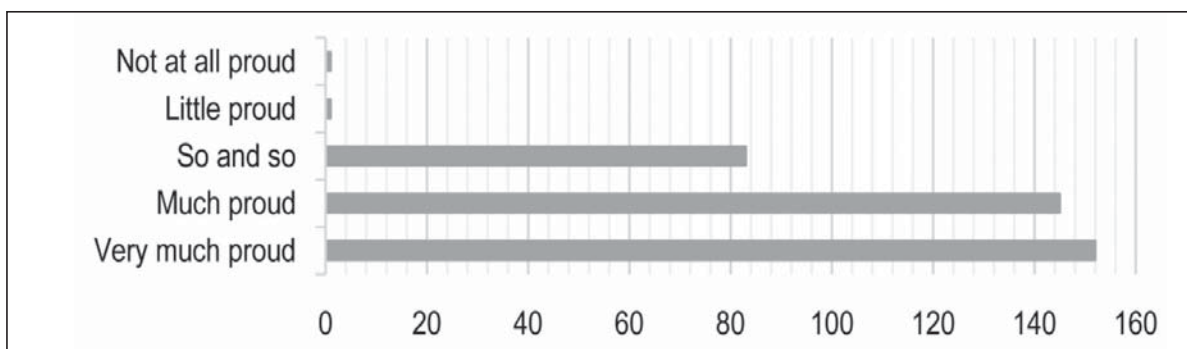


FIGURE 2: Inhabitants' pride in being citizens of Alba Iulia City

In addition, we identified the reasons for this positive personal view. Most respondents affirmed that the main reasons for feeling proud of the city they inhabited were, on the one hand, the aesthetics and comfort it provided, as it was viewed as a beautiful and peaceful city by almost half of the interviewees (41.6%), and, on the other hand, thanks to its historical, religious, and cultural renown (41%). The development currently experienced by the city was mentioned by just 5.2% of the respondents (Figure 3).

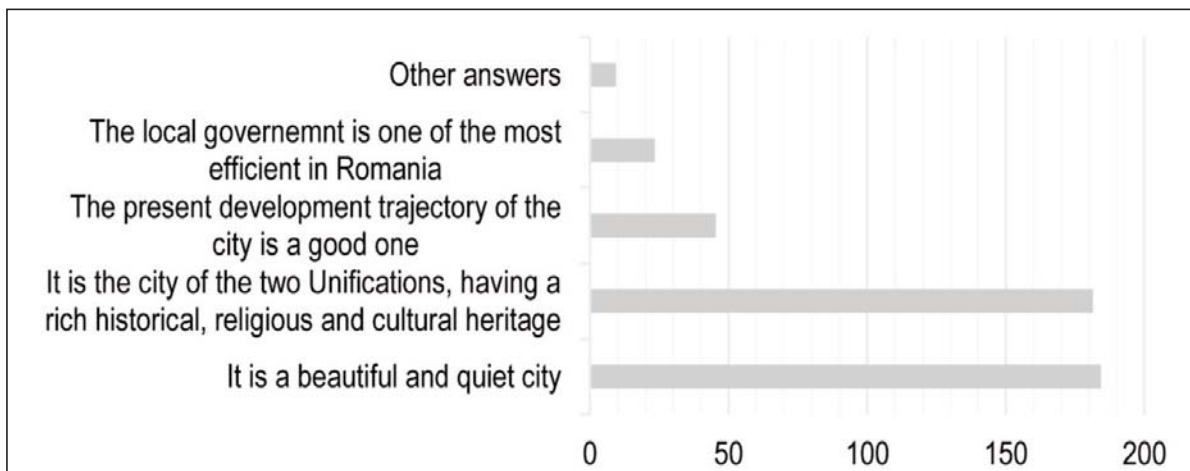


FIGURE 3: Inhabitants’ reasons for being proud as citizens of Alba Iulia City

It is no novelty that, at national level, there are many situations in which the actions and the strategic development focus of the local public administration are not always in accordance with the interests and needs of the community. Asked to point out the extent to which the current local public administration represented their interests, the results were the following: many (38.8%) indicated an average representation, 28.1% a high degree, 14% a very high degree, while 7.3% were displeased with decision makers and their actions in representing the community’s interests (Figure 4).

