

SAXONNESS WITHOUT SAXONS.
ETHNICITY AND SYMBOLIC CAPITAL IN A
TRANSYLVANIAN TOWN

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“Sibiu the European Capital of Culture salutes Bucharest the periphery.”¹

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, in the German town of Hamelin, which was suffering from a rodent invasion, a man dressed in colourful garments appeared, and promised the dwellers of the town to provide them with a solution in exchange for a reward. As the people of Hamelin accepted, the stranger played his musical pipe and lured the rodents out of town, into the nearby river, thus saving the town from the nuisance. Despite his success, the people retracted their promise and refused to pay the piper. One day, when the dwellers were in church, the revengeful piper returned and played his pipe again, this time attracting the children of Hamelin. One hundred and thirty boys and girls followed him out of town, after which they were never seen again.

The legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, made famous by the fairy tale version of Brothers Grimm, is believed to be in fact a story about migration. An explanation as old as the story itself advances claims that the journey of the children of Hamelin ended in Transylvania, where they settled down and built the seven fortresses of the region. The Germans, ‘successors’ of the fairy tale children of Hamelin, have been, for eight centuries, one of the most prominent ethnic groups in Transylvania. Closer to our times, in the 1990s, the migratory journey from Germany to Transylvania took the opposite route, as the German settlers of Transylvania embarked on the return journey, back to their land of origin.

¹ Informal slogan of the European Capital of Culture 2007.

The Germans of Transylvania, once a numerous population, adding to the traditionally multiethnic region, began their massive emigration from Romania during the communist period, encouraged by the nationalist demographic policies of the communist regime. The pressures imposed on them by a state that was in the process of creating a homogenous nation drawing from the ancient Dacians and Romans met with the willingness of the another state (The Federal Republic of Germany) to pay a ransom for their return. As a result of this conjunction, the Germans of Transylvania began their exodus, which accelerated after the fall of communism. Nowadays, the German minority in Romania decreased to 0.3% of the total population. In 1985, a study by an American anthropologist, Katherine Verdery, defended that “German ethnicity has ceased to mean belonging to a solidary and self-conscious ethnic group and consists only of stereotypic individual differences from non-Germans, in ways that do not entail any group strategy or organization.”² Since that moment onwards, the accounts about the Transylvanian Germans record deserted villages, and decaying fortified churches as the last remains of the Saxon heritage in Transylvania.

The present paper stems from the intention to provide an up-to-date overview of the German heritage of Sibiu, one of the seven fortresses founded by them in the medieval period. The Saxons, the German group which lay the founding stone of the city in 1191, have acquired a special visibility in the last eight years, once the city was the site of an ethnic paradox, during the 2000 local elections, won with an absolute majority by the Saxon candidate to the mayor’s office, Klaus Johannis. The election results were an enigma considering that the ethnic composition of the city, dominated by Romanian ethnics in a proportion of 95% and that the election winner was the candidate of the political organization of the German minority (the German Forum). The 2000

² Katherine Verdery, “The Unmaking of an Ethnic Collectivity: Transylvania’s Germans” in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (Feb., 1985), 62-83. 63.

winner of the mayor's office is still in office today, at the moment when this study is being edited, after two four-year mandates and is the most credited candidate for a new and third mandate.

Another event of great visibility which brought Sibiu into public attention was the 2007 title of European Capital of Culture, which Sibiu shared with Luxemburg. Such an event propelled Sibiu on the European cultural stage and prompted for the marketing of a local identity to be displayed for the wide European-scale audience.

My research was triggered by the acknowledgement of the emergence of two extraordinary events, both having a strong potential of constituting turning points for the local identity representations. The first motivation for such an inquiry is the noticeable salience of the Saxon background of the city, connected to the great political support which the German Forum received from the local population. The second motivation, as previously mentioned, is that the European Capital of Culture event, both in its position of cultural festivity and tourism attraction, created a stage for the local heritage and identity representations to be put on display.

The arguments advanced in this paper defend that the Saxon heritage played the key role in the contemporary identity construction, while, equally important, it developed outside a connection with an existent Saxon local community. More specifically, the Saxonness of the city was displayed as part of a political and cultural strategy built around the identification of the great symbolic capital of Saxonness and its potential uses.

My argument is two-fold. Firstly, the paper will develop on the existence of a “myth of the Saxon”, present in the local and national collective imaginary, upon which the political and

cultural actors drew in order to stimulate support and consensus for a Saxon cultural branding of the city. By bringing historic and contemporary evidence of the myth, I will build the justification for the potential of Saxonness to be revived and to receive consensus even in the quasi-absence of a Saxon community to carry its meanings. Saxonness becomes in this context a political project which can comfortably be directed according to the opportunity structures identified. The existence and the potential of ethnic stereotypes concerning the Saxons is the matter to be approached in chapter two, which also provides an explanation for the political success of the German Forum, but also for the consequences emerging from its predominance over local administration. The second part of the argument is focused on the role of Saxonness as a political and cultural currency in European context. My argument is that the symbolic capital provided by the ethnicization of local identity serves the city to secure the title of European Capital of Culture and to access further symbolic and material resources, such as centrality and prestige in a European context, tourist boom, and economic cooperation of German speaking countries. This argument is built on revealing the dimensions of Saxonness which political and cultural actors instrumentalized to connect Sibiu to a wider scene. I will develop, throughout chapter three, on how Saxonness connects the city to Luxemburg, the other European Capital of Culture in 2007. Moreover, I will develop on how Saxonness provides the link with the multiculturalism values defining the European Union and also on how Saxonness symbolically extracts Sibiu from a less prestigious Romanian context and allows the city to act as an independent actor on the European cultural, diplomatic and European stage. By city I understand the sum of political and cultural actors which have identified a stake relative to the local branding of Sibiu and are in the position to mobilize the symbolic resources of and identified local specificity, such as Saxonness.

The reason for my two-fold analysis is provided by the theoretical standpoint which the present paper assumes: that the ethnicization of Sibiu is a political project which draws from an identifiable historic background (the town was founded by Saxon settlers who, until the communist period, represented a big proportion of the local population), according to a contemporary context which encourages a selective memory and therefore selective representations of the local heritage. My main hypothesis is that, given the acknowledged latent potential of Saxonness to provide an efficient instrument to access various resources, its activation depended on a specific political context, which emerged with the election of Klaus Johannis as mayor and the foreseen opportunity to acquire (and benefit from) the title of European Capital of Culture.

The fourth chapter of the paper explores the symbolic construction of an ethnic space, envisaging the various dimensions of public space representations of ethnicity. This part is based on an anthropological fieldwork research undergone within a larger time span, which allowed me to document the evolution of what I argue to be an ethnicization of the public space between the emergence of the European Capital of Culture 2007 programme (which I will refer to as ECC07) and the short term aftermath as it was available for observation in the first half of 2008. The results of the findings are grouped according to the possibilities of displaying ethnicity in the public space. One subchapter details on the display of Saxon architectural heritage and the ethnic symbolic space claims, resulting into what I will refer to as politics of the space. The second part will approach the broader issue of memory and commemoration, but will narrow the theme to explore the way in which the history of the city was articulated through public signs such as statues, monuments, memorial plates and tourist directions and their connection to the ECC07. Further on, the ethnographic account analyses the ethnic framing of the city with the aid of flags, heraldics and toponymy politics, moving on to investigate how ethnicity shapes the museographic

account of the city's heritage. A further section, framed as the previous ones under the analytical category of cultural objectification, is a presentation of the commodification of ethnicity. Saxonness becomes for Sibiu, in the context of the great tourist invasion triggered by the ECC07, a consumer's item, represented under the shape of souvenirs, books, postcards etc.

To conclude, I will restate the objectives of the present study by saying that its aim is to provide possible guidelines for an answer to three questions regarding Sibiu's cultural heritage and politics. First of all, it explores what the ethnopolitical entrepreneurs instrumentalize in the case of Sibiu, more specifically it provides an overview of the symbolic content and political potential of Saxonness in Romanian and European context. Secondly, it tries to provide the reasons behind an eventual instrumentalization of Saxonness and last of all it offers an account on the ways this symbolic and material heritage is selected, displayed and marked in the local urban landscape. Therefore, the paper's objectives, are to provide an answer to three interrelated questions: "What?", "Why?" and "How?" ethnicity matters in contemporary Sibiu.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is formulated as a political anthropology account of a perceived local fervour of transforming the past into heritage. The process of local identity building stems as a struggle to activate the identified cultural capital of the local ethnic heritage, which can be strongly contextualized in a system of contemporary political opportunity structures. The study analyzes the emergence of the favourable context for the activation of the need to consent over a local sense of identity, as well as the possible reasons which made a particular choice predominant. The remembrance of the local past is a selective process, a strategic ethnic entrepreneurship of identifying sources of cultural and symbolic capital and transforming it into further benefits.

An important finding of the fieldwork research, which the further chapters try to document, is the ethnicization of the city by instrumentalizing Saxony in its material expressions. The efficient instrumentalization of the cultural capital of Saxon ethnicity is dependent on the extent this capital acquires an objective representation, which can be perceived by the envisaged public. By objectification, ethnicity can be either displayed in architecture sites, or commemorated by public signage and monuments, but also transformed into a commodity and sold on the souvenir market. The public space of Sibiu becomes thus a political arena, where heritage becomes a source of symbolic gentrification.

The type of account which the present paper is attempting to provide is a political anthropology of the cultural production. The methodological and, in part, the theoretical model for this study is the

ethnography made by Italian anthropologist Bernardino Palumbo on a town in Eastern Sicily.³ The author's main focus is the relation between heritage and identity. The presuppositions which he uses are, as in the case of the present analysis, that the process of patrimonialization involves an ideological reconstruction of the past, based on the competition between alternative rhetoric of identity-building. The power relations at local level play a key role in shaping the instrumentalization of the cultural goods. In this concern Palumbo's analysis specifies, in the same voice as Michael Herzfeld, the purpose of the research as being not the factuality, the 'traditional acts', but rather the "political rhetoric of the production of traditionalism", including "the poetics of construction and the authenticity claims, [...] by the practices and the rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion, of producing similarities and differences [...]"⁴ It seeks to deconstruct the concept of 'place', in order to highlight the available venues for the production of specificity. His view is focused on objects (statues, baroque buildings, medieval churches, prehistoric tombs, archive documents) and on the rhetoric of space and time (constructing competing narrations).⁵ The study questions the assumption of whether the local identities stratified in time are organically linked to cultural/patrimonial goods. The author argues that the similar forms of local belonging are connected to external intellectual, social, political and economical processes and speaks of forms of manipulating public space. The social actors who design the rhetoric strategies of identity building are, in the case of the Sicilian town, historians, university professors, journalists, together with local, provincial, regional and European administration representatives⁶. The staging of the past is a key focus of his analysis. By looking at The Baroque Week Festival organized in Catalfaro, Palumbo identifies a narrative and symbolic competition which accurately reflects the

³ Bernardino Palumbo, *L'UNESCO e il campanile. Antropologia, politica e beni culturali in Sicilia orientale* (Roma: Meltemi Editore, 2003).

⁴ Ibid. 15.

⁵ Ibid. 9.

⁶ Ibid, 12.

symbolic, economic and political power relations,⁷ as the cultural event offers the political actors a generous range of means of legitimization.

In the classic definition of Hobsbawm and Ranger, inventing tradition is, “where possible, [an] attempt to establish continuity with a *suitable* historic past.”⁸ The traditions and the public memories mobilized in these cases follow the pattern of an ethno-political instrumentalization process. Tradition is being mobilized for partisan purposes, transformed into a commodity for tourist use or invoked as a way to resist change. The staging of the past is the product of a selective filter and one should have in mind the intentionality and grounded politics behind any type of identity representation. The invention of tradition is a continuous process, but with periods of ethnic florescence and decline⁹. It usually arises from present needs, especially in times of intense social change.

A brief glance on the purposes for which representations of the past are used indicates “legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion”¹⁰ as the most general reasons. They can establish and legitimate social and political actors, as well as value systems. Supporting European integration by emphasising one’s own heritage compatibility with the European one is an illustration of such a legitimacy instrument.

Richard Handler takes a similar stand against the naturalistic conception of tradition: “We suggest that there is no essential, bounded tradition; tradition is a model of the past and is inseparable from

⁷ Ibid. 271.

⁸ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1. My emphasis.

⁹ Steven Hoelscher, “Tourism, Ethnic Memory and the Other-Directed Place”; *Cultural Geographies*; 1999; 5: 369-398. 372.

¹⁰ Hobsbawm and Ranger, 12.

the interpretation of tradition in the present. [...] Rather, the ongoing reconstruction of tradition is a facet of all social life, which is not natural, but symbolically constructed.”¹¹

One of the most notorious cases of historical reconstructions, frequently referred to in literature is that of Quebec’s old centre, which constituted the focus of a vast nationalist and tourism project resulted in the destruction of an ensemble of old buildings, which was subsequently reconstructed as a French eighteenth century architectural ensemble¹². This representation of ‘Quebecitude’ is an indicator of the selectiveness of inventing tradition. Representations depend on the use of symbols and are thus continuously reinvented.¹³

The revaluation of Sibiu’s old centre, considered in the same category as the cited case of Quebec, can be interpreted as an example of selective reevaluation of heritage. To illustrate, only certain architectural elements limited to the space of the Sibiu’s Upper Town section are highlighted to stage the identity of Sibiu, while other architectural sites are ignored. The heritage which is thought to be valued is actually a creation of contemporary conceptual values.¹⁴

Another classic theoretical framework for the study of heritage is David Lowenthal’s distinction between history and heritage. Heritage, in his words, “is not a testable or even a reasonably plausible account of some past, but a declaration of faith in that past.”¹⁵ Heritage, unlike history, is

¹¹ Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious”, *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 97, No. 385. 273-290. 276.