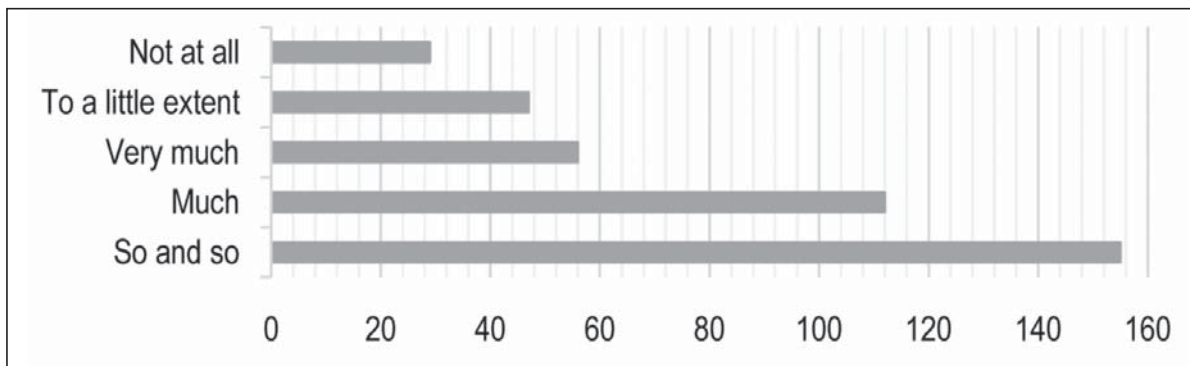


FIGURE 4: Inhabitants’ perceptions of the extent to which the present local city administration represents their community’s interests

It is widely known that Alba Iulia is called “The Other Capital” of Romania. We wanted to see whether the inhabitants of Alba Iulia wish for the city to become the second capital of Romania in the near future, especially from an administrative standpoint. Thus, according to their answers, more than three quarters of the respondents (78%) expressed their wish for this urban center to become a second capital, the remaining 22% disagreeing on the matter.

A challenge would be whether the City of Alba Iulia is ready to become the second capital of Romania, from administrative and decision making standpoints. The respondents considered Alba Iulia as somewhat ready to become the second capital of Romania

and take over some of the administrative, executive and decision making structures. 63% of the respondents were skeptical, while 37% were highly optimistic.

Taking into account the historical age of Alba Iulia, as it has been inhabited since 106-107 and first attested in a document in 1097, it was interesting to know the inhabitants' perception: if they felt more "Romanian" than their fellow nationals. 68% answered yes, while 32% said no.

Choosing the symbol of a city is, generally, the result of a complex process and it is recommended for it to be the outcome of a consultative procedure (between decision makers, the economic sector, research institutions, NGOs, and the community), and of an integrated analysis process (with focus on diachrony, prioritization, selection, and dynamics). Many times, the symbol of a city is a quintessence of many perspectives (e.g. historical, religious, cultural, etc.) and offers precious information about its identity. In the case of Alba Iulia, 74% of the respondents stated that the city's most representative symbol is Alba Carolina Fortress, followed by the Coronation Cathedral (16.3%), the other sites registering insignificant percentages (Figure 5).

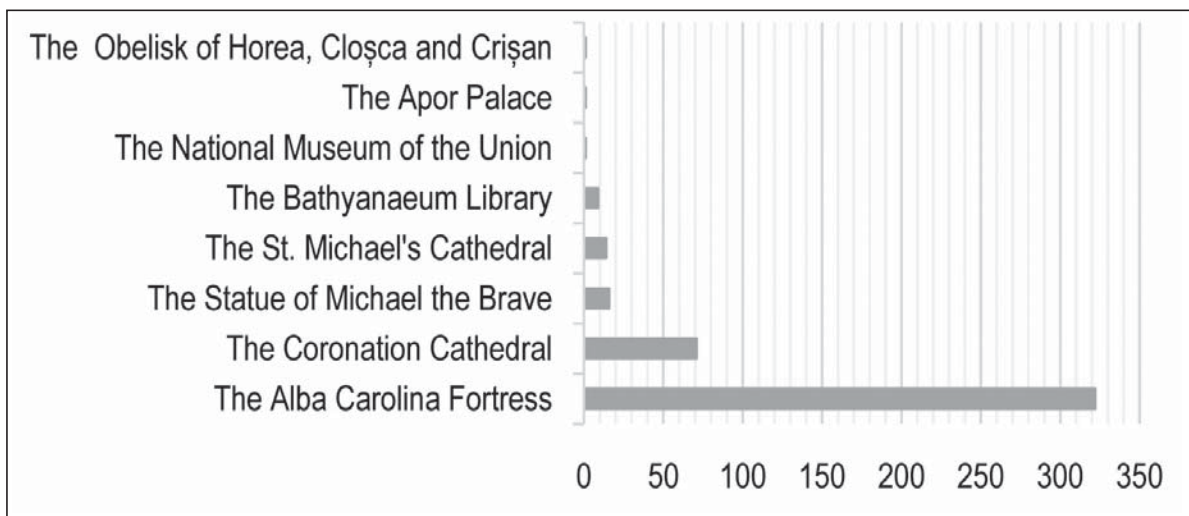


FIGURE 5: Inhabitants' perceptions of the most representative symbols of Alba Iulia City

The promotion of a city's potential and values should be found in the strategic actions and directions towards sustainable development. We identified the tourist objectives of Alba Iulia that should have been promoted more intensively and the survey results were as follows: 66.8% of the respondents stated that the Fortress and the monuments within it should have been more promoted, 15.3% identified the celebrations of the National Holiday of Romania, 10.6% mentioned the city's buildings and modern public spaces, while 7.3% chose the City Days (Figure 6).

The inhabitants' perceptions regarding the urban places to be prioritized when it comes to tourist promotion can be an important element in the development and implementation of a tourist promotion strategy at the decision making level. There are situations when the perception of the population is predictable or can confirm a reality, such as the results of our questionnaire when people chose the promotion of the Fortress's Walls (11.4%) (Figure 7).

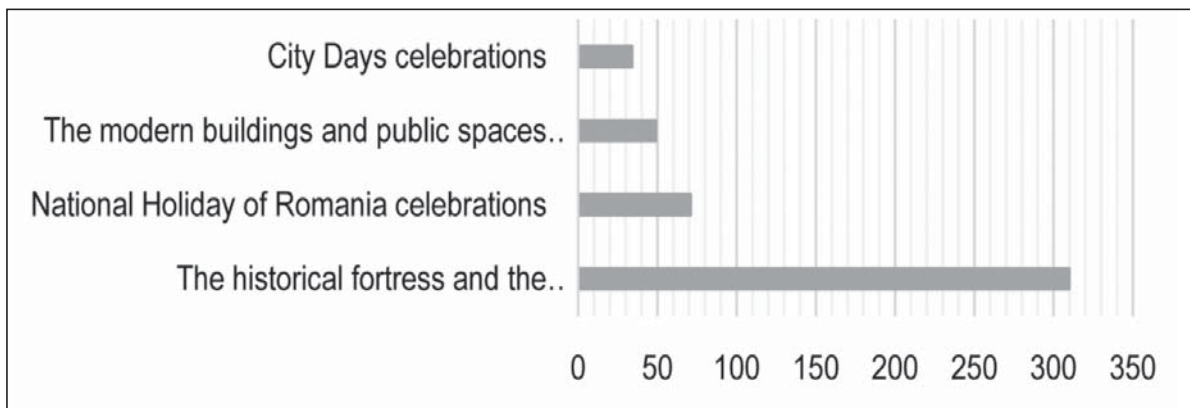


FIGURE 6: Inhabitants' perceptions of what should be promoted in Alba Iulia City as tourist attractions