¹² Ibid, 276-277.

¹³ Ibid, 281.

¹⁴ Ibid, 280.

¹⁵ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). 121.

not falsifiable, because it “diverges from history not in being biased but in its attitude towards bias [...] [F]or heritage, bias is a nurturing virtue.”¹⁶

Francoise Choay’s contribution to the topic, from her position as art historian, discusses the functions of heritage and its relation with memory, concerned with the means by which memory is being preserved. More specifically, she details on the modern processes by which (architectural, in her case) heritage is transformed into an economic product under cultural tourism: preservation, restoration, staging, modernizing, delivering the site¹⁷ are all expressions of the relation between the contemporary needs and memory. These spaces, transformed as such, could represent what M. Boyer formulated as “rhetorical topos”: “civic compositions that teach us about our national heritage [...] and assume that the urban landscape itself is the emblematic embodiment of power and memory.”¹⁸

Choay uses a global frame for her argumentation and suggests that “a market for old centres and districts has emerged” which tends to exclude the local or less privileged populations as a result of the standards of cultural consume.¹⁹ In the case of Sibiu, the argument connects with the spatiality of memory and an above mentioned historical gentrification: a situation where the commemorative sites and the heritage of the Saxon community have a spatial distribution which favours it for staging. The landscapes of ethnic memory are subjected to a gentrification perpetuated by the politics of memory.

¹⁶ Ibid, 122.

¹⁷ Francoise Choay: *Alegoria patrimoniului/The Alegory of Heritage*, (Bucharest: Simetria Publishers, 1998). 13.

¹⁸ M. C. Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994). 321.

¹⁹ Choay, 174.

The need to support memory with material representations is also developed by John R. Gills, who quotes Pierre Nora into saying that “Modern history is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording and the visibility of the image”.²⁰ Gills identifies the trend of “privatizing memory”: “today packaged forms of both memory and history have become so profitable that we must be wary of the results of commodification and commercialization as much as the consequences of political manipulation.”²¹

²⁰ John R. Gillis, Introduction, In: John R. Gillis (ed), *Commemorations – The Politics of National Identity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). 3-24. 15.

²¹ *Ibid*, 19-20.

2. THE SAXON MYTH, PAST AND PRESENT: THE SYMBOLIC CAPITAL OF ETHNICITY

For the purpose of the study, this section is designed to document the existence of a “myth of the Saxon”: a series of positive stereotypes about Saxons, as to which there is a collective consensus. Accordingly, the present study is divided into two parts. The first one aims to render a clear profile of what the Saxon myth consists of, under what circumstances it was formed and to what extent it is salient nowadays. This task is supported mainly by anthropological studies on Transylvanian multi-ethnic communities. The anthropological accounts suggest a consensus over a “Saxon model” which the other ethnic groups refer to as desirable. Complementary, I will develop on the results of the Barometer of Ethnic Relations, a national scale survey on the dynamics of ethnic relations in Romania.²² The survey reflects both, the social stereotypes which Romania’s main ethnic groups associate with the Saxons, and also how these groups position the Saxon community in the ethnic hierarchy.

2.1. BRIEF OVERVIEW ON SAXON HISTORY

In the 2000 local elections in the Transylvanian town of Sibiu the German candidate from the German Democratic Forum, Klaus Johannis, is elected mayor, by a population consisting of 95%

²² I will develop on the results of the 2000 edition of the survey. The databases, graphics and results of the Barometer can be found at http://www.edrc.ro/projects.jsp?program_id=3&project_id=19

Romanians and 1.6% German ethnics. In 2004 Johannis was reconfirmed for a second mandate, with 88.7% of the votes, together with a majority German City Council.²³

The city was initially a fortress founded by German settlers (Saxons) in the twelfth century and was widely known throughout medieval times by its German name - Hermannstadt. It preserved a multiethnic component until the last decades of the communist era, when the German population decreased dramatically, due also to the aggressive nationalist politics lead by Ceausescu in search of a unitary national state. Nowadays, with almost 2000 people, the German community in Sibiu is apparently the town's third minority group, surpassed numerically by the Hungarian one and, according to unofficial data, also by the Roma community. The existence of a very popular and successful German mayor opens the way to questions about the possible negotiation on ethnic bases of the power relations in Sibiu and, implicitly, on the types of capital mobilized.

It was under the mandate of Klaus Johannis that Sibiu won the title of European Capital of Culture for 2007 (in a partnership with Luxemburg, based on common Saxon origins) and started to be marketed for this purpose as a richly multicultural medieval town with an explicitly Saxon character, as subsequent parts of the present paper will attempt to argument. The title also coincided with Romania's admission to the European Union, also in 2007, correlation which transformed Sibiu ECC07 into an effective diplomatic opportunity.

²³ Unfortunately, the purpose of this paper does not allow for an extensive discussion on the salience, in the Romanian and especially Transylvanian territory, of positive stereotypes about the Saxons (the 'myth of the Saxon') and the compatibility between these stereotypes and the profile of a good town administrator.

2.2. STEREOTYPES

The first dimension of the topic addresses the evolution and the role of stereotypes in the ethnic group dynamics in Sibiu and on the available possibilities and determinants for a potential conversion of ethnicity into heritage.

One of the arguments which this chapter supports is that under the title of multiculturalism lies symbolic reparation for the exodus of the Sibiu Saxons throughout the 20th century. The Saxon heritage is being revived and put forward as the town's cultural brand. This specificity is staged and performed under the endeavour to recover and revitalize the ethnic past. A special focus of the research is on determining how the meaning and identity is being negotiated between the German population of the town (which makes up merely 1.6% of the total population) and the three more numerous communities of the town (Romanians, Hungarians and Roma). The content of the ethnic myth provides reasons for a high support for Saxonification as a strategy from the part of most of the involved social actors.

The case of Sibiu's Saxonness provides an illustration of the role of the past as provider of legitimacy for present aspirations, similarly to the more classical cases of *Quebecitude*²⁴ or Greekness²⁵. Whether a dimension of cultural imperialism or a part of a tourism marketing strategy, tradition and authenticity have been increasingly acknowledged as constructed in accordance with the needs of the present than expressions of history and heritage. This paper

²⁴ Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious", *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 97, No. 385, 1984, 276-289.

²⁵ Michael Herzfeld, *Anthropology Through the Looking-Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

supports the idea that the staging of the past is a selective and highly contextual process and that its contour and design are strongly linked to the political and ideological stakes of the present. As any staged event, to frame it under the form of a metaphor, identity needs to be put into play by a director according to a script, to be supported visually by décor and costumes and to address a public.

The other key issue which this section is attempting to challenge is the connection between ethnicity and the real existence of ethnic groups. I will develop my argument on the activation of stereotypes by “rethinking ethnicity” according to Brubaker’s theoretical framework: “ethnicity, race and nation should be conceptualized not as substances or things or entities or organisms or collective individuals – as the imaginary of discrete, concrete, tangible, bounded and enduring <groups> encourage us to do – but rather in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms.”²⁶ This is to state that creating, enhancing or using ethnicity should be approached as independent from the existence of an ethnic group as a consistently constituted entity²⁷. Ethnicity is rather a set of practices, as a dynamic process with political, social, cultural and psychological dimensions. This implies reconsidering ethnicity not as a reflection of a substantial entity, but possibly as a performance. Brubaker quotes Bourdieu on the “*performative character*” of ethnicity: “By *invoking* groups, they seek to *evoke* them, summon them, call them into being. These categories are for *doing* – designed to stir, summon, justify, mobilize, kindle, and energize.”²⁸ In other words, one should draw the distinction between the uses of ethnicity and its existence: ethnicity is indeed real insofar, as it refers to “practical categories, situated actions,

²⁶ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004), 11.

²⁷ Also in terms of numbers, the last census shows a percentage of 0,27% German ethnics currently living in Romania, which qualifies them as the fourth national minority: <http://recensamant.referinte.transindex.ro/?pg=8>. Accessed on February 15th 2008.

²⁸ Ibid, 10. My emphasis.

cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms, political projects and contingent events.”²⁹ In our case, the most realistic scenario, by which Saxonness can be activated, is by being articulated as a discursive frame and a cultural idiom. This strong pervasiveness and salience of Saxonness is one of the best cases to support Brubaker’s argument: it has a very feeble reflection in substantialist terms, as it will be discussed below. Not only did the community fade away as a cohesive, unitary actor as a result of about 70 years old unaccommodating historical context, but also the Saxon community in numerical terms is nowadays statistically insignificant in Transylvania and in Sibiu, as well and has been so for several decades.

The most extensive research which illustrates the evolution of the identity of Transylvanian Saxons from an anthropological perspective belongs to Katherine Verdery. In one of her papers addressing the topic, which was published in 1985, she identifies a phenomenon of “ethnic demobilization”: “Romania’s Germans, originally rooted in Transylvania, [...] for a long time constituted the region’s most tightly organized and solidary ethnic collectivity. But today [...] German ethnicity has ceased to mean belonging to a solidary and self-conscious ethnic group and consists only of stereotypic individual differences from non-Germans.”³⁰ She continues by saying that, contrary to the past, at the time of her research “[Saxon] ethnic identity has become far less central to life, far less publicly visible, and far more individualized.”³¹ It is meaningful to specify that the author stresses the Saxons’ still existing sense of distinctiveness, even though Saxon ethnicity has been

²⁹ Ibid, 11.

³⁰ Katherine Verdery, *The Unmaking of an Ethnic Collectivity: Transylvania’s Germans in American Ethnologist*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (Feb., 1985), 63.

³¹ Ibid, 63.

“unmade”. More recent researches³² with similar accounts indicate that the respective observation is still valid. Verdery herself draws on the “instrumentalist” view on ethnicity, which deals with the concept as an adaptation of response to political and economic circumstances.

As the key point of this chapter is to give a clear account on the content of Saxon identity and stereotypes, it is relevant to delve into the historical context in which Saxonness developed as a meaningful concept. “Germanness – specifies Verdery – has been multiply endowed with significance – in settings of local, regional, national and international political economy, through diverse institutions, within varied systems of symbols and ideas.”³³ She argues that the 18th and 19th century Habsburg Empire reinforced the Germans’ tendency to form a closed ethnic group. The most basic of the supporting conditions for identity formation were the special economic position and the Lutheran Church, which also provided the education. Lutheranism was a meaningful tool of reproducing identity even after the economic advantages had been lost, but in the late 1940s the German church and education were completely eliminated. During the communism, the Saxons were pushed, for the previously mentioned reasons, to the periphery of the Romanian society. Their interest in community-making shifted towards immigration, a focus which in Verdery’s view had individualizing effects.³⁴ As for the observations the American anthropologist makes concerning stereotypes, her research concludes that “the past perceptions of what it means to be German includes being economically successful and politically quiescent”³⁵.

³² Gabriela Coman, *Vecinatatile fara vecini (Neighborhoods without Neighbors)* in Vintila Mihailescu, Gabriela Coman, Ferenc Pozsony, Anne Schiltz, Vasile Soflau: *Vecini si vecinatati in Transilvania (Neighbours and Neighborhoods in Transylvania)* (Bucharest: Paideia Publishers, 2002), 93-118 and Vintila Mihailescu, *Modelul sasesc (The Saxon Model)* in *Secolul XXI- Sibiu, o capitala europeana* (November 2007), 131-134.

³³ Ibid, 69.

³⁴ Ibid, 69.

³⁵ Ibid 76.

The sociological survey presented below, the 2000 Barometer of Ethnic Relations,³⁶ indicates that these very dimensions of the perceptions on Saxons – economic status, entrepreneurship, political reputation, high intellectual level – are operational nowadays.

The first meaningful observation that needs to be made from the results of the Barometer of Ethnic Relations is that, out of the top ten ranked traits, no negative one was listed. The respondents' options resulted in the following ranking of Saxon traits (I list here only the ones which met over 5% of the respondents' choices): the main perceived quality is that of being “civilized” (18.4% of the choices), followed by “hard-working” (15%), “intelligent” (11.9%), “honest” (10.3%), “entrepreneurs” (9.4%), “reliable” (7.8%), “clean” (7.1%), “amiable” (5.4%). As shown above, the main stereotypes about the Saxons are positive, most of them coinciding clearly with what is widely known as Protestant values.

The findings of the Ethnobarometer are backed up by another imagology study, which describes the Germans as “the most admired national minority” throughout the whole survey-based data on social imagology available so far.³⁷ All of the above indicates that the Saxons are a dominant ethnic group, at least on the perception level. Relatively recent anthropological fieldwork done in Sibiu and its vicinities comes to strengthen this papers' interpretation so far and to relate it to the

³⁶ The Barometer of Ethnic Relations is a national survey designed to monitor and evaluate the ethnic groups' situation in Romania. It focuses on aspects such as hetero and in-group perceptions, the dynamics of ethnic representations, the construction strategies of the ethnic and national identity and the impact of public agenda on ethnic relations. The Saxon minority is featured in the section dedicated to stereotypes. The respondents are asked to choose from a list three traits which they find representative for the Saxons. Databases, graphics, results of the Barometer and studies based on its data available online at http://www.edrc.ro/publication_detai_ls.jsp?publication_id=15. Last consulted on December 16th 2007.