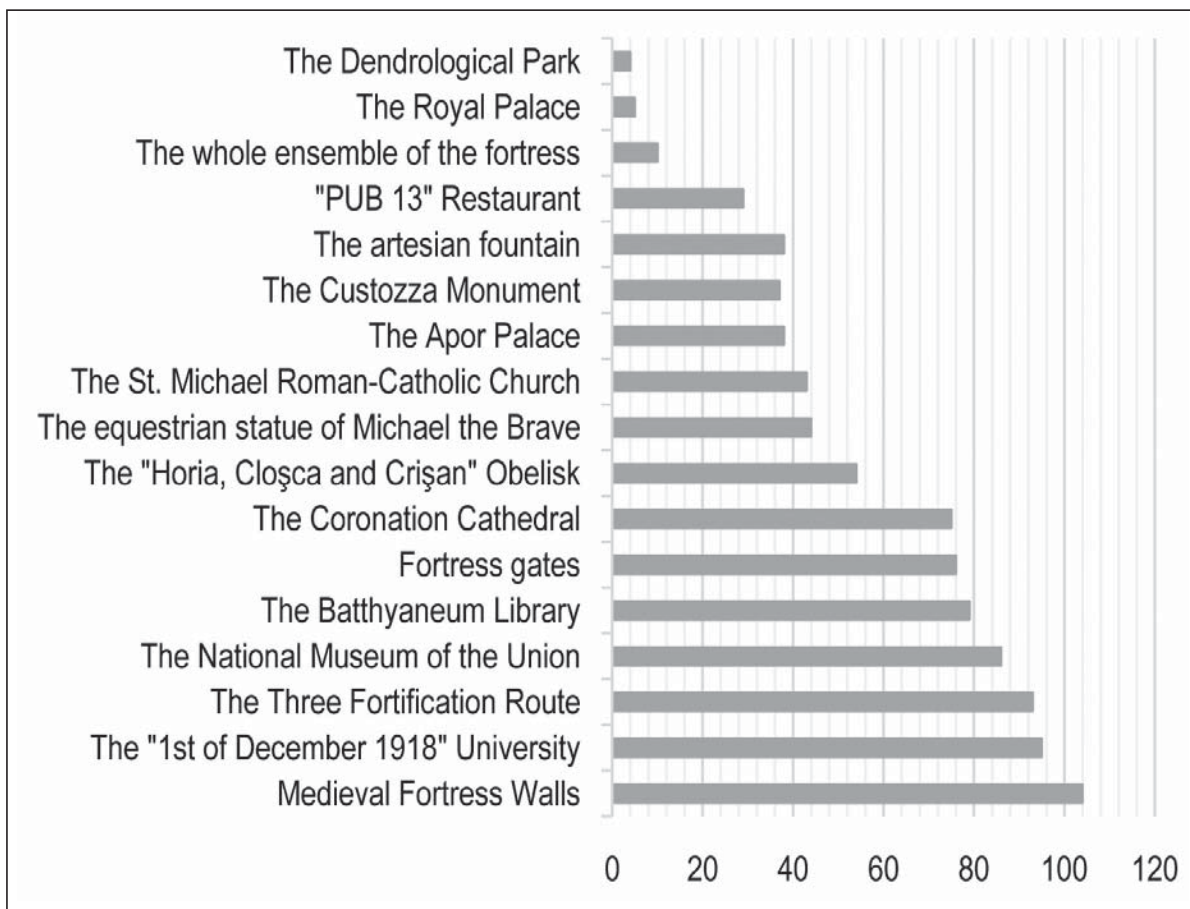


FIGURE 7: Inhabitants' perceptions of which places should be promoted with priority in Alba Iulia City

Surprisingly, the second objective on the list of “must be promoted” was 1 December 1918 University. This emphasizes the fact that the university, despite its short heritage, is currently developing and becoming more accessible, attracting a large number of students from different geographic areas. The third place is occupied (10.2%) by the Three Fortifications Route, an objective closely linked to the first one (City Walls). The last objective on the list is the Dendrological Park, for several reasons, such as the respondents’ lack of awareness of the site. Many smaller and less important sites appeared higher on the list than this park: the artesian fountain, the Custozza Monument (after the closure of Custozza Park and its transformation into a plaza, the monument lost its impact and no longer attracts tourists), PUB 13 Restaurant (the number of restaurants, coffee houses, etc. has increased in Alba Carolina, meaning that PUB 13 is no longer the only landmark of its kind). However, some projects have been implemented since 2007 to ensure better accessibility to the Dendrological Park.

This aspect is crucial as it enables a comparison between the current and the diachronic inhabitants’ perceptions about their city’s cultural-historical, political, and iconographic identity. Results show that most respondents keep memories of high historic “contents,” choosing, from a list of 100 words, the following: *union, Romanian, fortification, Transylvania, Ardeal, Romania, cathedral, Michael the Brave, museum, and medieval*. Other mentioned words, with place attachment value, included: *walls, Vauban, library, Orthodox, moat, Horia, Cloșca and Crișan, Roman* (Figure 8).

We compared the results of our research with those from the research undertaken a decade ago (in 2007) by 1 December 1918 University, on the development of a marketing plan for Alba Carolina. The answers received confirm the local attachment to the cultural-historical, political, and iconographic memory of the city, as mostly the same words had been picked: *union, fortification, Michael the Brave, cathedral, Romanian, museum, walls, obelisk, Transylvania, Orthodox, Ardeal, Horia, Cloșca and Crișan, moat, medieval, Romania, Vauban*.⁵⁷

The fact that this identity is expressed with the same intensity and continuity is the best example of the historic conscience and local patriotism that characterize the inhabitants of this city. The expression of this conscience and the attachment to the city’s symbols emphasize several messages that Alba Iulia transmits with strong intensity in Transylvania, as well as nationwide. The message of “Symbolic capital of the Romanian Union” is supported by words like: *union, Michael the Brave, cathedral, Romanian (Romania)*; the message of “ancient monumental fortification” is generated by: *fortification, walls, obelisk, Transylvania, palace, castrum*; the message of “martyrdom”: *cathedral, Horia, Cloșca, and Crișan, Christianity*; the message of “underlining the important contributions to the city’s identity” is built on *Roman, Vauban, Catholic*; the “historic” message is created by: *museum, Ardeal, monument, history, archeological*; the “medieval” message is based on: *walls, Transylvania, age, medieval*; the “eclectic” message (towards the creation of a new brand) is deduced from: *walls, Orthodox, library, statue*.⁵⁸

At national level, one of the most common complaints when decision makers implement certain actions, projects or development policies at local level is that the population is not consulted or that the consultation process is superficial or subjective. Therefore, to the question whether the inhabitants of Alba Iulia wished to be consulted when the local

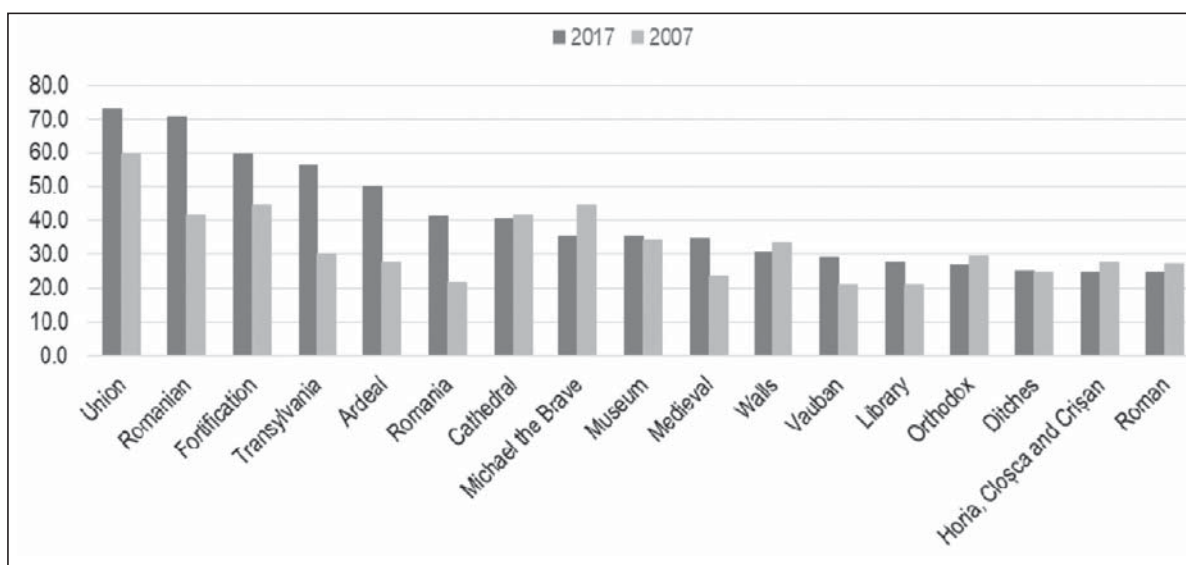


FIGURE 8: Inhabitants' choice of the ten words they considered the most representative for Alba Iulia City

government takes important decisions for the city's evolution and development, their answer was easy to anticipate. 84% answered yes, while only 16% said no.