³⁷ Aurora Liiceanu, *Alteritate etnica si imaginar colectiv (Ethnic Otherness and Collective Imagery)* in Gabriel Bădescu, Mircea Kivu Și Monica Robotin (eds.), *Barometrul relațiilor etnice 1994-2002. O perspectivă asupra climatului interetnic din România (The Barometer of Ethnic Relations 1994-2002. A perspective on the Interethnic Climate of Romania)*, (Cluj: CRDE, 2005), 61, available online at <http://www.edrc.ro/docs/docs/bare/055-064.pdf>

local level of analysis. The study³⁸ coins the term “Germano-centric communities” for two villages neighbouring Sibiu and to one of the town’s peripheral districts. It further shows how the Saxons are thought to be the dominant group – “the term of reference, the first in the village hierarchy”³⁹ - and looked up to even after their departure from the respective communities. The Romanian dwellers refer to the past existence of Saxons in their communities as a “Golden Age” and currently claim to be the keepers and perpetuators of the “Saxon model”, based on the work ethic – fair distribution of labour results, work discipline, thoroughness, self-determination, and preoccupation for perfection, punctuality, and accuracy – and a particular system of social organization (the so-called *vicinities*).⁴⁰

I believe the concept of *reference group* fully accounts for the social position of the Saxons in Sibiu. The term refers to the social unit with which people identify. It has a normative function, insofar as it provides us “with norms and attitudes – a frame of reference for guiding our behaviour” and a comparison function – “they serve as a standard or comparison point against which we judge or evaluate ourselves.”⁴¹ This group needs not always be identical with the membership group. When the two groups do not coincide, the individual may experience a sense of relative deprivation: dissatisfaction derived from the gap between what one has as member of a group and what one believes he or she should have judging from the conditions and circumstances of one’s reference group.⁴² This view of the Saxons as such a group for the dwellers of the Sibiu area is supported by a meaningful account by a Romanian member of Turnisor community (currently a peripheral district of Sibiu):

³⁸ Gabriela Coman, 94.

³⁹ Ibid, 96.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 97. For a similar account see also Vintila Mihailescu, *Modelul sasesc (The Saxon Model)* in *Secolul XXI- Sibiu, o capitala europeana* (November 2007), 131-134.

⁴¹ James W. Vander Zanden, *Social Psychology* (Ohio : McGraw-Hill, 1987), 418.

⁴² Ibid, 418-419.

“The foreigners [the Romanian newcomers to the community original from Moldova region] do not know how to keep the law of the place. They have luxury in their own courtyards: businesses, privatizations, but they do not care about how the streets look. Very sad...With us, in our Saxon place, such a thing would never occur.”⁴³

This view of the Romanian population of Sibiu on the Saxons as a reference group is a strong supporting argument for their prestige in the area and in the country as a whole. I will argue for the concept of relative deprivation as a viable explanation for the positioning of the Romanian majority in relation to the Saxon heritage. The explanation, according to the reference group theory, lies in the group's feeling that they are entitled to share the prestige and the perceived standards of living of the Saxon minority. Therefore, choosing a Saxon representative as the administrator of the town and as public voice for the community is a strategy bound to lead to a better positioning of the community (possibly also in national and international context) and to facilitate access to resources (be it symbolic or material). The same strategy, with the same reasons behind it, is a plausible explanation for the population's consensus upon the marketization of the city as Saxon: the perception of the city being denied of its deserved prestige and limited to the status of a regular provincial town in Romania determines more pragmatism in the identity choices of the locals.

I believe that the relative deprivation frame provides a consistent explanation for the public support which Romanians (in Sibiu) provide for the Saxon identity frame. Under these circumstances, ethnicity becomes salient. In other terms, Saxonness represents a resource of cultural capital available as a strategy which helps mobilize other resources. My view of Saxon ethnicity as a political project is supported by the James C. Scott's work on prestige as the public

⁴³ Interview with a Romanian inhabitant of Turnisor in 1997, quoted in Cristina Coman, 98.

face of domination. Scott argues that prestige is a relational good and a social transaction – it relies on audience’s acceptance. “The public face domination wears, the kind of prestige it aims at engendering, depends of course on the kind of claim to status it is making. Displays of technical skill, artistic grace, piety, physical strength or knowledge of sacred texts might be appropriate depending on the sort of claim being dramatized.”⁴⁴ Acting out Saxonness acquires legitimacy through links to cultural tradition.

To conclude, Saxon ethnicity has a latent potential which can be activated by political entrepreneurs. Saxons, with or without a strong physical presence, continue to represent a reference group for the Romanian population in areas where they once coexisted in mixed communities. My interpretation of Verdery’s observations draws back on Brubaker’s view on groupness as variable and contingent rather than fixed and given⁴⁵. The “Saxon myth” is a currency available for political use, even in the absence of a corresponding ethnic community in strict terms.

The interpretation which I suggest for the current state of affairs in Sibiu is as an ongoing process of (re)ethnicization and (re)framing of Saxonness. This process can be justified as a repossession of the dominant ethnic identity of the town from the times when the ethnic symbolic domination was numerical and effective (before the communist regime and the Saxon exodus), repossession which is unanimously acknowledged as accurate and rightful.

⁴⁴ James C. Scott, “Prestige as the Public Discourse of Domination” in P. Kollock and J. O’Brien, *The Production of Reality- Essays and Readings in Social Psychology* (California: Pine Forge Press, 1994), 473-486. 473-474.

⁴⁵ Brubaker, 11-18.

3. THE SYMBOLIC CAPITAL OF SAXONNESS

3.1. REFRAMING SAXONNESS IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT

It has been shown so far that it is accurate to speak of a pervasive ‘myth of the Saxon’ present in the Romanian collective imaginary, myth which has even more resonance in Transylvania, because of the long history of close cohabitation. Further on I will explore the potential of this ethnic myth to provide a political and symbolic contemporary currency for Sibiu as one of the seven Saxon-founded cities in Transylvania.

My argument regarding Sibiu’s symbolic capital states that Saxonness is a valuable asset on the cultural and political markets. By the spatial rhetoric and the staging of local identity, the authorities and other actors minimized the peripheral position of the town and emphasized the European commonality, claiming greater recognition as a European Community member. This permitted Sibiu to shape its identity in a more autonomous manner, appearing less bound to the national space and more anchored in the European one, as a space representative for European values and standards. By claiming the city as Saxon and thus symbolically activating its Western European medieval roots (the Saxon settlers from the Rhine and Moselle valleys), Sibiu became associated with a space to which it had no geographical access otherwise, as Romania as a whole was still a periphery of Europe.

Saxonness is a currency which draws value from the past according to contemporary expectations and foreseen opportunities. Hobsbawm's conceptualization of the invention of tradition provides support for this argument, by stating that inventing tradition is, "where possible, [an] attempt to establish continuity with a *suitable* historic past."⁴⁶ The traditions and the public memories mobilized in these cases follow the pattern of an ethno-political instrumentalization process. Tradition is being mobilized for partisan purposes, transformed into a commodity for tourist use or invoked as a way to resist change. The staging of the past is the product of a selective filter and one should have in mind the intentionality and grounded politics behind any type of identity representation⁴⁷. The invention of tradition is a continuous process, but with periods of ethnic florescence and decline.

One of the hypotheses of the study is that by activating its historical Saxon heritage, Sibiu acquires access to a complex political opportunity structure, with symbolic and economic connotations. Two of the dimensions of the opportunity structure, which I will develop onwards, are the honorary inclusion of the city in the Germanic European space (Germany and Luxemburg in particular), and the integration in the European cultural space, as a bearer of a representatively European patrimony and an exemplary illustration of the European values of multiculturalism, tolerance and mobility. The two dimensions are closely connected. The nature of this opportunity context causes the city to drift apart from the Romanian cultural and political space and to create for itself an image of a distinct entity, as the further paragraphs will emphasize. It is safe to say that the two main events which marked the cultural and political life of Sibiu, the double election of a Saxon mayor (2000 and 2004) and the title of European Capital of Culture in 2007, extracted Sibiu

⁴⁶ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1. My emphasis.

⁴⁷ Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Ibid.* 3-4.

under many aspects from the Romanian space and allowed the city to act as an autonomous European actor. As Saxonness became one of its high-profile identity features, the city had a stronger negotiation power and was less bound by its geographic position and national belonging. The city largely sustains itself through German investors and German tourists⁴⁸, the German Democratic Forum is, at the moment this paper is being written, reaching a four years time span of almost complete unanimity in the local administrative structures (2004-2008), the German and Bavarian governments financially support the restoration of heritage. Also, one of the ethnographic vignettes which emerged during the study was the discovery that the most popular informal slogan of 2007 was “Sibiu the European Capital of Culture salutes Bucharest the periphery.”

The ethnicization of local identity brought about several remarkable results. One of the key stakes of the identity design and marketing was the association of Sibiu with Luxemburg, on the basis of the alleged common origins of the Saxons and the dwellers of Luxemburg, association which allowed the two to secure the title of European Capital of Culture 2007 together, by an unprecedented exception made by the European Commission in their behalf.

The second path which can be framed as a strategy to utilize a foreseen opportunity structure, which is the subject of my analysis, also concerns the title of Capital of Culture: it refers to the branding of the city as multicultural, both in the application for the title, but also throughout 2007, by means of discourse and representations (slogans, official speeches and publications, heritage promotion, architectural practices and cultural programme). The strategy, as the content of Sibiu’s application to the title also reveals, was designed to associate Sibiu to the European values.

⁴⁸ “Germany has to be the main economic partner of Romania”, according to Sibiu mayor Klaus Johannis, interviewed by Razvan Braileanu. ‘22’ Magazine, nr. 746, 22-28 June 2004. <http://www.revista22.ro/html/index.php?nr=2004-06-23&art=966>

The main element of the political opportunity structure towards which Sibiu directed the marketing of Saxonness, the association with Luxemburg and the multiculturalism brand design was the European Capital of Culture candidationship, in 2004. Since then, several means were used in order to construct an expressive account of the city's Saxonness, ranging from official discourse, diplomacy and proper city branding to the commodification of ethnicity or urbanistic policies.

One of the exemplary acknowledgments of these strategic branding lies in one of the many speeches and declarations of mayor Klaus Johannis on the subject of Sibiu securing the title of ECC07:

“The main advantage which Sibiu had, in front of the other candidate cities, is the multicultural character of the city (shaped by the cohabitation of Romanians with Germans, Hungarians and other cultures). In addition to this, the eight centuries of urban history of a cultural life, [...] the consecrated bond with European culture and a traditional and close relationship with Luxemburg and the German speaking world [...]”⁴⁹

3.2. THE SIBIU – LUXEMBURG ROUTE

In April 2004, Sibiu and Luxemburg presented their candidationship in front of representatives of European Union institutions. Luxemburg had already been European Capital of Culture in 1995 and the approval of this candidationship would have resulted in an unprecedented event, Luxemburg being the only city to receive the title twice. Romania at the time of the application was not a EU

⁴⁹ Klaus Johannis quoted in: Maria Floricica, “Sibiu – poarta catre Europa (Sibiu – the Gate to Europe)”, *Vacante si calatorii* 75-76 March-April 2006. 8-9.

member, therefore Sibiu was not entitled to participate. The two cities joined their applications on the basis of the historical connections between the two, as by generally accepted but not unanimously acknowledged data, the Saxon settlers who founded Sibiu in the twelfth century had migrated from the area which is today Luxemburg. The common medieval origin of the two was the strongest argument to justify the joint application and it was to constitute, according to the evaluation of the EU Selection Panel, the basis for their further collaboration.⁵⁰ The first public space symbol of this historical connection which appeared in Sibiu was the nowadays called Luxemburg House. It was formerly known as Schaser House until it was restored with the contribution of the Bureau for National Monuments of the Great Duchy of Luxemburg⁵¹ and inaugurated on the 30th of March 2004, in the presence of Duke Henri and Duchess Maria Tereza of Luxembourg. The building is even nowadays one of the most visible buildings of Sibiu's historical centre, and it hosted throughout 2007 the headquarters of the Association Sibiu European Capital 2007, the organization in charge of the cultural programme. The renovation represented, in the words of mayor Klaus Johannis, "the origin for the restoration and revitalization campaign for the city centre."⁵² The House currently hosts the Luxemburg Consulate, the Institute responsible for elaborating the Dictionary of Transylvanian Saxon Dialects, the Tourist Information Centre for the Old Town, and The European Institute for Cultural Itineraries, author of an itinerary Luxemburg-Sibiu, tracing back the path of the Saxon settlers, and a bistro called Kulturcafe (German spelling). They are all listen on a bilingual Romanian-German sign.

⁵⁰ Report on the Nominations from Luxembourg and Romania for the European Capital of Culture 2007. Issued by The Selection Panel for the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) 2007. April 2004.

http://ec.europa.eu/culture/pdf/doc670_en.pdf. Last accessed on May 15th 2008.

⁵¹ <http://www.casaluxemburg.ro/index-en.html>. Accessed on May 15th 2008.

⁵² Klaus Johannis in "Luxembourg and Sibiu, symbols of Europe and Europeanness", *Transilvania* No. 8-9/2007. 23.