Conclusions

WE DESCRIBED the cultural, historical and political events of Alba Iulia and we emphasized the city's prestige, acquired during its entire existence. A hundred years after the Great Union, the city registered remarkable progress, the local government intending, at the Centennial of the Great Union, to finalize the Alba Iulia Smart City 2018 Project.⁵⁹

The research results emphasize a strong cultural, historical and iconographic imprint, as 78% of the respondents wish Alba Iulia to become, alongside Bucharest, the capital of Romania. The most mentioned symbolic urban attractions are Alba Carolina Fortress, the Union Cathedral and the Statue of Michael the Brave. Another aspect worth mentioning is respondents' choice of ten words out of a total of 100 which characterize Alba Iulia: Union, Romanian, fortification, Transylvania, Ardeal, Romania, cathedral, Michael the Brave, museum, and medieval. Other terms mentioned, of great identity value, are: walls, Vauban, library, Orthodox, moat, Horia Cloșca and Crișan, Roman, history, monument, Europe, and attractive. The attachment to national symbols, the city's prestige and the citizens' desire for it to become state capital are only a few arguments that certify Alba Iulia's symbolic title of "The Other Capital" for all Romanians.⁶⁰

Likewise, the survey enabled us to prove the research hypothesis according to which the feeling of local patriotism has remained the same as in 2007, according to a study conducted by 1 December 1918 University in Alba Iulia.

According to this study, one can point out that Alba Iulia has an extremely rich cultural, historical and political heritage, which bestows to the city a remarkable prestige and a special place in the national iconography. With a history of two millennia, when moments of greatness were intertwined with less fortunate moments, Alba Iulia is perhaps the city with the most dynamic history, being a true pillar of national identity.

Alba Iulia enjoys considerable favorable development premises through the efficient capitalization of its rich cultural and historic heritage. This can become a major instrument for the economic revival of a city which, unfortunately, does not offer enough economic opportunities at the moment.

The cultural, historical and political sphere of influence of the city registered many fluctuations, being strong during the Roman occupation (106-271), when the old Apulum rivalled Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, or during the time when Bălgrăd held the function of capital (1541-1690) of the Autonomous Principality of Transylvania and of the three united provinces (Wallachia, Transylvania, and Moldavia) under Michael the Brave. Its sphere of influence experienced a major decrease in 1241, when the city was destroyed by Tartars.⁶¹

The cultural-historical and political sphere of influence of a city was outlined through a qualitative research since it is very difficult, almost impossible, to rigorously map the expanding borders of urban influence. This is deciphered through the city's prestige at different spatial scales, through its iconography within the national conscience. Therefore, we can speak of a mental influence, as it is the closest to the noosphere of a territorial system than to its quantitative spatial dimension.

Being one of the oldest settlements in Romania, alongside *Tomis* (Constanța), *Callatis* (Mangalia), *Napoca* (Cluj-Napoca), *Potaissa* (Turda), *Drobeta* (Drobeta-Turnu Severin) or *Ampelum* (Zlatna), Alba Iulia has a two-millennia continuity of its cultural, historical and political sphere of influence, its hinterland having a strong presence in Transylvania and a more moderate one at the national level. The city's iconography and prestige are strengthened every year, during the National Holiday of Romania, when Alba Iulia hosts a considerable number of high-ranking officials, clergy, and citizens, thus fulfilling the role of symbolic capital for all Romanians.



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Abstract

The Cultural-Historical and Political Spheres of Influence of Alba Iulia

In this research, we primarily intend to promote a new paradigm for tackling urban spheres of influence. Since, in most cases, the areas of polarization are interpreted in their quantitative form, expressed by their spatial dimension, it is imperative to tackle the issue of the cultural-historical and political spheres of influence of Alba Iulia City, our case study, at a mental level, placing the subject in a regional (the Transylvanian space), as well as in a national context, according to the local inhabitants' perception. We collected data with a questionnaire having 402 respondents, which helped emphasize the people's perceptions of the cultural-historical, iconographic (symbolic) and political identity of the city in contemporary and diachronic contexts.

Keywords

qualitative research, opinion survey, cultural-historical and political influence, Alba Iulia, perceptions