Among the forty joint cultural projects in 2007 aimed to illustrate the cultural connections, Sibiu and Luxemburg included the erection of a monument in two identical copies, one in Sibiu's Youth Park and one in the Luxemburg town of Grevenmacher each consisting of two blocks of slate with horizontal marks which symbolically documented the "900 year old history of the two, with their same forefathers."⁵³ The references to Luxemburg still present in Sibiu after ECC07 include souvenirs, tourism guides and a Luxemburg flag joining the Romanian and the EU flags on the Luxemburg House façade. (See Fig. 1 and Fig. 14)

The references to Luxemburg present in the public space, justifiable as a celebration of the common heritage, are not supported however neither by a long tradition of collaboration between the two municipalities, nor by a unanimously accepted historical evidence for the common origins.⁵⁴ The presentation of the German Embassy in Romania states in fact that "the name of 'Saxons' does not in fact offer a clue of the geographic origin of the settlers. Their origin cannot be clearly and accurately determined."⁵⁵

Nonetheless, the common origins, whether invented or not, were activated and transformed into a discursive frame and a political project for the achievement and promotion of the ECC07 title and it constituted one of the access gates to the symbolic capital of Europeaness. To illustrate this argument, I will quote here a 2006 statement of the director of the largest museum complex in Sibiu, the ASTRA Museum:

⁵³ Translation from the monument's inscription.

⁵⁴ Fernand Fehlen, "La colonisation de la Transylvanie par les Luxembourgeois - ou l'invention d'un passé commun (The colonisation of Transylvania by the Luxembourgeois or the invention of a common past)". *Transilvania*, No. 8-9/2007. The author, a professor at the University of Luxembourg, brings historiography arguments to deny the common origins.

⁵⁵ The German Embassy in Romania website. The German Minority in Romania http://www.bukarest.diplo.de/Vertretung/bukarest/ro/06/seite_minderheiten.html. Accessed on January 24th 2008.

“There are indeed signs of Europeanness which should be proved at the level of heritage and identity indicators. Recently a Luxemburg researcher, A. Frich studied an impressive archive [...] and realised with great surprise and satisfaction that Luxemburg had a much more significant contribution to the colonization of southern Transylvania, leaving its print on the [...] transmission of a dialect preserved until today.”⁵⁶

The director also suggests that the time frame of the discovery of such common roots is situated in the proximity of the ECC title award: “This [discovery] is what attracted the attention of the elite representatives of the Luxemburg Duchy upon their first visits to Sibiu and made Sibiu European capital of culture.”⁵⁷

3.3. SIBIU 2007: (RE)CONSTRUCTING UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Another segment of the political structure which Sibiu connected itself to in order to secure symbolic capital was the set of values promoted by the European Union. This foreseen opportunity translated in the introduction of the multiculturalism theme in the promotion strategy. Sibiu, as the cultural capital of a Europe ‘united in diversity’ became itself (through ceremonial discourses, heritage highlights and cultural programme) the promoter of tolerance, peaceful ethnic cohabitation and dialogue of cultures.

According to how the European Commission designates the purpose and objectives of the ECC programme, the applications are evaluated according to the criteria gathered under two folds

⁵⁶ Corneliu Bucur in Elisabeta Iosif, “Axis Mundi – 2007: Sibiu si Luxemburg capitale culturale europene”. *AGERO magazine*, the magazine of the German-Romanian Association. Available online at <http://www.agero-stuttgart.de/REVISTA-AGERO/JURNALISTICA/Axis%20Mundi%202007%20de%20EI.htm>. Accessed on May 10th 2008.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

"European dimension" and "city and citizens"⁵⁸. As for the European dimension, the event provides the opportunity to underline the common features and the diversity of European cultures. "This diversity also refers to the cultural input from all the resident populations of migrants or new arrivals from European countries and beyond."⁵⁹ The 'European dimension' concept has two main aspects: the themes and the way in which the events in the programme are organized.⁶⁰ Bearing in mind that the study focuses on the display of ethnicity rather than on cultural policies and political strategies, I will offer a brief analysis of the branding themes chosen by Sibiu in 2007, supporting the idea that Sibiu's display of ethnicity became salient as a result of identifiable contextual demands.

The analysis of the cultural program of the Capital indicates a rich array of projects built around the idea of patrimony, material and immaterial, the (Saxon) colonization motif and the image of gate-city for advancement of the medieval and modern European culture to Romanian territories, everything wrapped up in the idea of multiethnic cohabitation. In connection to this, an analysis of the means of promoting the specificity of the city indicates that the "multiculturalism" discursive frame used generously designates a much less diverse ethno-cultural reality⁶¹. The promoted multiculturalism, a popular concept in EU context, is limited, in the case of Sibiu, to a cultural dualism: upon closer analysis, only includes the Saxon heritage and culture, leaving aside the more numerous but less prestigious and less organized Roma and Hungarian communities.

⁵⁸ Culture section of the European Commission, *European Capitals of Culture, purpose and objectives of the event*. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/culture/our-programmes-and-actions/doc435_en.htm. Accessed May 4th 2008.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ European Commission Culture, *Guide for cities applying for the title of European Capital of Culture*, 11.

⁶¹ As I have mentioned previously, the local demographics indicate Sibiu as a fairly ethnically homogeneous city, with 1.6% of Saxon ethnics. The other comparatively large minorities of Sibiu are the Hungarians (2%) and the Roma, in even larger numbers than the Saxons, according to unofficial data.

In this case, the Saxon community had precedence in establishing the local identity exhibited for reasons which were detailed previously: the prestige of such an ethnic frame in the conscience of the public and the beneficiaries and the power position in the local administration held by the Saxon political representatives. The display of multiculturalism was reduced, therefore, to displaying Saxonness, which became the local equivalent of multiculturalism and Europeanness.

3.4. STAGENAME HERMANNSTADT: THE THEMES OF THE CULTURAL CAPITAL

The cultural branding strategy of Sibiu 2007, published by the Romanian Ministry of Culture, explores six directions, among which three that refer to either the European and/or multicultural dimensions:

- 'Multicultural, Multiethnic and Multiconfessional City' – “the awareness of Sibiu’s multiculturalism, the promotion of interconfessional harmony, the development of linguistic diversity”;
- ‘The Dwellers of Sibiu, citizens of Europe’ – “celebrating the European personalities who were born or lived in Sibiu”;
- ‘Europe’s Identity – a Europe of Identities’ – “the dialogue and cohesion of cultures, in a diversity specific to Sibiu.”⁶²

The identity marketing strategy translated into a branding campaign, which defined the city’s identity around three slogans. The content of the slogans was meant to pinpoint three main features

⁶² Sibiu European Cultural Capital: The Mission and the Implementation of the Program. Document on the Ministry of Culture website <http://cultura.ro/DosarPresa.aspx?ID=33>. Accessed on April 12th 2008.

of Sibiu: multiculturalism, the European centrality and the old historic roots and medieval heritage. The same three elements were abundantly illustrated in the content of the cultural programme of 2007.⁶³ The central theme of the campaign was “City of Culture. City of Cultures”, reinforced by two other slogans: “Normal. Sibiu. Young since 1191.” and “Sibiu. Transylvania. Romania. Europe.”

A synthesis of the slogans appears in the mayor’s welcome speech which greets the ECC07 potential tourists from the event’s website. The phrase concentrates the elements on which Sibiu’s cultural brand is structured: ‘multicultural profile’, ‘historical city’, enhanced by the toponym’s linguistic duality:

“The theme chosen by Sibiu/Hermannstadt for the Sibiu 2007 programme seeks to present the multicultural profile of this eight century old city, under the slogan ‘City of Culture. City of Cultures.’”⁶⁴

“City of Culture. City of Cultures.” is meant to capture Sibiu’s cultural plurality and is a rather straightforward attempt to associate Sibiu to the European ideal of ‘unity in diversity’, if we consider the initial title of the branding campaign: “A celebration of Cultures Living Together, of Unity in Diversity.”

From the series of official branding strategies one very important element was the very renaming of the city. The public communication about Sibiu in 2007, at least when it originated from official local voices, institutionalized the name “Sibiu/Hermannstadt, European Capital of Culture”. Hermannstadt is indeed the initial toponym, coined by the Saxon settlers in the twelfth century, but

⁶³ The integral programme of ECC07, according to the official website of the event http://www.sibiu2007.ro/ro3/proiecte_cautare.php. Accessed on March 10th.

⁶⁴ <http://www.sibiu2007.ro/ro3/about.htm>. Accessed on January 7th 2008.

its use decreased in popularity as the Saxon population decreased. The name Hermannstadt is still widely used in the German-speaking world to refer to the city, as is Siebenburgen for Transylvania. However, Sibiu became the official name of the city in 1919⁶⁵, after Transylvania came into the possession of Romania, in the same year that the streets received Romanian names. The bilingual name, Sibiu/Hermannstadt, written with an oblique dash, became a pervasive presence in the signage of Sibiu's public space, but was also included in the tourist communication materials and in political and diplomatic documents. A representative episode for the usage of the bilingual name is in Sibiu's and one of its chronologically first contemporary reuses revealed by the research was in the application sent to the EU selection panel for the ECC07 title⁶⁶. It subsequently appeared on architectural heritage, urban furniture, manhole covers in the tourist areas and was also transferred in the communication strategies of commercial spaces.⁶⁷

The truly 'multicultural' name of the city, if one is to comply to the historical and contemporary reflection of multiculturalism in Sibiu, would have to include the Hungarian correspondent (Sibiu/Hermannstadt/Nagyszeben). Nonetheless, an extensive research on documents and public space only revealed the usage of the Hungarian version on the memorial plate of a Hungarian ethnic sculptor displayed by the Local Administration of the Ist district of Budapest on a street in the Lower City. (See Fig. 2)

Such an institutionalization of the bilingual name can be interpreted as a symbolic mimesis of the official regulations on bilingualism, which state that bilingual plates must be installed in

⁶⁵ The official website of Sibiu City Hall, <http://www.sibiu.ro/ro2/istorie.php>. Accessed on April 24th 2008.

⁶⁶ Report on the Nominations from Luxembourg and Romania for the European Capital of Culture 2007. Issued by The Selection Panel for the European Capital of Culture (ECOC) 2007. April 2004.

⁶⁷ A restaurant with Transylvanian cuisine named 'Hermannstadt Restaurant' was opened in the Main Square of Sibiu in 2006.

settlements where a national minority is larger than 20% of the population.⁶⁸ The case of Sibiu's symbolic name alterations might thus translate as the acknowledgement of a necessary tribute to a multiethnic past which the majority population shared with the Saxons and also an explicit suggestion of diversity ideal for marketization. Without making any legal abuse in doing so, the branding strategy contributes to the creation of the visual illusion of a contemporary multiculturalism of the city and acknowledges the Romanian and the Saxon heritage as a live part of the city's culture. This identity element finds a complementary suggestion in the slogan "Young since 1191": the (ethnic) past is recovered in a selective manner and activated to cater for present demands for a prestigious identity to be displayed for a European-wide audience.

"Sibiu. Normal. Young since 1191" was designed, according to the campaign coordinators, to cover "an apparently absurd contrast" which denotes the confluence between the city's history and its contemporariness. It illustrates a "convergence point between cultures, where any everyday activity transforms into an artistic event."⁶⁹ The slogan also refers to the medieval origins of the Hermannstadt fortress, founded in the mid-twelfth century by Saxon settlers, reference which enhances the city's cultural worth through history and durability.

"Sibiu. Transylvania. Romania. Europe" can be seen as an attempt to give the city a more complex geographical and political frame than the national one, thus anchoring the city in a regional and continental context which undermines to some extent the traditional national confines. Sibiu is firstly linked to Transylvania, an area circumscribable, from the cultural point of view, for its

⁶⁸ For more information on official provisions regarding bilingualism, see the Romanian 2003 Constitution, <http://www.constitutia.ro/const.htm> and the Law on Public Administration, 215/April 23rd 2001. http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.http_act?ida=28647. Accessed on May 6th 2008.

⁶⁹ Declaration of Raluca Sultan, the representative of GAV/Scholz&Friends, the advertising company responsible for Sibiu ECC07 branding <http://www.sibiu2007.ro/cms2/press.php>. Accessed on February 13th 2008.

multicultural specificity and traditionally associated more with European values than Romania. The association of Sibiu to Transylvania rather than to the national territory is complementary expressed, as a subsequent analysis of public display of symbols will show, by the German name of Transylvania, Siebenburgen. Moreover, including the continental reference in the slogan circumscribes Sibiu to broader boundaries and creates the suggestion of European **centrality**.

Sibiu ECC07, as representative of European cultural values, becomes more autonomous in building its identity independently from the national brand. Coincidentally, as the title coincided with the year of Romania's EU accession, Sibiu was invested with the status of cultural integration engine for Romania, as reflected at diplomatic level.⁷⁰

It is not uncommon for a European Cultural Capital to use the title to underline their belonging to the continent and to thus compensate for the image of European periphery determined by the geographical position. One of the similar cases was that of the Irish town of Cork, Capital in 2005, who even dedicated a part of its cultural programme to symbolically attract attention to other type of peripheries: the community of travellers, the new EU members and the homeless persons.⁷¹ Lisbon in 1994⁷² was a European Union member capital condemned to a peripheral condition, put under the spotlight of the European Capital of Culture programme which occasions the city's make-up as true European metropolis to leave aside its ties with Africa and its fatalist, passive melancholy for a glorious past.

⁷⁰ In April 2005, at the invitation of the Romanian prime-minister, Klaus Johannis participated in Bruxelles, to the signing ceremony of the EU Accession Treaty.

⁷¹ Dorothee Meyer- Holtkamp, Bologna and Cork: "A compare and contrast analysis of the short-, medium- and long-term effects of the European Capital of Culture Programme" (MA Dissertation, National University Ireland, 2006).33-39. Available online on the Network of European Cultural Capitals and Months website, http://www.eccm-cultural-capitals.org/cc_studies.html. Accessed on February 15th 2008.

⁷² The account on Lisbon ECC '94 is based on Kimberly DaCosta Holton, "Dressing for Success: Lisbon as European Cultural Capital", *The Journal of American Folklore*. 1998; 111: 173-196.

The so-called ‘grand narrative’, in the case of Lisbon and Sibiu, was the display of the European historical roots as origins for a present Europeanness in opposition to other markers indicating a peripheral position. In the case of Sibiu, the Saxon ethnicity and heritage were the symbolic equivalent of Europeanness. It was extensively put on display (Saxon architectural patrimony, the erection of statues of Hermann, the Saxon mythical founder, the shared ethnic heritage with Luxemburg) and used as a discursive frame (such as the reintroduction of the bilingual Romanian-German name of the town: Sibiu/Hermannstadt). It was successfully adopted as the dominant discourse, largely because the strategy of the local authorities (led by a Saxon mayor) had the general support of the beneficiaries: national and especially local stereotypes indicating the high prestige held by Saxon ethnicity⁷³. Therefore, the ‘grand narrative’ of Saxon Sibiu had no strong counter-narrative as, to frame it in James Scott’s formulation, prestige is “the public face of domination”.⁷⁴

In the similar case of Lisbon ECC’94, there were two versions of the past competing with Portugal’s aspirations for a European future. First, there was a nostalgic social imaginary burdened with the melancholy for its 16th century lost glory-days, a ‘memory plague’ reproduced by a circle of cultural elites. Secondly, there was the ethnic reality of Lisbon as one of the European cities with the greatest number of African residents, forming a non-official melting pot. The organizing committee for the European Cultural Capital and municipal and federal governments set about manufacturing a new image for Lisbon, and implicitly for Portugal, one adapted to Northern European standards: a country “no longer confined to cultural isolation along the continent’s edge.

⁷³ According to the findings of the Barometer of Ethnic Relations 2000 survey. The databases, graphics and results of are available online at http://www.edrc.ro/projects.jsp?program_id=3&project_id=19

⁷⁴ James C. Scott, *Prestige as the Public Discourse of Domination* in P. Kollock and J. O’Brien, *The Production of Reality- Essays and Readings in Social Psychology* (California: Pine Forge Press, 1994). 474.

Through verve, industriousness and tenacity that ‘never stops’ [the official slogan of L94; n.a.] Portugal would pull itself by its bootstraps to join a unified Europe from its center”.⁷⁵ By the spatial rhetoric and the staging of national identity (slogans, cultural program), “the dominant political class strategized Portugal’s European inclusion”⁷⁶. It minimized its relationship with Africa and focused on emphasizing “a distinctly Western commonality”⁷⁷, on claiming greater recognition as a European Community member.

The particularities of Sibiu as ECC find two relevant predecessors in Cork ‘05 and Lisbon ‘94, all of the cities seizing the title’s potential to compensate for the geographical and cultural periphery towards which they were drawn by competing narratives and to enjoy the allegedly deserved European centrality. In order to stage its adherence to European values and specificity, Sibiu instrumentalized the symbolic capital provided by the German origins, its most Western asset (relatively ignoring at the same time the symbolically controversial but statistically numerous Hungarian and Roma minorities as expressions of multiculturalism).

Among the most visible official discourse usages of the bilingual name and of the multiculturalist local specificity, the potential public finds these references in the welcoming discourse of Klaus Johannis from the official website of the ECC07:

“The occasion presented to Sibiu/Hermannstadt to be European Cultural Capital of 2007 in partnership with Luxembourg and Luxembourg Grand Region is for us an opportunity to present our city, our way of life and the creativity of all the communities which live here in an attractive complex programme. The swords of the Middle Ages [which appear on Sibiu’s coat of arms; n.a.] went into oblivion long time ago and the town opened its gates to the world and became home for people of many cultures,

⁷⁵ Holton, 191.

⁷⁶ Holton, 191.

⁷⁷ Holton, 191.

speaking different languages and practising different forms of religious life. Sibiu/Hermannstadt with its different ethnic communities developed a unique multicultural life.”⁷⁸

Among the representative official voices of the events, there was the ECC07 official presentation DVD⁷⁹, which offered, in the section entitled Public Relations, an only video of the participation of mayor Klaus Johannis in a live show on German television channel ZDF. The interview was given in German and was not dubbed or subtitled in any other language on the official ECC07 DVD.

Another multimedia element of the promotion campaign was a documentary made by director Dumitru Budrala, director of a renowned documentary festival which takes place in Sibiu. It is a thirty eight minute film, launched in February 2006, done by governmental request to be included as a protocol material. Entitled “Sibiu/Hermannstadt – City of Culture, City of Cultures 2007”⁸⁰, the city aroused controversy among the various local and national branding actors of Sibiu and among the representatives of local cultural institutions because of the division of time allocated to each actor. A quantitative content analysis applied to the movie revealed that the Evangelical community around Sibiu is the actor with the longest time span in the movie, seven minutes, after the ten minutes dedicated to official speeches. The presentation of the city was on the third position, with six minutes, whereas no other ethnic community had a special section dedicated. Apart the Saxon minority, other themes favoured by the author are folklore traditions, ecumenism, medievalism and the European character of the city. If one is to leave aside the national political actors, it is safe to say, based on the content of the official ECC07 documentary, that the Evangelical/Saxon is pictured as the most representative local community. To emphasize the

⁷⁸ <http://www.sibiu2007.ro/en3/about.htm>. Accessed on January 7th 2008.

⁷⁹ “Info 2007”. Official presentation DVD

⁸⁰ Dumitru Budrala (director), “Sibiu/Hermannstadt – City of Culture, City of Cultures 2007”. Produced by Visual Anthropology Foundation Sibiu 2006.

different representation that the ethnic communities received, I will underline that the Hungarian minority received four seconds of footage.⁸¹

⁸¹ Dragos Popescu, “Film provincial pentru capitala culturala (Provincial movie for the Cultural Capital)”, *Evenimentul Zilei*, February 21st 2006, 16.

4. THE SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF AN ETHNIC SPACE

4.1. ACTORS AND AGENCY

The second part explores how the branding strategy of Sibiu is reflected in public display. In the previous chapter I have described the opportunity structure behind the Saxonification of the city, stating that Saxonness is an instrument for securing symbolic and economic capital. In the following paragraphs I will provide an overview of the public narrative regarding ethnicity. This pursuit will seek to decipher the territorialization and the politics of public space in Sibiu, more specifically to identify the ethnic marks in the construction of space. This part will be dedicated mainly to illustrating the display of ethnicity. Its focus is more on ethnic material representations and the highlighting of heritage and less on identifying agency, but will also draw conclusions regarding the actors involved in this process, which, assuming Rogers Brubaker's terminology, I will call ethno-political entrepreneurs. The empirical findings have brought to my attention, as the previous chapter has also shown, a multiplicity of entrepreneurs of ethnicity. The working distinction which I shall make throughout the chapter will divide them into private and official voices, when it comes to the source of their authority and legitimacy (public authorities, economic private agents, non-governmental organizations). From the point of view of the sphere of influence, I will structure my argument under local, national and super-national (or external) actors: the local authorities, the Romanian Ministry of Culture, the Romanian government, the European Commission, the German and Luxemburg governments and the regional governments of German lands, German publishing houses, the UNESCO etc. Another classification should take

into consideration which segment of the city's identity is the focus of interest. There are thus actors concerned with the cultural, the political, the religious and the economic dimension of Saxonness. The interest in the cultural dimension is disputed between several cultural operators, among which some of the well-established local cultural institutions: The Brukenthal Museum and The ASTRA Museum. The religious aspects are dominated by the Evangelic Church of Sibiu, now having around 2000 local believers but at the same time being the main actor in the matter of Saxon property restitution and the owner of one of the greatest tourist attractions: the Gothic fourteenth century church in Huet Square. The political dimension is mainly represented by the German Democratic Forum of Sibiu, the ethnic political organization of the Saxons, and its leader and current mayor Klaus Johannis. The economic dimension of the Saxonification is divided between shop owners, souvenir makers, publishing houses, airline companies and others. The general rule is that these dimensions overlap when it comes to the interests and the initiatives of most of the ethnic entrepreneurs involved.

It is true in some cases that the organizations, institutions or private actors were Sibiu-based Saxons, Saxon émigrés, German or Romanian differentiated their approach and their interpretation of Sibiu's ethnic heritage. To illustrate this observation with an example, I will refer to the tension between the Ministry of Culture and the Brukenthal Foundation regarding a part of the Brukenthal Museum's painting collection relocated in the Bucharest National Art Museum during the communist period and only returned to the Brukenthal patrimony seventeen years after the fall of communism. The discursive strategies of the two cultural actors were to claim the nineteen paintings either as the public property of the Romanian people or as part of the rich art heritage of the seventeenth century Saxon Governor of Transylvania.

Nonetheless, it is equally important to stress that the ethnic background of the actors contributing to the branding process is a key factor on how they position themselves in this process, only in the sense that their support or resistance to saxonification was to a great extent determined by the identified available opportunities. The attachment to Saxonness or the decision to saxonify does not stem from the awareness of a community of belonging, but more from one's own representation of Saxonness. This detail makes the ethnic branding more a question of symbolic ethnicity.

The preliminary conclusion which can be drawn from the overview of such a multiplicity of actors involved is that the ethnic dimension of the city's local identity provides a rich latent potential for several interests and opportunities.

4.2. RESEARCHING LOCAL ETHNICIZATION: THE METHODOLOGY

The research was based on several methods, some necessitating fieldwork. One part of the research, spread on a total of around five months, focused on the analysis of official and public discourse on Sibiu, mostly with concern to the ECC07, ranging from the period of its candidateship to the title, in 2004, to up to five months after the ECC year has ended. The central part of my research on the communication strategy envisaged the branding strategy in the strict sense of the word: the work of GAV/Scholz&Friends advertising company (incidentally, GAV/Scholz&Friends is a German-based company), commissioned by the Ministry of Culture. The research also had a close look at the official voices regarding the events, such as the ECC07

official website, the Sibiu City Hall website, the website of the Romanian Ministry of Culture, the Culture section of the European Commission's website. It also included a content analysis of official publications designed for the tourists and the public of the cultural activities, both on hardback support or multimedia materials: the official presentation DVD for the ECC and the official presentation documentary financed by the Ministry of Culture and directed by local film director Dumitru Budrala.

Another part of the research was focused on the local elections campaigns of 2000, 2004 and 2008. The period covers the first two elections of Klaus Johannis, the first Saxon mayor of Sibiu after the communist period and his third elections campaign, which is undergoing at the moment of the editing of this article.

In addition to officially emitted communication materials, I have done a mass-media monitoring research, envisaging both local and central media, spanning on a period of about one year, with an additional look at the reader forums. Although measuring the public's perception on Sibiu's identity, I found it of interest to register what local events and actions did the media and their public consider of interest plus whether and if the local news were ethnically framed.

In regards to actors, I have also targeted the organisations connected either with local cultural activities, or with the preservation of heritage and also organisations of any sort (political, charity, religious) with an ethnic component, which might represent voices on the multicultural public stage of Sibiu. Some of whose activity was especially revealing when it comes to claiming or reframing the city's Saxonness were The Evangelical Church/Parish of Sibiu, The German Democratic Forum, the German Society for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), the Brukenthal

Foundation and the Brukenthal Museum and the Association of the Transylvanian Saxons in Germany.

Discourse and content analysis of the media speech, of political and cultural institutions and of cultural organisations, some of which representative for the Sibiu Saxon population, provided a better understanding on the actors on the local branding stage, together with their strategies and antagonisms. The aim of these sections of the research was to explore the communication strategies at times when the city was marked by milestone moments (elections, ECC title) when the need to define, analyse and interpret the local status quo would have been a salient need for all actors. The ethnic paradox of Johannis' double election and the multicultural identity of ECC07, which I initially perceived from a tourist's standpoint, subsequently triggered my hypothesis on the generous potential which the Saxon heritage enjoys as a political instrument.

The fieldwork part of the study had two stages of ethnographic observation. My first research visit to Sibiu was done in May 2007, which made me have access to development of the ECC07 regarding cultural projects, organisation, heritage display. The second stage was accomplished one year later, in May 2008, five months after the closure of the ECC, which allowed the data to include the aftermath of a one-year long peak of branding and heritage consume. It included numerous complementary approaches, build around on-site observations. My presence there advanced from the position of a distant observer closer to that of a participant to the local cultural life, as I gained access to the networks of non-governmental workers, museographers and artists. Moreover, a revealing way to document my overall observations were a few days of volunteer work for the Capital's programme coordinators (The Association Sibiu ECC07).

More specifically, the conversations with residents, tourists and tourism workers (including a revealing dialogue with the Communications officer of the ECC07 organizing committee), but also with representatives of cultural and political institutions and organizations allowed me to construct a political opportunity map of the place which, joined with the rest of the research methods, converge towards a political anthropology account.

The subsequent section of the paper focuses on interpreting that part of the research data which contributes to the presentation of an ethnography of the public space in Sibiu, with the specific focus of conveying the Saxonification of the city through the analysis of territorialization, ethnicity display, the symbolic framing of heritage etc. The on-site observations envisaged everything which could translate into public space representations of the city's identity, focusing mainly on tourism addressed sites and cultural venues (museums, monuments, souvenir shops) but including also institutions and leisure-related sites (restaurants, parks, coffee houses). The presentation goes beyond the descriptive level, providing insight on the politicization of the urban landscape and the political struggles around the display of local identity, taking into consideration the actors presented above.

4.3. ARCHITECTURE AS HERITAGE AND THE POLITICS OF SPACE

The overview should begin with a delimitation and a brief description of the city's area considered for research, delimitation which was not premeditated, but emerged, in fact, as a result of the research. As the paper focuses on the design and display of identity, there was strong evidence that, in the context of the European Capital of Culture, the stage was limited to one section of the

Old Town, while leaving aside the peripheries almost completely, and also most of the Lower Town (the other part of the Old Town). The confine was expressed in renovation investments, tourism and heritage signage, banners, flags, cultural events venues, renewal of urban furniture, as well as leisure time facilities and others.

The Government Commissioner in charge of the ECC07, himself an architect, confirms the role of a selected urban space and architectural heritage for the ECC title, stressing:

“[...] the authenticity of the urban space, its potential to serve as stage to artistic events, by contributing to their quality and attractiveness. One of the actors of 2007 is, without a doubt, the historical centre, the city itself, the historical monuments, the patrimony and the contemporary architectural creation of Sibiu.”⁸²

Different authors design different terms to explain how the past is staged when it comes to representing local or ethnic identity. We can speak of objectification of identity (Bourdieu) or of reification of tradition/ethnicity/community. In the cases under discussion the best illustration is the architecture display, defined by David Lowenthal as sources to “augment identity and community self-esteem [and] to promote citizenship, to catalyze creativity, to attract foreign sympathy [...]”⁸³

To what concerns the display of heritage, the spotlight was placed almost exclusively on one part of the historical centre, the so called Upper Town, excluding the Lower Town, the second half of the city’s centre and the peripheries, made of houses and blocks of flats neighbourhood. With the exception of an occasional modern art exhibit placed in an industrial hall in the periphery, all the

⁸² Sergiu Nistor in Viorica Buica, “Sibiu – Capitala Culturala Europeana in 2007. Transformarile orasului. (Sibiu ECC07. The city’s transformations)” in *Igloo – Architecture and Habitat*. No 51, March 2006. 79.

⁸³ Holton, 185.

other events in the cultural program, as well as the renovations and the signage, took place in the small area surrounding the system of the three main squares - The Large Square, The Small Square and Huet Square - and Nicolae Balcescu boulevard (Sibiu's pedestrian street), including reduced areas around the Old City's defence walls.

Huet Square, the smallest of the three, is dominated by the Evangelical Church, one of the most active cultural institutions of Sibiu. The building with the most visibility in the Small Square is the Luxemburg House, presented as the location of the first settlement in the area by the Saxon colonists and later renovated with funds from the Luxemburg Government in 2004. During 2007, it hosted the Association Sibiu ECC07, the coordinator of the cultural program.

As for the Main Square, the undisputed most central venue is the Brukenthal Museum, hosting the art collection of Saxon Baron Brukenthal. The Brukenthal Museum was partly returned to the Evangelical Church two months before the beginning of Sibiu '07, by a highly controversial legal derogation unique in the history of the Romanian restitution process. It is generally believed among the locals, as a few of my informants also indicated, that most of the buildings in the Main Square and Balcescu boulevard belong to the Evangelical Church and were subject to restitution only after Johannis became mayor. The other most visually dominating buildings in the Main Square, and also the landmarks of this space, identified as such by most of my respondents and by my personal observations, and also more visibly signalled by indicators or explanatory plates, are the Roman-Catholic Church, Baroque nineteenth century construction and associated with the Hungarian heritage of the city and the Brukenthal Museum, both on the north-western angle of the square. On the eastern side, there is Lutsch House, nowadays hosting the common headquarters of the German Democratic Forum (FDGR, mayor Johannis' political party) and the Democratic

Union of the Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). On the south side, facing the German Forum, there is the German Cultural Centre, a very active cultural organization, neighboured by Haller House, named after a renowned mayor of the city (currently a restaurant with the same name) and Schiller Bookstore, specialised in German-language publications.

The particularity of the three central squares appears to be, as one informant, specialist in medieval history explained to me, that they form a typically medieval system of communicating squares which only survived up to day in a town in Germany. The affirmation, although not convertible into an objective piece of information, is interpretable either as a coincidence, either as an illustration on how the city uses (other) German territories as terms of reference for its heritage.

One revealing collection of the sites that the authorities consider representative for the city was displayed in a long-term photography exhibition, entitled “Sibiu/Hermannstadt – Monuments, people, places” organised by the City Hall and the German publishing house Wort und Welt & Bild. It consisted of several large water-resistant panels exhibited in the Great Square, between April 2007 and the end of the ECC year. Among the thirteen sites illustrating the city’s attractions, many were the classical Saxon heritage highlights, such as the Evangelical Church and the Brukenthal Palace, but at least two other of the thirteen represented rather original choices for patrimonial illustration. One of them was the headquarters of the German Democratic Forum, the political party of the Saxons, which is indeed in one of the prestigious architecture sites (Lutsch House), but the explanatory caption of the photograph listed it as the FDGR headquarters.

The other particular choice in terms of local attractions was the Romanian-German University, a minor private education institution, hosted in a rather functional, simple building at thirty minutes

walk from the city centre. (See Fig. 3) My research could identify almost no additional information regarding the institution, neither on site nor in mass-media or in discussions with Sibiu students from the State University “Lucian Blaga”, Sibiu’s consecrated higher education institution, which incidentally did not find its way on the photographic panels. Information retrieved by its website presents it as a two-faculty university (law and economic sciences) founded by a Romanian foundation and named and designed to “value the strong regional tradition of relations with the cultural and scientific European space by German orientation.”⁸⁴ The support of any German stakeholders is not stated explicitly, except a mentioning of how the representatives of the German community in Romania and the representatives of the German state expressed their special interest and support for “this model of academic European cooperation.”⁸⁵ There is also a specification about the procedures of accreditation of the Federal Republic of Germany’s Rector Council, initiated in 2000, about which there is no further updated information. Displaying the institution among the thirteen local sites of interest illustrates the generous symbolic value of Saxonnese as a guarantee of value and an attractive front piece to be used when urged to display local identity. In the case of the Romanian-German University, the German name seemed to constitute a sufficient element for selection and made a low-profile institution and a building with little architectural value win its place in the local hall of fame.

4.4. “SIBIU’S HISTORY BECOMES THE FUTURE”: THE POLITICS OF COMMEMORATION

⁸⁴ The Romanian-German University Sibiu, official website, <http://www.roger-univ.ro/citeste%20mai%20mult.html>. Accessed May 12th 2008.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

The renovations of architectural heritage which took place in Sibiu in the last eight years (during the two mandates of Klaus Johannis) had German support, through the GTZ Programme (The German Society for Technical Cooperation), funded by the German Federal Government. The renovation project was entitled “The Romanian-German Cooperation Project ‘The Rehabilitation of the Sibiu/Hermannstadt Historic Centre’”. In 2007, the financing project was transformed into a foundation, relying on GTZ’s financial support until 2009.⁸⁶ The aims of the 60 million euros programme was, according to Stefan Mildner, its coordinator, the restoration of the three main squares, the education of the population concerning the local cultural heritage and consultancy for the local architects and workers on the methodology for restoring a historical city.

The German strategy, it seems, clashed with plans and the priorities of the local authorities. The architecture oriented initiatives, which were still ongoing in the Great Square in May 2007, received criticism for focusing exclusively on the Upper Town and for dealing only with the facades instead of a thorough rehabilitation. The GTZ wished to delimitate itself from the accusations of superficiality. Stefan Mildner, the programme coordinator, declared to the press:

“We – the German part – always had a clear stand, that we cannot only renovate the facades and ignore the rest of the building, because we are talking about a development project, not a cosmetic one. But the Ministry of Culture provided eight million euros for the ECC07 and it was normal that the city presents itself in a god shape with the occasion.”⁸⁷

The GTZ activity was done under the slogan “Sibiu’s History Becomes the Future”⁸⁸; the buildings renovated were marked with a bilingual Romanian-German plate with the organization’s logo and

⁸⁶ The GTZ programme transformed into a foundation in 2007 due to the changing of Romania’s status to EU member. The Foundation for Urban Rehabilitation, <http://www.gtz.sibiu.ro/despre.php>. Accessed on May 15th 2008.

⁸⁷ Anca Toader, “Sibiul aspires to a place in the UNESCO World Heritage list”, *BBC Romanian*, March 25th 2008. http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/news/story/2008/03/printable/080325_arena_patrimoniul_sibiu.shtml. Accessed on May 15th 2008.

⁸⁸ In original, “Trecutul Sibiului devine viitor/Die Vergangenheit Hermannstadts wird Zukunft.” My translation.

the above-mentioned slogan, together with the German national symbols (coat of arms and flag). (See Fig. 4 and Fig. 5). The other external actor involved in the reconstruction of Sibiu's architectural heritage was the Luxemburg government, the symbolic initiator of local renovations, according to Klaus Johannis's words, by the help granted for Schaser House, in the Small Square. Their support is acknowledged by the renaming of the building to Luxemburg House and by joining the Romanian and the EU flag on the façade by the Luxembourg flag. The edifice hosts several organisation offices and a hotel, which are indicated on a Romanian-German bilingual plate. (See Fig. 6)

The urbanism and branding decisions taken in the process, combined with the private initiatives of the inhabitants and business owners regarding the city centre, resulted into the insistent display of Saxon markers or in combination with medieval ones, among which the bilingual Romanian-German name of the city (Sibiu/Hermannstadt).

The case of Sibiu is comparable to Lisbon's urban branding experience as European Capital of Culture, in 1994. Its Liberty Avenue (*L'Avenida de Liberdade*), consecrated as one of Lisbon's most powerful national symbols, the name referring to the liberation from fascism and the pursuit of democratic values served as Lisbon's urban theme with the occasion of the ECC '94. The boulevard, previous the ECC '94 a "schizophrenic potpourri"⁸⁹, was renovated and inspired one of the programme's slogans: "Liberty is much more than an avenue". Moreover, the authorities initiated an energetic campaign to reconvert the gray facades of Lisbon's historic district, symbol of the oppression and urban degradation occurred during fascism, by returning Lisbon to its

⁸⁹ Holton, 180.

brightly coloured 19th century appearance. The “spatial rhetoric” of the EEC ’94 emphasized national liberty as one of its themes.

On the occasion of the European Capital of Culture, Sibiu was subjected to a massive signage spree, noticeable by comparison between my May 2007 fieldwork and the May 2008 one, to which several actors contributed along with the local authorities. The signs placed on edifices refer to either the author of the renovations (the GTZ, the local authorities, the Luxembourg government or the Romanian Ministry of Culture) or to the building’s quality of heritage site (the latter write “Historical Monument”). Some of the plates are more detailed, also specifying the history or the name of the building or the personality it used to belong to. (See Fig. 9) A different type of signage, distinguishable by elegant, old-like plates, marks the buildings where Sibiu personalities were born or spent a part of their lives. The project is entitled “*Personalitati sibiene/Hermannstadtter Personallichkeiten*” (Sibiu Personalities). Although the owner and initiator of these plates could not be identified, they suggested being part of a German/Saxon project or at least one oriented towards an audience familiar with the German culture or language, judging by their content (the four that I recorded celebrated exclusively the Saxon personalities of the city) and their bilingual Romanian-German formulation. Other memorial plates erected in this interval were generally bilingual (Romanian/German) or trilingual (Romanian/German/English), with the exception of the one installed by The “Hid” Sibiu Association and the Local Administration of Sector I Budapest, in the memory of sculptor Borsos Miklos, which was bilingual Romanian/Hungarian and recorded the city’s name as Sibiu/Nagyszeben. (See Fig. 2) An enigmatic type of building sign is a Plexiglas modern-looking plate with no script, displaying an eye formed of Sibiu’s coat of arms, framed by the Sibiu – Hermannstadt on the upper and lower side, potentially a more discrete manner of indicating monuments. (See Fig. 10)

The city displays two other types of heritage marks, consisting of standing plates in squares or other public areas: the official ECC07 indicators of tourist attractions (See Fig. 11) and a series of plates installed by the European Institute of Cultural Itineraries Luxembourg, with graphic support and bilingual Romanian/German description of sites followed by French and English executive summaries. (See Fig. 12)

The statue scene of Sibiu was decisively, in 2007, dominated by the eight versions of Hermann, the mythical founder of the city, as a result of a ECC07-financed project entitled “The Walking History. Meet Hermann.”⁹⁰ It constituted for Sibiu’s urban landscape a ‘rhetorical *topos*’, in Boyer’s terminology, “civic compositions that teach us about our national heritage [...] and assume that the urban landscape itself is the emblematic embodiment of power and memory.”⁹¹ Such rhetorical *topoi* can be public monuments and architectural landmarks. The project, as their initiators designed it, was intended as a stimulating way to convey information and data on Sibiu’s civilization and history, with a focus on the history of the Saxon community.⁹² Among the premises of the project, the authors listed that “Sibiu represents a multicultural, complex, typically central European space, whose historical, urban and civic fundamentals are due mainly to the German ethnic element.”⁹³ The proposed illustration of this history, with the ambition to become a “mascot” of the city, by analogy to Berlin’s bear mascot,⁹⁴ consists of eight historical representations, identifiable with eight typically medieval, real-size embodiments of Hermann,

⁹⁰ In original, “Istoria la pas. Faceti cunostinta cu Hermann.” The designers’ translation.

⁹¹ M. C. Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994). 321.

⁹² “History Stroll. Become acquainted with Hermann” project description. Accessible on the project’s website, <http://www.inforom-cultural.org/hermann/>. Accessed March 25th 2008.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ According to the project description. Ibid.

suggested by “attributes, costumes, attitude and facial features”⁹⁵: “Hermann the medieval knight”, “Herman the Banker”, “Hermann the Brewer”, “Hermann the Guildmaster Butcher”, “Hermann the Student”, “Hermann the Mayor”; “Hermann the Medieval Minstrel”, “Hermann the Infantry Man”. The statues, each representative for a different aspect of the Saxon medieval urban life, were placed as such as to provide landmarks for an itinerary through historical Sibiu. As an example, Hermann The Guildmaster Butcher was placed in front of the Small Square building formerly housing the Butchers’ Guild (today home of the Museum of Saxon Ethnography). The initial project had designed two more characters – “Hermann the Dandy” and “Hermann the Deportee” – the two statues which would have narrated Sibiu’s history up to the 1945 era, but they did not materialize in the end. The ‘Hermanns’ are currently displayed in the courtyard of the History Museum, where they were sheltered after the ECC was over.

Apart these semi-permanent, mobile, statues, one of the other two remarkable statues in the range of the Upper City displays the Evangelical Bishop Hans Teutsch, dominating the court of the Evangelical Church. The second one, of Gheorghe Lazar, leader of the movement for Romanian education in the modern period is placed in the Greater Square. Another statue, although a traditional part of Sibiu’s monumental heritage, failed to be included in the public display on the occasion of the ECC: the statue of the catholic bishop Jan Nepomuk. (See Fig. 13) It used to adorn the top of the fountain in the Great Square from 1734 until the communist period, when it was taken down and moved. Nowadays, it is deposited in the interior court of the Catholic Parish House. Although it used to be Sibiu’s front piece for about two centuries, no political or cultural actor seemed fit to include it in the multicultural brand of the ECC07. Upon both my 2007 and 2008 fieldwork to Sibiu, no facility which would have made the statue more visible, including a

⁹⁵ Ibid.

possible signage on the exterior wall of the court was made. Nepomuk's statue can be considered, together in this regard with the "Hermann deportee" statue, one of the great absents from the public narration of history in Sibiu.

A good illustration of what John R. Gillis called "mementos, images and physical sites to objectify [...] memory"⁹⁶ is the recent addition to the monument landscape of Sibiu: a sculpture meant to illustrate the common history of Luxemburg and Sibiu. It was done in 2007 with an identical correspondent in a Luxemburg town.⁹⁷

Celebrating memory through public display appears to be a selective process in Sibiu's public space. To phrase it in an anecdotic manner, the most visible figure which adorns the public space of the Old Town, is mayor Klaus Johannis. As a part of my fieldwork research coincided with the 2008 campaign for local elections, I was present to witness a large electoral billboard with the busts of the two German Forum candidates, for the Mayor's office and for the Head of County Council, displayed on the façade of the German Forum's headquarters. As it stretched on the entire façade of the building and benefited from the positioning in the Great Square, the banner represented, during the elections campaign, certainly the most visible public image of a personality. (See Fig. 15)

The statues, monuments, memorial plates and heritage signage all build up into a landscape of commemoration. In doing so, the branding agents attach a frame to the city's history, which allows for a selected range of elements to be represented on the public stage.

⁹⁶ John R. Gillis, Introduction to John R. Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations, the Politics of National Identity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). 17.

⁹⁷ A detailed description of the monument's history is available in the previous chapter.

4.5. FLAGGING THE CITY

The concept draws from Michael Billig's study on 'banal nationalism', defined as the routine, daily reinforcement of national identity and belonging. It takes unobtrusive, everyday life forms, such as the national news, weather report, sports competitions. Such occasions provide a constant reminder of the nation, by the use of deictics: discrete indicators of belonging which make the world of nations familiar, even homely. Relying heavily on the context in which they are issued, little words such as 'we', 'our' as well as the display of national colours and symbols perform the task of stating who one is and what he belongs to. The practice of banal nationalism is destined to provide a representation of the ethnicity, rather than nationalism, in our case. Flagging and flag waving are such practices. The banality of flag waving, Billig argues, does not imply that it is necessarily a benign form of nationalism or that it is irrelevant.

Symbolic references to the Saxon origins of the city, related to the process of flag-waving, lie in the display of two heraldic elements: the city's coat of arms and the medieval coat of arms of Saxon Transylvania. The city's coat of arms (See Fig. 16) consists of two swords crossed around a triangle of leafs held together by a crown. The triangle of leaves used to serve as the seal and heraldic mark of the Saxon University, the governmental institution of the Transylvanian Saxons, created in the fifteenth century. The crossed swords directed toward the ground are translated as the mark of possession over the land, but some interpretations go into more detail and explain the symbol as the two ends of the land inhabited by the Saxons.⁹⁸ The explanation from local

⁹⁸ The interpretations are based on comparing the information retrieved from Sibiu's City Hall and discussions with representatives of cultural organizations based in Sibiu and the local press. For a compatible account accessible online, see the Sibiu County Council's website, <http://www.cjsibiu.ro/ro/herald.htm>. Accessed May 23rd 2008.

institutional sources justify the content of the coat of arms as a “sign of patronage, as after its formation, the Saxon University exercised its authority on Sibiu’s entire historical space.”⁹⁹

The display of the sign in the city’s public space was always present, but the European Cultural year is associated with an intensified symbolic territorialization with the use of the local coat of arms. A novelty in this regard of my 2008 fieldwork, compared to my visit to the city in May 2007, was the omnipresence of the coat of arms on souvenirs, tourist brochures, postcards and photography albums. It was also displayed on the local means of transportation, according to an administrative decision put into application in June 2007. The project, the result of a credit from the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, consisted on applying the coat of arms on the frontal side of seventy five buses of Sibiu’s public transportation lot¹⁰⁰. Another coat of arms was placed by the local authorities in Astra Park, Sibiu’s central park; it was represented in the shape of a floral design.¹⁰¹

Another heraldic symbol which enjoyed a symbolic resurrection in Sibiu’s urban landscape was the Saxon coat of arms of Transylvania. The symbol acted a visual representation of a phrase which also acquired a wide notoriety in the last year: the Saxon name for Transylvania, Siebenburgen. The word refers to the seven German fortresses founded in Transylvania in the medieval period, category which includes, beside *Hermannstadt/Sibiu*, *Bistritz/Bistrița*, *Klausenburg/Cluj-Napoca*, *Kronstadt/Brașov*, *Mediasch/Mediaș*, *Mühlbach/Sebeș* and *Schässburg/Sighișoara*. Its usage can be read as simply the alternative German name for Transylvania, in the multicultural logics of the region, where the consecrated Romanian and Hungarian name,

⁹⁹ <http://www.cjsibiu.ro/ro/herald.htm>. Accessed May 23rd 2008.

¹⁰⁰ The Sibiu City Hall website, according to public information from June 2007. <http://www.sibiu.ro/cms/archives.php?id=A2007061>. Accessed on April 15th 2008.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Transilvania and *Erdely* respectively, belong to the everyday usage. The German version is not, however, the exact equivalent of the first two, which both define the territory “beyond the forests”, as the word confines the reality is designates to the Saxon history of Transylvania, “the seven fortresses”. Its usage and understanding by Sibiu’s inhabitants is perceivably limited and it can safely be said that the term’s comprehension is confined, to a great extent, to a German speaking audience. The coat of arms picturing the seven Saxon fortresses and objects with the “Siebenburgen” name printed on them, as well as German-language books about the Saxon heritage in Transylvania represented a consistent part of the souvenir market in 2008. The tourist market’s Saxonification of Sibiu is particularly evident in the selling of flags with the seven Saxon fortresses as the flag of Transylvania, thus displaying an incomplete representation of the official coat of arms as the original.

The so-called ‘flagging’ and the toponimy politics of the city were supported by the bilingualism policy around the city’s name. When it comes to the reintroduction in the public space of the bilingual name of the city, the most pervasive strategy was perhaps the territorial marking by urban furniture. Sibiu’s local authorities introduced, a few months before the start of the ECC07, festive manhole covers picturing the local coat of arms, with “Sibiu/Hermannstadt 2007” written around it. (See Fig. 16) The initiative regarding manhole covers created a subtle spatial divide between the Old Upper Town and the Lower Town and peripheries together. The map of the festive urban elements suggested the equivalent of a tourist frame which contributes to ‘reading’ the city in a ready-given key. The Cultural Capital’s space and the limits of Sibiu’s heritage are thus suggested by their circumscription with unobtrusive, functional, urban furniture. Another similar and roughly overlapping division of the city, which will be discussed in the subsequent section of the study, is

the symbolic *intramuros* – *extramuros* division which marks the museum scene, by the positions of the museums relative to the city walls.

In the same category of flags which appear in the public space, there are the national colours of Germany and Luxemburg, displayed on the buildings renovated with the support of the two governments. It appears that there is a strong propensity for perceiving the German markers of the city, as my respondents were able to name specific buildings which had the GTZ (the German renovation programme) plate on the façade, perception going as far as suggesting that the German Forum's head office building, the Lutsch House in the Great Square, is painted in a combination of the subdued shades of the German national flag (See Fig. 15).

4.6. ETHNICITY AND THE MUSEUM DIVIDE

4.6.1. Samuel von Brukenthal's heritage

The Brukenthal Museum is acknowledged as one of the most prestigious cultural institutions in Sibiu and hosts one of the most valuable art collections in the country. Its collections are based on the eighteenth century heritage left by Baron Samuel von Brukenthal, local patron of the arts and, for some time, governor of Transylvania, in the service of the Viennese Imperial Court. He had his palace opened as a public museum soon after his death and donated most of his possessions to the community. The largest sections of the Museum Complex are the Art Museum and the History Museum.

The Art Museum is located in the Baroque Brukenthal Palace, in the Great Square, and it is widely acknowledged by most of my respondents as Sibiu's greatest cultural attraction, both as architectural heritage, and as museum. It also appeared to constitute the main landmark of the city centre, always referred to when explaining directions and as a meeting place. Its adjoining annex is the Blue House, the only building in the Central Square which is not known by its former Saxon owner's name. The History Museum is hosted in the Altemberger House, in Huet Square, a building known as the most important ensemble of Gothic architecture in Transylvania. Another part of Brukenthal's heritage is the Summer Palace, close to Sibiu, currently in the possession of the Brukenthal Foundation, after it was reclaimed from the Romanian state. Brukenthal is also the name given to the German-language high-school, situated in the Evangelical Church's courtyard.

In 2007, the Museum's events were grouped under the heading of the 190 years celebration of its inauguration, first project to inaugurate the ECC year being "Sibiu, European City", followed by "The Sibiu Guilds of the fourteenth – nineteenth century" and "Samuel von Brukenthal, Homo Europaeus."¹⁰² As to what the Brukenthal foundation is concerned, their seven proposed projects for the ECC07 included "Tolerance and the nation in theory and practice: Immanuel Kant, Samuel von Brukenthal and the ambivalences of Illuminism", "Brukenthal Jamboree – Romanian-German jazz workshop" and "Trips between cultures: Nocih-Sibiu-Avrig."¹⁰³

In the last years, Brukenthal's heritage constituted the subject of several disputes and status changes. On December 28th 2005, Christoph Klein, the Bishop of the Evangelical Church of

¹⁰² Sibiu ECC07 official website. The events organised by the Brukenthal Museum.

http://www.sibiu2007.ro/ro3/detaliu_eveniment.php?ideveniment=892. Accessed on March 28th 2008.

¹⁰³ The Samuel von Brukenthal Stiftung official website. <http://www.brukenthal.org/ro/projekte.php>. Accessed on May 20th 2008.

Romania and the Ministry of Culture met in Sibiu to sign “The Agreement Concerning the Brukenthal National Museum”¹⁰⁴. The agreement made the Evangelical Church co-owner of the Brukenthal Museum, together with the Romanian state. The restitution was based on a controversial legal derogation of which no other litigious heritage of national interest benefited and which was criticised especially by analogy to the case of the Greek-Catholic church’s possessions, which still disputes numerous sites with the Romanian state.

The second episode which marked the return to Brukenthal, in November 2006, of nineteen masterpieces originating from the Brukenthal collection, but which the 1948 Ministry of Culture transferred to the National Art Museum in Bucharest. The return of the paintings was staged as a ritual regarding which the Ministry of Culture declared that “it represents a key gesture of the attempt to recover and to promote Sibiu’s cultural memory. Lacking these elements, the ensemble of the future cultural capital of Europe would be incomplete.”¹⁰⁵ The ceremony had the minister, mayor Klaus Johannis and Evangelical Bishop Christoph Klein as protagonists of the paintings’ first presentation to the Sibiu public. Mayor Johannis expressed his gratitude to the minister “in the name of the Sibiu dwellers and of the Sibiu German community”.¹⁰⁶ One month before the inauguration of the ECC07, the Museum administered by the Evangelical Church becomes the beneficiary of a transfer of patrimony from the National Museum of Art, after fifty years, becoming thus, with the nineteen painting masterpieces, a much more prestigious institution on the national museum scene.

¹⁰⁴ The Romanian Ministry of Culture website, <http://www.cultura.ro/News.aspx?ID=696>. Accessed on March 28th 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Adela Mohanu, “Anti-tero pentru ‘Rastignirea’ (Antiterrorism for ‘The Crucifixion’)”, *Sibianul*, November 13th 2006. <http://old.sibianulonline.ro/articol/zia/sibiu/anti-tero-pentru-rastignirea/12851/>

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

The Blue House, the building adjacent to the Brukenthal Palace, constituted the subject of a still ongoing dispute with ethnic claims between the director of Brukenthal Museum and that of the ASTRA Museum in which the latter accused the former of trying to evacuate the Romanian patrimony (belonging to the ASTRA Museum) from the newly acquired premises. The conflict, which reached national press coverage, revolved around 55,000 pieces of patrimony, consisting of “worship objects, icons, ceramics, wood, textiles, folklore costumes and embroidery”,¹⁰⁷ belonging to the ASTRA Museum of Traditional Popular Civilisation, which had been deposited in The Blue House for fifty years. The position of ASTRA Museum’s director, Corneliu Bucur, associated the eviction with an exercise of ethnic domination and discrimination directed from the Saxon community’s representatives towards local Romanian heritage:

“[...] [T]hose who rule us today manifest a repulsion towards everything that is Romanian. If this is the attitude of our Museum, which dedicated two of its sections to the Saxon minority, then perhaps only the court can secure our right to protect the Romanian heritage.”¹⁰⁸

The episode justified alternative interpretations, limited to museum competition for prestige and predominance on the local cultural scene, but it was shifted on the field of ethnic feuds, interpreted as a dispute over ethnic heritage, with the Saxon mayor and the President of the County Council, together with the Evangelical Church and the Brukenthal Museum on the one side of the ethno-political spectrum, and Corneliu Bucur, as symbolic administrator of the Romanian heritage on the other.

¹⁰⁷ Dan Tomozei, “Razboiul muzeelor/The War of the Museums”, Jurnalul National, March 11th 2008. <http://www.jurnalul.ro/articole/119252/razboiul-muzeelor>. Accessed on May 15th 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Corneliu Bucur, director of ASTRA Museum Complex. Ibid.

4.6.2. The History Museum

The History Museum is based on Baron Brukenthal's collections and developed in time to tens of thousands of objects, including archaeological discoveries and medieval coins, among which 14,000 objects belonging to the guilds of Sibiu, medieval Saxon professional associations which formed the corporate organization of the town in medieval times. Other collections include Medieval Archaeology, Weapons and Armours and a Medieval Lapidary.¹⁰⁹

The Museum (Altemberger House) and the Evangelical Church are the dominant architectural ensembles of the Huet Square, the third and smallest of the three main squares of the Upper City. It includes a wide interior courtyard, which hosts, after the end of the ECC07 year, eight statues of the legendary founder of the town, Hermann. There are no historiography accounts on the historical figure of Hermann, but he is an alleged ruler of the Saxon settlers, after whom the medieval town was named (Hermannsdorf and, subsequently, Hermannstadt). The eight statues are part of a project financed as part of the European Capital of Culture, and consisted of exhibiting eight statues of an imagined Hermann, each of them dressed in clothes specific to a certain medieval profession or status among the urban Saxon population. After its display around the Old Centre, the historical founder of the town found his place at the gates of the History Museum, as a symbolic welcome guard of Sibiu's story.

In 2007, the Museum benefited from substantial funding for restoration, granted by the Ministry of Culture, so generous that it permitted the managers to accomplish "what no one in Romania ever

¹⁰⁹ The Brukenthal Museum official website, <http://www.brukenthalmuseum.ro/ro/mistorie.php>. Accessed on April 26th 2008.

dreamt of and what few can afford even in the Western world.”¹¹⁰ The highlight of the restoration which the director mentioned to the press was the rehabilitation of the hall where Sibiu’s Local Council used to meet in the old times. A very suggestive re-enactment of those times, which did not, according to me respondents and to the press, become reality, was to have mayor Johannis and his fellow Local Council members wear the historic clothes and hold a Local Council meeting there: “We will invite Mr. Johannis, if he wishes, to hold a more special event, [...] to have them sitting at that large table.”¹¹¹

The association of Johannis and the Council (the Local Council holds a 70% German Forum majority¹¹²) with the medieval and modern rulers of Sibiu is not a singular time when Johannis was framed among the historical figures of Sibiu. An anecdotic episode of my fieldwork consists of the explanations given by a woman to her child, upon passing one of Hermann’s statues: her explanation referred to Johannis instead of Hermann, by transforming the mayor’s name into that of the town’s founder (“Look, here is Johann!”).

A lengthier exploration of the History Museum’s souvenir shop allowed me to notice that the books and brochure shelves were disposed on two parts relative to the entrance, of which one was dedicated to an exclusively German language variety of books, most on the history of Siebenburgen (Transylvania) or Hermannstadt.

¹¹⁰ Director Sabin Luca, quoted in the Culture section of the local website New Sibiu. <http://www.sibiul.ro/stiri-locale/muzeul-naturii-scos-din-tipare/14643/>. Accessed on May 15th 2008.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² The Sibiu City Hall website, <http://www.sibiu.ro/ro2/componenta.htm>. Accessed on May 26th 2008.

4.6.3. The 'Emil Sigerus' Saxon Ethnography Museum

The Museum, founded in 1997 as part of the ASTRA Museum Complex¹¹³, is situated in the Small Square. Its permanent exhibition is build around the *cahle*, painted pieces of ceramics used to decorate the heater. It also hosts temporary exhibitions; the latest one, entitled “Transylvanian Painted Furniture”, inaugurated in august 2007, was financed by the ECC07 programme. Upon visiting the *cahle* exhibit, we are told about the particularities of the Saxon painted furniture, which is recognizable from the Hungarian painted furniture by the colours used (red and blue instead of green) and the motifs (the Saxon ‘tree of life’). The visitors also learn how the latest donations of costumes and objects were collected as a result of a trip to Germany, from Saxon emigrated families.

The ground floor of the museum is divided into several souvenir shops. The main one, belonging to the museum, sells books, albums, calendars, bags with motifs from the painted furniture. Most materials are available in German, few in English. The door of the souvenir shop is adorned with a pair of puppets in simple, Saxon folk costumes, in the colours of the German flag. (See Fig. 19) The adjoining space is rented to a designer’s studio selling pieces of painted Saxon furniture. (See Fig. 20) A third shop sells flags and banners. Displayed outside is a flag of the Saxon coat of arms, with Siebenburgen specified under the sign. It has indeed the same colours which the museum guide indicated as specifically Saxon. (See Fig 21) In all these spaces of the Saxon Ethnography

¹¹³ The Museum of Saxon Ethnography and Folk Art ‘Emil Sigerus’ webpage, “History”, http://www.muzeulastra.ro/emilsigerus/en_index.php?var=8. Accessed April 25th 2008.

Museum there is the ambiguity between presenting the heritage items (*cahle* and painted furniture) as Saxon and at the same time associating them with an intercultural Transylvanian heritage.

4.6.4. The Evangelical Church exhibited

The Museum of the Evangelical Church is hosted by the Friedrich Teutsch Intercultural Centre, just outside the Old Centre of the city, which also hosts the largest German language book collection and occasional exhibits. It is in fact a museum of Saxon civilization, illustrating, as one of the exhibit's plates indicated, "the extension to which the Saxons identified with the fortified churches as symbols of their own history."¹¹⁴ The Evangelical Church in Huet Square reveals another piece of Saxon heritage. At the time of my visit, the guide of the church was a German (not Saxon) gentleman ready to speak perfect German, but no Romanian and only very basic English. The Evangelical Parish also hosts another renowned tourist attraction and one of the most abundantly visually signalled sites in the city centre: The House of the Nomad Apprentices. (See Fig. 22) It represents the shelter of the German nomad apprentices who come yearly to Sibiu, following a tradition of journeymen. Their tradition was included in the ECC07 cultural programme as live demonstrations of craftsmanship. The Evangelical Church provided them with a shelter in exchange for the renovation of the building, which was known, from the second half of 2007, as The House of the Nomad Apprentices.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Excerpt from the one of the exhibit plates in the Museum of the Evangelic Church, Sibiu.

¹¹⁵ The ECC07 official website, http://www.sibiu2007.ro/ro3/detaliu_eveniment.php?ideveniment=546. Accessed on May 15th 2008.

4.6.5. The ASTRA National Museum Complex

The ASTRA Museum of Traditional Civilization, placed outside the city's walls, is the largest Romanian open-air museum, both as size of heritage and as geographical dimensions. Its goal is to display a synthesis of Romanian folk life, as an "authentic museum of popular traditional civilization in Romania."¹¹⁶ The Museum offers a very wide overview of a variety of aspects of Romanian rural life, from the customs in the preparation of food to watermills and machinery used for ploughing.

During the ECC07, the museum did not use the official banners of the event's communication campaign, but had a special banner and slogan designed for the event. The banner consisted of a list of specific types of "culture and civilization", as the slogan at the top of the banner indicated: dichotomised or complementary dimensions of "culture and civilization" split on two columns: one column listed "rural", "traditional", "Romanian" and "national", while the other grouped "urban", "aulic", "German" and "European". (See Fig. 22) The dichotomy is better defined if put in the context of a phrase by which the director is attempting a rebranding of his institution as a second pole of the local culture: in order to counterbalance for a perceived concentration of Sibiu's display of heritage in the limits of the old Saxon fortress, the director is trying to associate the museum under his administration with the phrase "Sibiu *extra-muros*"¹¹⁷. The phrase is intended to draw attention to what the management of the museum considers it should be the second centre-weight to Sibiu's heritage scene.

¹¹⁶ The ASTRA Museum website, http://www.muzeulastra.ro/main/index_mal.php?var=1. Accessed May 23rd 2008.

¹¹⁷ According to the museum's communication officer and to the signage on a map designed by the museum to describe the route between the city's centre and the Dumbrava forest, where it is situated. The map is divided in two sections: Sibiu *intra-muros* and Sibiu *extra-muros*.

4.7. *COMMODIFYING ETHNICITY*

Saxonness was also objectified under the tourist gaze, its symbolic representations transforming into tourism goods. In the case of the ECC07, ethnicity was transferred on a multitude of published materials. Books, cards, guides, photography albums, displayed Saxonness either by language (written for a German speaking audience), by the usage of the German toponimy or with the visual aid of symbols (the two coats of arms). The content had often references to Saxon and German culture, or represented explicit attempts to create bridges, such as a cooking book entitled “An einem Tisch/Împreună la masă” (“Together at dinner”), consisting of a synthesis of German and Romanian cooking recipes. Other souvenirs represented Saxon pieces of painted furniture or other wooden objects with floral motifs and the red-blue Saxon colouring.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper sought an explanation for the resurgence of Saxon symbolism in Sibiu. The answer provided had two dimensions. Firstly, it delved into explanations regarding the existence of a widely acknowledged prestige of Saxonness, showing that it has always carried a high status which met with the consensus of all ethnic actors. It addressed the evolution and the role of stereotypes in the ethnic group dynamics in Sibiu and on the available possibilities and determinants for a potential conversion of ethnicity into heritage.

Secondly, it explored the political context which provided an occasion for Sibiu to revitalize and exhibit its Saxonness. I have brought arguments and empirical evidence for the slow tendency of Saxonness to represent the cultural brand of the city in the last eight years, during the mandate of Klaus Johannis, and especially around the European Capital of Culture year. My hypotheses for the argument were that Saxonness, whether (re)emerged as a dimension of cultural domination or a part of a strategy of tourist marketing, provided an instrument which helped Sibiu associate with the European values. The staging of Sibiu's ethnic past became, as the evidence has tried to prove, the local equivalent of multiculturalism and Europeanness.

To conclude, I will say, by using Rogers Brubaker's terminology, that Saxonness, even if it has always played an important role in the local identity representations, it should not be regarded as an intrinsic local characteristic, but as a latent category which can be activated as part of a political project. The aim of this study was to provide insight on such a political project.

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MULTIMEDIA MATERIALS

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APPENDICES



Figure 1. The monument ‘narrating’ the common history of Sibiu and Luxemburg. Astra Park.



Figure 2. Memorial plate commemorating a Hungarian sculptor. The plate has the city’s name written in bilingual RomanianHungarian version.



Figure 3. The Romanian-German University.



Figure 4. GTZ renovation plate. “The rehabilitation works for this building were funded by the Federal Republic of Germany Government”. My translation.



Figure 5. GTZ renovation plate with the slogan “Sibiu’s Past Becomes Its Future”.



Figure 6. The plate on the Luxemburg House. Bilingual Romanian-German.



Figure 7. “Hermann the Medieval Knight”



Figure 8. “Hermann the Banker”



Figure 9. Hecht House. Double signalling: above, “Sibiu Personalities” plate; below, official ECC07 tourist plate.



Figure 10. Sibiu/Hermannstadt plate. In the centre, Sibiu's coat of arms.



Figure 11. Official ECC07 tourist post.



Figure 12. Tourist post put up by the Luxemburg Institute of Cultural Itineraries. Details in Romanian/German. Executive abstract in English/French.



Figure 13. Jan Nepomuk's statue, formerly resident in the Great Square. The Catholic Parish inner court.



Figure 14. Façade of the Luxemburg House. Romanian and EU flag, joined by the Luxemburg flag.



Figure 15. The headquarters of the German Forum (Lutsch House) during the local elections campaign. Great Square, facing the Brukenthal Museum.



Figure 16. Sibiu/Hermannstadt ECC07 festive manhole cover.



Figure 17. Manhole cover outside the Old Town.



Figure 18. Manhole cover outside the Old Town.



Figure 19. 'Saxon' puppets in German national colours. The souvenir shop of the Saxon Ethnography Museum, groundfloor.



Figure 20. Saxon furniture exhibit. Groundfloor of the Saxon Ethnography Museum.



Figure 21. Flag shop. The groundfloor of the Saxon Ethnography Museum. Exhibited outside, the Siebenburgen flag.



Figure 22. The House of the Craft Apprentices. Outside the Evangelical Church court.



Figure 22. Billboard designed by the ASTRA Museum for the ECC07. The duos spell, from left to right, “Culture and civilization”, “rural-urban”, “Traditional-aulic”, “Romanian-German”, “National-European.” On the premises of the ASTRA Museum of Traditional Civilization.